From Dormitory Walls to Moral Worlds: Empowering Educators as Moral Architects in Indonesian Boarding-Based *Madrasahs*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Purpose –This study explores the moral and pedagogical dimensions of teacher empowerment within the unique ecosystem of Indonesian boarding-based madrasahs. In these faith-oriented learning environments, educators are not only knowledge transmitters but also moral architects, shaping students' ethical consciousness and communal identity. **Methodology –** Employing a qualitative multiple case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis across three boarding-based madrasahs in South Kalimantan. **Findings –** The findings reveal that teacher empowerment in these settings transcends administrative or instructional authority, evolving instead into a moral praxis grounded in Islamic values, reflective mentorship, and collective spiritual routines such as Qur'an recitation and *muhasabah* (self-reflection). Educators exercise moral agency through daily interactions in the dormitory, reinforcing discipline, empathy, and self-accountability. Leadership strategies—such as participatory mentoring, ethical modeling, and arts-based religious practices—serve as integral mechanisms for cultivating a holistic moral environment. **Contribution –** This study contributes to the growing discourse on teacher empowerment by highlighting how faith-driven moral leadership can be both contextually rooted and pedagogically transformative. It argues that moral empowerment is essential for sustaining ethical schooling cultures, particularly in residential educational settings where learning and living converge. The implications extend toward rethinking teacher development frameworks that integrate spirituality, reflective practice, and community-based moral agency.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of accelerating social change and moral fragmentation, education systems worldwide face increasing urgency to cultivate ethical integrity and character resilience among young people. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has emphasized that modern education must equip learners not only with cognitive skills but also with the moral capacities needed to navigate uncertainty and complexity (Güler Yıldız et al., 2021). Within this global discourse, boarding schools have regained scholarly attention as unique environments that foster character development through continuous social interaction and structured daily life. Studies in Europe and Asia indicate that boarding systems can effectively reinforce empathy, cooperation, and leadership when educators are actively engaged as moral mentors rather than disciplinary enforcers (Hippe et al., 2016; Merrills & Robertson, 2022). However, despite these global insights, the role of teacher empowerment in shaping the moral climate of boarding institutions remains underexplored, especially within faith-based education systems such as Indonesia's Islamic madrasahs (Musaddad, 2023).

Indonesia represents one of the largest Islamic education ecosystems in the world, with more than 42,400 *pesantren* and thousands of madrasah units providing both academic and religious formation to over 3.4 million students under the supervision of approximately 370,000 teachers (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020). Within this vast network, the dormitory or *asrama* is not merely a physical space for residence but a moral microcosm where discipline, spirituality, and social learning intersect. The government has made significant policy efforts to institutionalize character education, particularly through Presidential Instruction No. 87 of 2017 on *Pendidikan Penguatan Karakter* (Alannasir, 2020). This initiative positions teachers as the moral foundation of education reform, emphasizing their role in nurturing integrity, empathy, and civic responsibility. However, while national frameworks highlight moral outcomes, less attention has been paid to how teachers themselves are empowered to fulfill these moral mandates within the dormitory-based context (Sugiarto & Fitri, 2023).

The role of teachers in boarding madrasahs transcends the boundaries of formal instruction. In Islamic educational philosophy, the teacher (*mu'allim*) is both a transmitter of knowledge and a moral exemplar (*uswah hasanah*). Their influence permeates every dimension of students' lives—from worship routines and study sessions to interpersonal conduct within the dormitory community. Research in Indonesian boarding schools shows that five primary virtues—faith, self-discipline, empathy, responsibility, and honesty—are most effectively internalized through daily interactions with teachers who model these values (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020; Anshori, 2017; Nurkholis, 2020). This reinforces the idea that moral education is not merely taught but lived. However, such moral embodiment depends critically on the empowerment of teachers—how much authority, autonomy, and institutional trust they are given to design ethical learning environments and sustain them through reflective practice (Islamic et al., 2024; Roqib, 2021).

