

Creating Child-Friendly Schools in Islamic Educational Institutions in East Kalimantan for Continuous Strengthening of Student Characters

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ABSTRACT

Children's education plays a crucial role in shaping the character and morals of the next generation. A child-friendly environment in Islamic educational units is an urgent need to support the holistic development of children physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Integrating Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in the education system strengthens spiritual, moral, and social values, thus creating individuals who are ethical and responsible. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda (both are public Islamic-based schools). Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation with purposive sampling techniques involving the head of the madrasah, IRE teachers, parents of students, and students. Data analysis was done through data reduction, presentation, and inductive conclusion drawing. The study results showed that the child-friendly environment in both madrasahs contributed to strengthening students' character based on sustainability. MAN Bontang emphasized coastal ecosystems and social entrepreneurship, while the MTsN Model Samarinda prioritized environmental education and zero bullying policies. The main supporting factors were madrasah policies that supported character education, community participation, and adequate facilities and infrastructure. This study also concluded that implementing a child-friendly environment in madrasahs can create an educational ecosystem oriented towards academics and character formation based on sustainability. Synergy between schools, communities, and governments is needed to strengthen character education implementation sustainably.

Keywords

Child-Friendly Education
Islamic Education
Madrasah
School Environment
Student Character

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Introduction

Children's education is a fundamental aspect in shaping the character and morals of the nation's next generation. In formal and informal education, religious values play a significant role as a guideline for life that shapes children's personalities from an early age [1]. IRE not only teaches religious knowledge, but also instills spiritual values. [2], moral [3], and social values that can help children become responsible individuals [4], have noble character [5], and have strong faith [6]. Children's education is the primary foundation in shaping the character and morals of the nation's next generation. In the education process, both formal and informal, religious values play a vital role as a guideline for life that shapes children's personalities from an early age [7].

In IRE, Islamic values are the primary foundation for creating a harmonious, inclusive, and moral learning atmosphere [8]. However, in its implementation, IRE learning often faces various challenges, such as limited innovative learning methods, minimal parental involvement in children's religious education, and a lack of synergy between schools, families, and the community [9].

A child-friendly environment is an educational principle that emphasizes the fulfillment of children's rights [10], encompassing physical [11], psychological [12], and social aspects [13]. A child-friendly environment must support optimal child development, including security [14], comfort [15], participation [16], and protection from discrimination [17], violence [18], and exploitation [19]. Violence against children has become a worrying phenomenon in society [20]. Children, as a mandate and gift from God, must be the focus of protection and attention [21]. They have the essence, dignity, and rights as human beings that must be upheld [22]. Violence against children can have long-term impacts on physical and mental health [23]. Therefore, serious efforts are needed to prevent and overcome violence against children.

Protection of children in the objectives of Islamic education is in line with the goals of national education, namely to form a whole person, both physically and spiritually, intellectually and spiritually [24]. Students need more intellectual knowledge and moral values, which are much needed in life [25]. Therefore, the presence of teachers as educators is significant not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a role model for students [26].

Child-Friendly Education Units (CFE) are formal, non-formal, and informal education units that can fulfill children's rights and special protection, including a complaint mechanism for handling cases in education units [27]. This program was developed to meet children's rights and protect them in educational units. The CFE program is directed at building new education units and renovating existing ones to make them comfortable for children. Islamic education units such as madrasahs are essential in helping the younger generation acquire high morality and ethics. However, madrasahs must consider environmental factors that may have an impact on children's general development in addition to character development. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions need to implement madrasahs with a child-friendly environment.

According to Islamic teachings, creating a child-friendly environment in Islamic educational units reflects the values of compassion, tolerance, and respect for children's rights. [28]. However, there are still challenges in implementation, including the lack of understanding of teachers and education personnel about a child-friendly environment and a disciplinary approach that is still based on punishment. The physical environment and IRE learning facilities in Islamic schools are often not designed to support children's comfort, safety, and needs, both in terms of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. Therefore, exploring and optimizing the role of IRE in children's education, both in the school environment and at home, is essential.