The notion of "From Dormitory Walls to Moral Worlds" captures this transformation from physical supervision to moral cultivation. Dormitory life, when shaped by empowered educators, becomes an ecosystem of virtue—a setting where moral awareness is cultivated through routine, reflection, and community life. In this framework, teachers serve as "moral architects," designing daily activities, mentoring relationships, and social norms that embody the school's ethical vision. This aligns with Bobokokanye's theory of moral leadership, which argues that authentic school leadership emerges from shared moral commitments rather than bureaucratic control (Bakokonyane & Bakokonyane, 2022). Empowering teachers in this sense means positioning them not as passive implementers of policy but as co-creators of the community's moral identity.

Empirical evidence supports this moral ecosystem model. A study in a West Sumatran Islamic boarding school identified seven consistently cultivated values—faith, curiosity, discipline, confidence, responsibility, independence, and honesty—embedded within daily dormitory activities under teacher mentorship (Musaddad, 2023). Likewise, dormitory initiatives that prioritize teacher-led reflective programs, such as *muhasabah malam* (nightly moral reflection) and *tafaakur pagi* (morning contemplation), have been linked to reductions in disciplinary cases and stronger student self-regulation. At MAN 4 Banjar, for instance, the

introduction of the "Discipline Circle"—a weekly student-led discussion guided by teachers—resulted in a 40 percent decrease in repeated behavioral infractions within one year. These results highlight the effectiveness of empowering teachers to enact restorative, rather than punitive, approaches to discipline grounded in moral dialogue.

National education data also reveal a growing recognition that moral and civic education cannot be achieved solely through the curriculum. The Ministry of Religious Affairs reported that madrasahs with integrated dormitory systems demonstrate higher student retention and civic engagement than non-boarding institutions (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020; Sugiarto & Fitri, 2023). This correlation underscores the dormitory's potential as a space for holistic moral development when teachers play a central, empowered role. The integration of spiritual routines, cooperative learning, and moral reflection in dormitory settings transforms daily supervision into what might be called a living pedagogy—an education of presence, habit, and shared responsibility (Bass, Bernard M., and Steidmeier, N, 1994).

At the regional level, South Kalimantan's boarding-based madrasahs have emerged as exemplars of this integrated model. Schools such as MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin have developed comprehensive dormitory programs that link academic rigor with moral formation. These institutions not only embed spiritual rituals, such as daily Qur'an recitation and communal prayers, but also provide structured spaces for reflection, leadership mentoring, and peer accountability. Teachers in these settings act as facilitators of conscience—guiding students to understand moral consequences and to practice ethical discernment in everyday decisions. Their empowerment is reflected in their capacity to design programs, lead discussions, and adapt policies to support students' moral progress (Snoek, 2021).

Despite these advances, many teachers still face systemic barriers that limit their moral agency, including rigid bureaucratic structures, limited professional development, and hierarchical decision-making. Such constraints risk reducing educators to functionaries rather than facilitators of moral growth. When teachers lack empowerment, dormitory life can devolve into a system of control rather than cultivation (Han, 2022). Conversely, when teachers are trusted and equipped to act as moral architects, the dormitory evolves into a moral community characterized by empathy, self-regulation, and shared accountability. This dynamic underscores the need to reposition teacher empowerment not as an administrative tool but as a moral foundation for educational transformation.

In essence, this study situates teacher empowerment within the moral architecture of boarding-based education in Indonesian madrasahs. It argues that educators, when empowered, bridge the gap between policy and practice—turning dormitory routines into living expressions of character education. From daily reflections to restorative discipline practices, their actions shape the moral climate that students inhabit. In doing so, they transform dormitory walls into moral worlds—spaces where ethical growth is nurtured, community is sustained, and education becomes an act of spiritual and moral creation (Daliri et al., 2022; Yaghoubi et al., 2022). It becomes evident that boarding-based madrasahs are not merely educational institutions but complex moral ecosystems where educators play a central role in shaping students' ethical worlds. The dormitory emerges as a critical site where values are negotiated, embodied, and institutionalized through daily interactions, rituals, and governance practices (Li et al., 2023). While previous studies have highlighted the importance of leadership and curriculum in character education, limited attention has been given to how educators are empowered as moral architects within the lived space of the dormitory.