Child protection involves efforts to guarantee the fulfillment of children's rights without discrimination [29]. A critical aspect of children's rights is the right not to experience violence. Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under the age of 18, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers. Most perpetrators of violence against children are people closest to the environment where the children are [30]. Therefore, the presence of teachers as educators and knowledge transferors is also a role model for their students. A madrasah is a formal educational unit under the auspices of the Minister of Religion, which organizes general and vocational education with the characteristics of Islam, which includes Raudlatul Athfal (kindergarten), Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (elementary education), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (junior high school), Madrasah Aliyah (senior high school), and Madrasah Aliyah Kejuruan (vocational school). It plays a vital role in helping the younger generation to gain high morality and ethics. Madrasahs form the younger generation to have strong characters and noble morals and to be able to face life's obstacles in the future. Madrasahs must consider environmental factors that may impact the general development of children, in addition to character development. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions need to implement madrasahs with a child-friendly environment.

MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda were chosen as the objects of study in this research. Both of these madrasahs have begun to implement the concept of a child-friendly environment as part of efforts to improve the quality of education and character building of students. However, implementing this concept faces various challenges regarding policy, infrastructure, and support from the surrounding community. Therefore, this study aims to understand how the idea of a child-friendly environment is implemented in the context of Islamic education in both madrasahs and how this environmental transformation contributes to strengthening students' character. Efforts to create a child-friendly environment are ongoing steps and involve many parties. The transformation of a child-friendly environment is not just a physical change in the educational unit, but also includes changes in mindset and approach to learning [31]. Teachers, staff, education personnel, parents, and students must collaborate to create a learning space supporting children's rights and needs [32]. The role of stakeholders in realizing it is essential and strategic [33]. Synergy between various parties is needed so that a child-friendly environment does not just stop at policy, but is also implemented in real life in educational units [34]. However, various problems related to creating a child-friendly environment in Islamic Education Units in the context of IRE, such as: how Islamic education units can create an environment that reflects the values of compassion, tolerance, and respect for children's rights according to Islamic teachings. There are still teachers and education personnel in Islamic schools who do not understand the concept and importance of a child-friendly environment, so the IRE teaching approach is often still centered on instructions without considering emotional aspects and needs. Cases of violence against children in East Kalimantan are relatively high. Based on an interview with the Head of the Samarinda City Education and Culture Office, there were 240 cases of violence against children in Samarinda City. Meanwhile, the Head of the Regional Technical Service for the Protection of Women and Children in Bontang City stated that there were 74 cases of violence against children until September 2024, of which 24 cases were related to sexual violence, which was generally carried out by relatives or close family of the victim. Therefore, it is essential to understand how this concept is implemented in the context of Islamic education in both educational units and how this environmental transformation contributes to strengthening students' character.

MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda have begun implementing the concept of a child-friendly environment to improve the quality of education and character building of students. However, implementing this concept is not free from various challenges regarding policy, infrastructure, and support from the surrounding community. Based on the background explained, this study aims to:

- Find out how to create a child-friendly environment for strengthening student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan.
- How can a child-friendly environment be implemented to strengthen student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan?
- What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in creating a child-friendly environment for strengthening student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan?

This study is essential to answer the challenges of creating a child-friendly educational environment in Islamic educational units and how the environment forms a sustainable student character.

Methods

This study discusses an in-depth exploration of creating a supportive environment for children in Islamic education. It used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The primary focus is to understand and describe the phenomenon by exploring the meaning, understanding, and interpretation of the experience of the CFE.

A. Research Location

This research was conducted at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda. MAN Bontang is an Islamic educational institution in East Kalimantan designated as the CFE Program's implementer. The determination of MAN Bontang as a CFE was based on the Decree of the Head of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of East Kalimantan Province Number 134 of 2022 dated February 3, 2024. Since its determination, MAN Bontang has set a strategic direction for implementing the child-friendly program. The child-friendly program at MAN Bontang has entered its second year, so it is open to evaluation.

MTsN Model Samarinda is one of the MTsNs designated as one of several leading state madrasahs in Indonesia. It is located between residential areas and offices in the city center. It is a general secondary education institution with Islamic characteristics under the guidance of the Ministry of Religion. As with MAN Bontang, MTsN Model Samarinda has also been designated as a child-friendly madrasah and has received an award from the Indonesian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection in the category of best child-friendly madrasah.