Despite a growing body of literature on character education, moral leadership, and boarding-school environments, several critical gaps remain evident. Existing studies have mainly focused on principals' leadership styles, curriculum integration, or policy implementation in faith-based and boarding institutions, often treating teachers as implementers rather than as central moral agents (Bakokonyane & Bakokonyane, 2022; Chance, 2022; Lapsley & Woodbury, 2016; Muazza et al., 2018). While research has documented the effectiveness of dormitory routines, religious rituals, and disciplinary systems in shaping student character, there is limited empirical attention to how teachers are empowered to design, enact, and evaluate these moral

practices within the lived space of the dormitory (Li et al., 2023; Yaghoubi et al., 2022). In the Indonesian madrasah context in particular, studies tend to emphasize dormitory traditions or national character education policies, leaving the micro-processes of teacher empowerment in state boarding madrasahs underexplored (Arifin, 2022; Musaddad, 2023; Roqib, 2021). Moreover, few studies conceptualize the dormitory as a dynamic moral ecosystem shaped through participatory governance, arts-based spirituality, restorative discipline, and data-informed reflection led by educators themselves. The position of teachers as "moral architects" who actively transform dormitory walls into moral worlds remains theoretically underdeveloped and empirically insufficiently examined.

Understanding this process requires an in-depth exploration of how dormitory spaces are reframed, how symbolic and cultural practices are mobilized, how discipline is enacted through restorative and participatory approaches, and how moral development is continuously evaluated through reflective and data-informed processes. Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1) How do educators and school leaders reframe dormitory spaces as "moral laboratories" to foster holistic character formation in Indonesian boarding-based madrasahs?
2) In what ways are educators empowered through arts, rituals, and symbolic practices to shape students' moral sensibilities and communal identity within dormitory life?
3) How is restorative discipline implemented through participatory moral governance involving teachers, dorm mentors, and students in boarding-based madrasahs?
4) How do data-informed reflection and collective moral evaluation practices empower educators to improve character education within dormitory-based schooling environments continuously?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multi-site case study design to explore the implementation of boarding-based character education in three Islamic senior secondary schools in South Kalimantan Province, namely MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it aligns with the study's aim to deeply examine and interpret teacher empowerment processes and character education practices within residential school settings. Drawing on Creswell's perspective, qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth understanding of the meanings individuals or groups assign to social and educational phenomena. The research was grounded in a post-positivist paradigm, which recognizes that social realities are constructed and shaped by context and interpretation rather than being entirely objective. Within this framework, the study focused on the lived experiences of principals, vice principals, teachers, and dormitory supervisors in implementing character education through both formal learning activities and non-formal boarding programs. The multi-site design also enabled comparative analysis across different institutional contexts, yielding rich, contextually grounded insights into shared patterns and unique strategies of teacher empowerment in boarding-based madrasah education systems (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Research Setting

This study was conducted across three state Islamic senior secondary schools (*Madrasah Aliyah Negeri*) in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. The institutions were selected purposively because they exemplify diverse models of boarding-based character education administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Each madrasah represents a unique approach to integrating residential life with moral and educational development.

The selection of these three institutions was intended to capture variation in organizational structures and management practices related to character education. Such diversity strengthens the analytical depth and credibility of the findings by enabling cross-site comparison and pattern identification across different boarding models (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). Data were collected through on-site engagement, including

classroom observations, dormitory-based activities, and the examination of administrative and managerial processes conducted between 2023 and 2024.

Table 1. Profiles of Boarding-Based Madrasahs Involved in the Study

Madrasah	Description
MAN 4 Banjar	An Islamic senior high school with a long-standing tradition of harmonizing religious scholarship and academic excellence through the *Madrasah Aliyah Program Keagamaan* (MAPK). The school prioritizes the development of Islamic leadership, disciplined behavior, and moral integrity within a highly structured dormitory system.
MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut	A full boarding madrasah that integrates science, technology, and religious studies to nurture students who are intellectually capable and spiritually grounded. As part of the national Insan Cendekia network under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the school reflects a standardized yet innovation-oriented model of boarding education.
MAN 2 Banjarmasin	An urban madrasah that implements a partial boarding scheme for selected students, emphasizing academic performance, ethical conduct, and civic responsibility within a semi-residential educational context.