B. Research Subject

The research subjects in this study were selected using purposive sampling based on their role and involvement in the educational process and the application of the concept of a child-friendly environment. They covered:

- The Principal of the madrasah became the subject of the research to obtain information and data related to the policy of the child-friendly madrasah program. The Principal of the madrasah is responsible for determining the implementation system of the CFE program at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda.
- IRE teachers have a significant role in shaping the character and morals of students through the education of Islamic religious values. Attitudes such as honesty, politeness, caring, and mutual respect are instilled in learning, so students have good personalities and can create a child-friendly school environment. IRE teachers can introduce the concept of children's rights and obligations from an Islamic perspective. This helps students understand the importance of respecting peers' rights, such as the right to receive fair treatment, freedom from violence, and participation in madrasah activities.
- CFE is not only the school's responsibility, but also requires support and cooperation from parents. The determination of parents of students as research subjects provides an overview of the extent to which they support the concept of CFE and how this collaboration affects the strengthening of student character. Parents are the main parties responsible for children's character education in the family environment and have a deep understanding of the values applied at home, which can be the basis for strengthening students' character at school.

C. Data collection technique

Evaluation instruments are an essential element in evaluation research because the accuracy in choosing evaluation instruments will significantly affect the credibility of evaluation results. The instruments used in this study are as follows:

1. Interview

The interview activities conducted in this study were interviews with the head of the madrasah, IRE teachers, parents of students, and students at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda. The list of questions with the head of the madrasah included policies, implementation, and other activities related to implementing the CFE program at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda (37 questions). Table 1 shows the interviews conducted related to child-friendly schools.

2. Observation

Observation is an activity carried out by researchers to obtain information through the observation and recording of research objects. Observation techniques are used to dig up data from data sources in the form of events, places, locations, objects, and image recordings. This technique is used to collect data by directly observing the conditions at the research location and recording and evaluating the child-friendly madrasah program, including the condition of the madrasah, child-friendly madrasah facilities and

infrastructure, and the process of implementing child-friendly madrasahs at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda.

Table 1. Interview guidelines

Indicator	Example Question
Creating a Child-Friendly Environment	
Safe and Comfortable	What are the most critical factors in creating a safe, comfortable madrasah environment?
Fulfillment of Children's Rights	What do you think about fulfilling children's rights in the madrasah today?
Children's Education and Participation	What do you think about the attention given by teachers to students who have learning difficulties?
Aspects of the Implementation of the Child-Friendly Model Creation Model	
Environmental Awareness	How are individual beliefs of leaders, teachers, and students towards the environment and their perceptions of environmental damage and balance?
Integrity and Independence	Do everyone, be it leaders/teachers/students, have students?
Social Responsibility	How can student independence contribute to strengthening sustainability-based character?
Integrity	How does the implementation of sustainability values strengthen student character in schools?
Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Creating a Child-Friendly Environment	
	What are the supporting factors for creating a child-friendly environment to strengthen student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units?

In collecting data through observation, researchers use observation sheets containing several aspects to be observed. The observation sheet guides observation activities based on what happens in the field. More details regarding the observation aspects that will be explored in this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Observation guidelines

No	Observed Activities
1	Physical and social environment of MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda (Areas free from potential hazards, such as vehicle traffic, with protective fences and special markers)
2	Facilities and infrastructure owned by the madrasah (Counseling or guidance room for students with a comfortable design that supports privacy)
3	Availability of child-friendly areas: • Play areas equipped with safe equipment, free from risk of injury, and with adequate supervision. • Spaces for activities that support children's social development, such as art centers, community spaces, or places to interact with peers.
4	Student character-building activities • Students are involved in discussions or lectures on character values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and cooperation. • Observation of how students absorb and apply these values in everyday life. • Observation of student arrival at school, study time use, and punctuality in class activities.
5	Child-friendly extracurricular activities related to character building

3. Data Triangulation Beyond Perception

To enhance the credibility and depth of the findings, this study goes beyond perception-based data (interviews and observations) by incorporating documentary and material

evidence. This triangulated approach allows the study to ground claims of character development and behavioral change in observable, tangible data:

- **Student Work Samples:** Written assignments, reflection journals, and project outputs that illustrate the internalization of values such as empathy, responsibility, and honesty. These artifacts provide insight into how character education is manifested in students' academic expression and moral reasoning.
- **School Records:** Documentation such as student behavior logs, disciplinary records, attendance rates, and commendation reports was reviewed. These records offer objective indicators of behavioral trends over time, including improvements in student conduct aligned with child-friendly principles.
- **Classroom Artifacts:** Posters, class charters, student-created rules, and visual displays that promote rights, responsibilities, and respectful behavior. These materials demonstrate the active presence of child-friendly values in the daily learning environment.