Research Subjects

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of individuals with direct, substantive involvement in the design and implementation of boarding-based character education. A total of 18 key informants were drawn from three Islamic boarding madrasahs, with six participants representing each institution to ensure balanced cross-site perspectives. The sample comprised three madrasah principals, three vice principals for dormitory affairs, three vice principals for curriculum affairs, three vice principals for student affairs, three dormitory supervisors, and three teachers. Each group contributed distinct yet complementary insights: principals addressed strategic planning and evaluation; vice principals elucidated operational management, curricular integration, and student development; dormitory supervisors described daily mentoring and behavioral monitoring; and teachers reflected on instructional practices, role modeling, and extracurricular engagement. This distribution allowed the study to capture leadership, managerial, supervisory, and pedagogical dimensions of character education in an integrated manner.

The logic of purposive sampling was guided by the principle of information-rich cases, prioritizing institutional roles that function as key moral and pedagogical agents within dormitory life. Rather than pursuing numerical representativeness, the sampling strategy emphasized functional relevance and role complementarity across sites. The adequacy of the 18 informants was established through an iterative process of data saturation, whereby recurring patterns related to moral routines, restorative discipline, teacher agency, and participatory evaluation consistently emerged during data collection. By the final phase of interviews and observations, no substantively new themes or analytical categories were identified, indicating thematic saturation had been achieved. This assessment was further reinforced through triangulation across interviews, field observations, and institutional documents, confirming the stability and convergence of the findings. The sampling approach ensured analytical depth, methodological rigor, and contextual credibility while remaining aligned with the study's qualitative scope.

In total, 18 key informants participated in in-depth interviews and field observations. Prior to data collection, all participants provided informed consent, ensuring ethical integrity, confidentiality, and compliance with established qualitative research standards (Sugiyono, 2017).

Table 2. Research Matrix

No	Research Focus		Sub-Indicators	Data Collection	Informants
1	Teacher Empowerment Strategies in Boarding-Based Character Education	a)	Professional competence development through training, workshops, and continuous professional development programs	Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis	Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, and Teachers
		b)	Teacher leadership development		
		c)	Participatory decision-making and shared leadership		
		d)	Collaboration and professional community development		
2	Character Formation Strategies for Boarding Students	a)	Sincerity – performing activities with pure intention to seek Allah's blessings, not for praise or reward	Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis	Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, and Teachers
		b)	Simplicity – practicing modest living according to needs and avoiding excess		
		c)	Independence – developing self-reliance and responsibility in daily life		
		d)	Islamic Brotherhood (*Ukhuwah Islamiyah*) – promoting mutual respect, affection, and solidarity among peers		
		e)	Freedom – fostering independent thinking and expression aligned with Islamic values		
3	Quality Assurance Strategies in Boarding-Based Character Education	a)	Internal quality planning	Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis	Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, and Teachers
		b)	Implementation monitoring		
		c)	Evaluation and feedback		
		d)	Continuous improvement mechanisms		

Data Analysis

Single-Site Analysis

Data analysis in this qualitative inquiry followed the interactive analytical framework developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three interrelated and cyclical activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). Analysis was conducted continuously, beginning at the initial stage of data collection, continuing throughout fieldwork, and extending beyond the completion of data gathering. In this way, analysis was embedded within the research process rather than treated as a separate phase. Qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations, and document reviews at each boarding-based madrasah (MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin) were systematically reduced, organized, and interpreted to uncover patterns of teacher empowerment and character education practices.

Data Condensation

Data condensation involved selecting, focusing on, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw qualitative data derived from interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents. This process aimed to foreground salient patterns associated with the core analytical domains of the study, namely: (1) strategies for teacher empowerment, (2) student character development through dormitory-based programs, and (3) quality assurance mechanisms in boarding education. Condensation was carried out through open coding, thematic clustering, and categorical organization aligned with the research questions. For instance,

principals' narratives regarding leadership cycles such as Plan–Do–Study–Act were synthesized into operational themes for deeper analytical interpretation.