4. Documentation Study

Documentation is one of the techniques used by researchers to collect authentic data in the form of documents, such as diaries, photos, memos, or other important notes. The data in question includes information about the general description of the madrasah, the vision and mission of the madrasah, the organizational structure of the madrasah, data on teachers, students, and facilities and infrastructure related to the child-friendly madrasah program. In addition, documentation also includes data on the implementation of the child-friendly madrasah program that has been running at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda, as well as matters related to the evaluation of the program. The documentation study that will be explored is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Documentation Study Guidelines

No.	Required Documents
1.	Child-friendly program policy and regulation documents;
2.	Instructions for implementing child-friendly madrasahs;
3.	Child-friendly learning environment planning documents
4.	Child-friendly learning documents
5.	MAN Bonding and MTsN Model Samarinda Profiles
6.	Child-Friendly Environment program documents
7.	Results of continuous character building and strengthening
8.	Child-Friendly Environment affirmation documents and photos
9.	Child-Friendly School Determination Decree
10	Child-Friendly School Implementation Team Decree
11	Child-Friendly School SOP

D. Data Analysis Techniques

In this study, qualitative data analysis follows the interactive data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman. This approach involves analyzing the data obtained, developing

specific relationship patterns, and concluding that the data is valid and easy for the researcher to understand. The data that has been collected is then analyzed using the descriptive evaluative analysis method. This evaluative research aims to evaluate the achievement level of the evaluation components related to the context, input, process, and product in implementing the Child-Friendly madrasah program at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda. Data analysis in qualitative research is carried out continuously to reach the desired conclusion.

Results and Discussion

A. Creating a child-friendly environment to strengthen students' character

The environment plays a fundamental role in shaping children's behavior and character. The environment, including children, is one of the main factors influencing human behavior through the interaction between physical, social, and psychological conditions around them. A good environment can meet children's physical needs and provide the emotional and intellectual support for positive character development. A child-friendly environment is an environment that offers a sense of security, comfort, and supports an inclusive learning process that is oriented towards children's needs.

1. MAN Bontang

MAN Bontang cultivates character through environmental programs such as tree planting movements, 3R-based (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) waste management, and the Adiwiyata initiative. Social responsibility is promoted through community service, support for underprivileged families, and blood donation drives. Integrity is reinforced via a zero-tolerance policy on academic dishonesty and role modeling from school leadership. Independence is fostered through social entrepreneurship projects, student council (OSIS), and leadership training programs. Global awareness is developed through project-based learning, analysis of international case studies, and the integration of global issues into the curriculum.

2. MTsN Model Samarinda

MTsN Model Samarinda emphasizes environmental awareness through its curriculum, classroom cleanliness, waste bank program, and eco-friendly policies. Social responsibility is nurtured through the Caring Friend Program, anti-bullying movement, and safe reporting systems. Integrity is demonstrated in a transparent and inclusive school culture, supported by character education and parental involvement. Independence is strengthened through over 30 extracurricular activities, encouraging student initiative and leadership. Global awareness is achieved through activities such as Model United Nations (MUN), English debates, international Olympiads, and participation in volunteer and nature lover organizations.

Table 4 provides a comparative overview of character education initiatives at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda across five key aspects: Environmental Awareness, Responsibility, Integrity, Independence, and Global Awareness. Both schools demonstrate strong efforts in fostering student character, though with varying strategies and program focuses.

Table 4. Character Education Comparison

Character Aspect	MAN Bontang	MTsN Model Samarinda
Environmental Awareness	3R programs, greening movement, Adiwiyata initiative.	Integrated curriculum, waste bank, classroom cleanliness responsibility, and eco-policies.
Responsibility	Social aid, community service, blood donation, and student organization involvement.	Caring Friend Program, disaster fundraising, anti-bullying campaign, and safe reporting system.
Integrity	Zero-tolerance for academic fraud, leadership role modeling.	Transparent, inclusive culture, character education, parental engagement.
Independence	Social entrepreneurship, OSIS, Scouts, leadership training.	30+ extracurriculars, self-managed activities, and organizational experience.
Global Awareness	Project-based learning, global case studies, and international issue integration.	MUN, English debates, international Olympiads, volunteer and environmental clubs.

B. Implementation of the CFE concept to strengthen student character

The results of this study demonstrate that implementing the CFE concept at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda supports the holistic development of student character rooted in sustainability. The environment in both schools was intentionally structured to reflect core values such as responsibility, integrity, independence, empathy, and global awareness. This aligns with the Child-Friendly School framework, emphasizing safe, inclusive, and participatory learning spaces. At MAN Bontang, the 3R Waste Management Program and School Greening Movement promote responsibility and care for the environment. These are consistent with the other research on character education, where moral action and habituation are central to instilling enduring values [20],[22].