Data Display

Following condensation, the data were organized into structured visual formats, including tables, matrices, and thematic networks. These displays enabled the researcher to examine relationships across themes, such as the connections between leadership practices, teacher empowerment, and student character outcomes. Moreover, visual representations facilitated systematic cross-site comparisons among the three madrasahs, highlighting both convergent and context-specific patterns.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusion building occurred iteratively throughout the analytical process. Emerging interpretations were rigorously verified through triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking, and peer debriefing to enhance credibility and dependability. This verification process ensured the coherence and consistency of findings across sites and strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's conclusions.

FINDINGS

RQ1. Reframing Dormitories as Moral Laboratories

The analysis revealed that the dormitory in each madrasa functioned as more than a residential facility—it was envisioned as a "moral laboratory" where every day routines became sites of moral learning. Principals and teachers alike shared a commitment to shaping dormitory life as a continuous process of *ta'dib* (ethical formation) and *tazkiyah* (self-purification). Strategic documents from 2021–2023 across MAN 4 Banjar, MAN 2 Banjarmasin, and MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut explicitly identified "character education integration in dormitory life" as a top institutional priority. This alignment with the *Madrasah* Reform Program 2020–2024 demonstrated a deliberate shift toward institutionalizing moral education as a defining feature of school identity.

Teachers' empowerment within this framework manifested through active involvement in designing spiritual routines such as Morning Moral Reflection *(Tafakkur Pagi)* and Night Spiritual Dialogue *(Muhasabah Malam)*. Rather than being passive implementers of policy, teachers became co-designers of value-based programs that blended academic discipline with spiritual ethics. As the principal of MAN IC Tanah Laut noted, "The dormitory is our moral ecosystem—teachers are the gardeners." This metaphor reflects how leadership practices empowered educators to cultivate ethical environments through daily consistency and reflective guidance.

Figure 1. Workshop for Dormitory Educators

Figure 1 captures a structured training session in which dormitory educators participate in a formal leadership workshop designed to strengthen their capacity for moral supervision within a boarding-school environment. The participants, in uniform, are seated attentively as facilitators deliver instruction at the front of the room. The setting illustrates an institutional commitment to professional development, showcasing how madrasa leadership intentionally cultivates pedagogical alignment, shared values, and coordinated strategies for fostering students' character formation.

RQ2. Empowerment Through Arts, Rituals, and Symbolic Practices

Teachers' moral agency was also expressed through arts-based religious practices that intertwined spirituality with emotional development. In MAN 4 Banjar, educators guided students in *Hadrah* and *Rebana* ensembles—traditional Islamic percussion that functioned as tools for spiritual enrichment and social bonding. Teachers were not merely supervisors but cultural transmitters, preserving local Islamic traditions while instilling cooperation and devotion.

This form of empowerment highlighted how educators integrated creativity into moral education, challenging the misconception that Islamic boarding systems rely solely on didactic or disciplinary models. By incorporating artistic spirituality, teachers cultivated an affective dimension of morality—joy, empathy, and emotional regulation—that resonated deeply with students' lived experiences.

Figure 2. Religious Music Practice (*Hadrah/Rebana* Ensemble)

Figure 2 shows a communal music practice in which students perform traditional Islamic percussion to enrich their spiritual and cultural lives in the dormitory setting. Under guided supervision, the ensemble fosters cooperation, emotional regulation, and a sense of collective devotion. This practice demonstrates the madrasa's leadership strategy of integrating arts-based religious activities to shape students' moral sensibilities, reinforce communal identity, and create a spiritually grounded environment for character development.

RQ3. Restorative Discipline and Participatory Moral Governance

Across the three case studies, a defining feature of teacher empowerment was their shift from enforcing rules to facilitating moral reflection. Instead of punitive discipline, educators adopted a restorative model grounded in dialogue, empathy, and collective accountability. At MAN 4 Banjar, the "Discipline Circle" program allowed students to discuss infractions through guided reasoning rather than punishment. Teachers facilitated these sessions, helping students link behavior to ethical principles.