At MTsN Model Samarinda, student engagement in the Waste Bank program and environmental campaigns also represents active participation in sustainability (Fig. 1). However, observations revealed gaps in students' understanding of waste sorting, indicating that habit formation requires continued modeling and reinforcement, as discussed by Supriyono et al. [31]. Activities such as charity fundraising, clean-up drives, and blood donation campaigns allow students to develop empathy and civic responsibility.

A teacher in MAN Bontang appreciates the students' activity, as in his quote:

“Every individual at MAN Bontang (leaders, teachers, or students) has a social responsibility, especially given our industrial area setting” (Teacher, MAN Bontang).



Fig. 1. Students of MAN Bontang sort recyclable waste into labeled bins

At MTsN Model Samarinda, the Zero Bullying Policy, Safe Reporting System, and Anti-Bullying Campaigns demonstrate a commitment to student safety and mutual respect, key pillars of the CFS framework. These policies also help foster psychosocial well-being, which is crucial for character development. Fig. 2 shows the student activity on the zero-bullying program.



Fig. 2. Posters made by students during Anti-Bullying Day

The Zero Tolerance Policy on Academic Cheating at MAN Bontang is a clear example of intentional character formation, where school rules are directly linked to moral values such as honesty and fairness. Fig. 3 shows this program implementation when the teacher appreciates the student for fairness.



Fig. 3. Students leading a discussion during Student Council leadership training

Independence is cultivated through extracurricular activities and student-led initiatives, such as social entrepreneurship, student council, and service projects. These platforms develop decision-making, teamwork, and problem-solving skills as attributes emphasized in performance character theory [30],[34].

C. Barriers to Effective Implementation

Despite their many achievements, both schools face challenges in implementing child-friendly education. Key barriers include limited infrastructure (e.g., poor lighting and inadequate sanitation), unequal access to digital learning tools, teacher workload, and inconsistent parental involvement. These issues reflect Rusilowati's [23] assertion that sustainable educational reform requires systemic support and adequate resources. Without such support, even well-designed character education programs may fall short of their full potential.

1. MAN Bontang

At MAN Bontang, the physical environment reflects ongoing efforts to enhance student safety and comfort. Surveillance systems have been installed, although some areas still require improvements in lighting and maintenance. Regarding children's rights, the school offers a balanced curriculum integrating religious and general knowledge through programs like *tahfidz* and project-based learning. Nevertheless, equitable access to learning resources remains a challenge for some students. Social and cultural support is evident in the strong communication networks among students, teachers, and parents. The school actively implements peer mentoring and personalized support to assist students in academic and personal matters. Student participation is encouraged through active

involvement in organizations such as OSIM, Scouts, and PMR, as well as academic competitions. Additionally, dialogue forums between students and teachers promote a culture of openness and democratic engagement. In terms of technology, the school effectively uses platforms such as Google Classroom and Quizizz, ensuring that their application aligns with child-friendly principles. Gadget usage is regulated, and students receive digital literacy education to ensure safe and responsible use.

2. MTsN Model Samarinda

Through comprehensive infrastructure, the MTsN Model Samarinda provides a safer and more comfortable physical learning environment. Security is enhanced with CCTV, 24-hour security personnel, well-ventilated classrooms, proper lighting, gender-separated toilets, and a nutritious canteen. The fulfillment of children's rights is addressed through inclusive education policies that guarantee equal access for all students, including those with special needs. The school also maintains established counseling and health services to support student well-being. Social and cultural support is cultivated through active collaboration with parents, alumni, and the wider community, particularly through environmental and cultural initiatives. Student participation is strongly promoted, with more than 30 extracurricular activities enabling students to develop their interests. Students also contribute to school decision-making processes via OSIS and class representative forums. Regarding technology, the school integrates e-learning platforms and interactive digital tools into the teaching process. However, despite the practical implementation, some students face challenges due to limited access to digital devices at home.

Table 5 summarizes the comparison between the MAN Bontang and the MTsN Model Samarinda in implementing CFE across five themes. While MAN Bontang shows strong efforts in integrating character education with moderate infrastructure and structured support systems, MTsN Model Samarinda demonstrates a more comprehensive approach, particularly in safety infrastructure, inclusive education, and broad student participation.