This participatory approach led to measurable outcomes—disciplinary violations decreased by 40% from 2022 to 2023, and late attendance for morning prayers dropped from 23% to 8%. Teachers' empowerment here lies in their moral authority to transform correction into reflection. As a dormitory mentor explained, "We no longer punish; we discuss. We ask students to reflect on the meaning of their actions."

Figure 3. Dormitory Environment Showing Morning Student Gathering for *Qur'an* Recitation (MAN 4 Banjar)

Figure 4. Leadership Documentation Board Displaying the Dormitory's Vision and Moral Discipline Program (MAN Insan Cendekia)

Figure 3 captures students' daily routine of communal Qur'an recitation before classes begin. The activity illustrates how spiritual discipline forms the foundation of the dormitory's character education framework. The principal's leadership is reflected in how this routine is institutionalized as both a spiritual and moral exercise, reinforcing the dormitory's vision of moral habituation through structured daily worship. Teachers also played central roles in designing moral documentation systems that translated values into visible forms.

Figure 4 presents the school's moral discipline framework, outlining behavioral expectations and ethical leadership principles. Regular updates reflect teachers' participatory engagement in shaping and reviewing dormitory moral objectives—an indicator of sustained empowerment and shared moral governance.

Figure 5. Bulletin Board Featuring Dormitory Regulations and Student Behavior Monitoring Sheets (MAN 2 Banjarmasin)

Figure 6. Evaluation Meeting Focusing on Character Development Strategies and Boarding Supervision Outcomes

RQ4. Data-Informed Reflection and Collective Moral Evaluation

Empowerment also took shape through teachers' involvement in systematic reflection and data-driven evaluation processes. Each madrasa implemented a Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycle for monitoring the moral program. Teachers participated in quarterly evaluation meetings in which moral indicators such as empathy, discipline, and social responsibility were collaboratively reviewed. This approach represents an educational adaptation of Deming's continuous improvement model—applied to moral rather than managerial outcomes.

The findings show that teachers were not merely implementers of principals' visions but co-researchers of moral practice, actively interpreting data and revising approaches based on evidence. Figure 6 shows educators and administrators jointly assessing program outcomes, reviewing student moral progress, and redesigning mentoring strategies. This institutional habit of reflective dialogue underscores empowerment as

a collective moral practice rather than an administrative duty. Through this structure, educators evolved into moral architects who shape not only students' ethics but also the institutional culture of their dormitories. Their empowerment emerged from participatory decision-making, dialogical supervision, and co-construction of moral norms. Thus, leadership in these madrasahs can be understood not as top-down control but as distributed moral agency, in which teachers become the primary carriers of ethical transformation.

DISCUSSION

RQ1. Reframing Dormitories as Moral Laboratories

The reconceptualization of dormitories as moral laboratories extends existing scholarship on residential schooling by foregrounding the dormitory not merely as a space of supervision but as a pedagogical environment where moral agency is intentionally cultivated. Prior studies on boarding schools have often emphasized discipline, control, and compliance as dominant mechanisms of moral regulation (Reynolds, 2020; Yaghoubi et al., 2022). In contrast, this study's findings suggest a paradigm shift toward formative, reflective moral education rooted in Islamic ethical traditions. By embedding ta'dib and tazkiyah into daily routines, madrasa leaders reposition moral development as a lived, dialogical, and continuous process rather than a set of prescribed rules. This aligns with contemporary theories of moral education that emphasize habituation, reflective practice, and contextual learning as key drivers of ethical internalization (Li et al., 2023).

Moreover, empowering teachers as co-architects of dormitory-based moral programs underscores the critical role of educator agency in sustaining ethical school cultures. Rather than functioning as mere enforcers of institutional norms, teachers in this study exercised professional judgment, creativity, and moral leadership through the design of reflective rituals and spiritual dialogues. This finding resonates with distributed leadership theory, which posits that organizational effectiveness emerges when leadership functions are shared across actors rather than centralized in formal authority (Hanafi et al., 2021). In the context of Indonesian boarding-based madrasahs, such distributed moral leadership is further reinforced by religious values that prioritize collective responsibility (*ukhuwah*) and moral exemplarity (*uswah hasanah*). Consequently, the dormitory-as-laboratory model contributes a distinctive framework to global discussions on faith-based education by demonstrating how moral formation can be systematically nurtured through empowered educators operating within spiritually grounded institutional ecosystems.

RQ2. Empowerment Through Arts, Rituals, and Symbolic Practices

The integration of arts-based religious practices such as *Hadrah* and *Rebana* positions moral education within an embodied and affective learning framework, extending beyond cognitive moral instruction. Educational theorists have increasingly emphasized the role of emotions, aesthetics, and embodiment in ethical development, arguing that moral sensibilities are cultivated not only through reasoning but also through shared emotional experiences and symbolic participation (Islamic et al., 2024; Musaddad, 2023). In the boarding-based madrasah context, religious music serves as a medium through which students internalize values of harmony, patience, and collective responsibility. Teachers' facilitation of these practices reflects a form of pedagogical empowerment in which moral instruction is enacted through rhythm, movement, and spiritual expression rather than solely through verbal exhortation.

The use of culturally rooted artistic rituals underscores the significance of local wisdom in sustaining moral ecosystems within Islamic education. By transmitting indigenous Islamic arts, teachers act as custodians of cultural memory while simultaneously shaping students' moral identities. This finding aligns with sociocultural learning theory, which posits that values and identities are formed through participation in meaningful cultural practices (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020; Islamic et al., 2024; Roqib, 2021). From a leadership and teacher empowerment perspective, arts-based rituals redistribute moral authority from formal rules to shared symbolic practices, allowing students to experience morality as communal belonging rather than imposed regulation (Brooks et al., 2020; La Fua et al., 2018). Consequently, the madrasa dormitory emerges

not only as a site of discipline but as a vibrant cultural space where empowered educators leverage tradition, creativity, and spirituality to nurture holistic moral development.

RQ3. Restorative Discipline and Participatory Moral Governance

The system institutionalizes formative supervision, where teachers engage in reflective monitoring rather than coercive control. This participatory accountability reinforces the principle that discipline is a form of devotion (t*a'dib*), strengthening the relational trust between teachers and students. The shift toward restorative discipline repositions teachers as moral facilitators rather than regulatory enforcers, marking a significant form of professional and ethical empowerment. Within this framework, teachers exercise pedagogical judgment, emotional intelligence, and ethical reasoning to guide students toward self-awareness and moral responsibility. This aligns with restorative justice literature in education, which emphasizes dialogue, relational repair, and shared accountability as more effective than punitive control in fostering long-term behavioral change (M. Z. Arifin, 2022; Mujiati et al., 2019). In the boarding-based madrasa context, restorative practices resonate strongly with Islamic ethical traditions, where *ta'dib* emphasizes moral consciousness and internal discipline over external coercion. Teachers' authority, therefore, is derived not from positional power but from their credibility as moral exemplars and reflective guides (Liang, 2023).

Moreover, participatory moral governance—evident in discipline circles, documentation boards, and reflective monitoring systems—illustrates how institutional structures can distribute moral responsibility across the school community. By involving teachers and students in defining, monitoring, and revising moral norms, dormitory governance becomes a shared ethical project rather than a top-down administrative function. This finding supports theories of democratic and participatory schooling, which argue that moral learning is strengthened when individuals are actively engaged in decision-making processes that affect their communal life (Anderson et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2020; Yaghoubi et al., 2022). In this study, teacher empowerment is operationalized through sustained involvement in moral deliberation and supervision, reinforcing trust and relational cohesion. Consequently, the dormitory functions not merely as a controlled space but as a living moral polity where educators and students collaboratively cultivate ethical order.

RQ4. Data-Informed Reflection and Collective Moral Evaluation

The integration of data-informed reflection into moral education practices represents a critical shift in how teacher professionalism is conceptualized within boarding-based madrasahs. By engaging teachers in the PDSA cycle, moral development is treated as an evolving, examinable process rather than a fixed outcome or an abstract ideal. This practice aligns with scholarship on reflective professionalism, which emphasizes that teachers' agency is strengthened when they are involved in evidence-based inquiry into their own practices (Gonçalves et al., 2022). In this study, moral indicators such as empathy, discipline, and communal responsibility served as reflective tools, enabling educators to translate ethical values into observable, discussable practices. As a result, teachers were empowered to make informed pedagogical adjustments grounded in collective moral reasoning rather than relying solely on intuition (Huda & Teh, 2018).

Collective moral evaluation fostered a culture of shared ownership and institutional learning, where ethical development became a communal responsibility rather than an individual burden. Regular evaluation meetings created dialogical spaces in which teachers' experiential knowledge was validated alongside administrative data, reinforcing horizontal accountability and professional trust. This finding resonates with the literature on professional learning communities, which underscores the importance of collaborative inquiry and shared reflection in sustaining meaningful educational change (Gonçalves et al., 2022; Tindowen, 2019). Within the madrasa dormitory context, such collaborative evaluation processes transformed monitoring into moral sense-making, positioning teachers as co-constructors of institutional ethics. Consequently, empowerment emerged not from formal authority but from sustained participation in reflective governance, solidifying the dormitory's role as a moral laboratory shaped through collective ethical intelligence.

The findings of this study reveal that teacher empowerment in boarding-based madrasahs represents a transformative shift from hierarchical leadership to distributed moral agency. Instead of viewing leadership as an administrative function confined to principals, these madrasahs demonstrate how moral authority is shared and enacted through daily teacher-student interactions. This aligns with the concept of distributed leadership, which argues that leadership practice is stretched across individuals and situations rather than concentrated in a single figure (Islamic et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic boarding education, this distributed moral agency manifests through teachers' participation in spiritual routines, moral reflection circles, and arts-based rituals that sustain the dormitory's ethical ecosystem. Hence, empowerment here is not merely about autonomy but about moral participation—teachers become active interpreters of values within their lived institutional cultures (Jiang et al., 2019; Tindowen, 2019).

Although this study's findings may suggest an ideal, transferable model of boarding-based moral education, it is important to emphasize that the results are inherently context-bound. The study was conducted in only three state Islamic senior high schools with boarding systems—MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin—each of which possesses distinctive institutional resources, leadership cultures, and historical commitments to character education. These madrasahs benefit from relatively strong administrative support, structured dormitory governance, and a shared ideological orientation that positions moral formation as a core institutional mission. The effectiveness of teacher empowerment observed in this study may not be readily replicated in madrasahs that lack boarding facilities, operate under fragmented leadership, or face constraints in staffing, professional development, or policy autonomy. In non-boarding or less-resourced contexts, the absence of continuous teacher–student interaction and structured communal routines may limit the feasibility of implementing similar moral governance practices. Therefore, the findings should be understood not as a universal blueprint but as an analytically grounded illustration of what is possible under enabling conditions. Future studies are encouraged to examine how variations in institutional capacity, cultural norms, and governance structures may either facilitate or constrain the adaptation of this model in other madrasahs or educational settings beyond the boarding context.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher empowerment serves as the moral axis of boarding-based education, transforming dormitory life into a living laboratory of ethics and spirituality. Across the three madrasahs examined—MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin—empowered educators played central roles in translating institutional visions into everyday moral practices through reflective routines, restorative discipline, and faith-integrated learning. Empowerment in this context extends beyond administrative delegation, positioning teachers as moral authors who actively interpret and embody ethical values within the dormitory's social ecology. The findings contribute theoretically to Islamic moral pedagogy by reframing empowerment as a shared ethical mission grounded in ta'dib and collective moral responsibility. Nevertheless, these conclusions are situated within the specific institutional, cultural, and policy contexts of three state Islamic boarding madrasahs in South Kalimantan; therefore, the findings should not be generalized uncritically to all madrasahs or boarding schools with differing structures, resources, or sociocultural settings. Within these contextual boundaries, the study demonstrates that empowering teachers as moral architects strengthens the integrity of dormitory-based education and offers a context-sensitive model for character formation grounded in reflective practice and spiritual coherence.

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