D. The supporting and inhibiting factors in creating a CFE for strengthening student character

The effort to build a child-friendly environment (CFE) in schools plays a vital role in shaping student character that is aligned with sustainability principles. MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda show strong commitment through leadership, community involvement, and policy frameworks.

Table 5. The Comparison in Implementing CFE

Theme	MAN Bontang	MTsN Model Samarinda
Safe & Comfortable Physical Environment	Some areas lack adequate lighting and maintenance; basic safety standards are met, but need improvement.	Comprehensive safety measures (CCTV, security, ventilation, gendered toilets, healthy canteen).
Fulfillment of Children's Rights	Balanced curriculum (religious & academic); some inequality in facility access still exists.	Inclusive education with support for special needs students and full access to school health and prayer facilities.
Social & Cultural Support	Strong peer support, guidance counseling, and empathetic teacher-student-parent communication.	Active involvement of parents, alumni, and community; emphasis on local culture and environmental values.
Children's Participation	Students engaged in OSIM, religious and social clubs, and forums to voice opinions.	Participation in 30+ clubs; student voice integrated in policy and activity planning.
Child-Friendly Technology & Information	Digital tools are used with age-appropriate supervision and digital ethics education.	E-learning and digital platforms are in use, though access to personal devices remains challenging for some.

However, they also face similar challenges related to limited resources, infrastructure gaps, and the balance between academic pressures and character education. These factors reflect the urgency to develop school-based strategies and broader systemic support that enables consistent implementation. Addressing these elements is key to forming a generation equipped to face global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, and social injustice, with strong values of empathy, integrity, and responsibility.

1. MAN Bontang

At MAN Bontang, creating a child-friendly environment is strongly supported by the commitment of the leadership, particularly from school heads and educators, who implement inclusive and student-centered policies. Parental and community involvement strengthens this ecosystem through parenting programs and environmental supervision. However, the school faces several inhibiting factors, such as inadequate infrastructure in areas like stairways and open spaces, and unequal student access to technology. Furthermore, teachers experience high workloads, and the tight academic curriculum makes allocating sufficient time for character-building activities difficult. These constraints hinder the optimal implementation of sustainability-based education.

2. MTsN Model Samarinda

MTsN Model Samarinda benefits from structured school policies and strong collaboration with external institutions like the Education Office and Family Learning Center. Teachers are trained in positive discipline approaches, and parents actively participate in school decision-making. Students are also highly aware and engaged in maintaining a positive school environment through activities like Clean Friday and environmental programs. However, barriers remain, including budget limitations,

outdated infrastructure, and a few teachers who lack a complete understanding of inclusive education. Behavioral issues such as residual bullying and digital exposure also pose challenges. In addition, a minority of parents remain passive in supporting school character-building efforts at home.

Table 6 summarizes the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of child-friendly environments (CFEs) at MAN Bontang and MTsN Model Samarinda. Both schools benefit from strong leadership, teacher commitment, and community involvement as key enablers. However, they face similar challenges, including infrastructure limitations, teacher workload, and inconsistent parental involvement. MTS Samarinda Model stands out with clearer policies and wider stakeholder collaboration, while MAN Bontang emphasizes visionary leadership and school-community synergy.

Table 6. Summary of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Both Schools

Category	MAN Bontang	MTsN Model Samarinda
Supporting Factors	• Strong leadership commitment • Active parental involvement • Integrated character curriculum	• Clear CFE policy- External partnerships (Education Office, Puspaqa) • Teacher training and parent support
Inhibiting Factors	• Poor infrastructure (stairs, lighting) • Limited student access to tech • Teacher overload	• Budget constraints- Incomplete teacher understanding of inclusivity • Social media influence
Community Involvement	• Parenting programs • Collaboration with local stakeholders	• Joint decision-making with parents • Involvement of alums and the community in school events
Technological Barriers	• Limited student access to digital tools at home	• Limited devices for home learning • Need for improved digital literacy education
Cultural Challenges	• Balancing academic focus with character building	• Persistent student habits (e.g., bullying) • Limited parental follow-up at home

Conclusions

Creating a child-friendly environment for strengthening student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan has strengthened student character through a holistic approach that includes environmental education, social responsibility, integrity, independence, and global awareness. Both madrasahs have demonstrated their commitment to building an inclusive, safe educational ecosystem that supports character growth and student achievement sustainably, implementing the concept of a child-friendly environment for strengthening student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan. Regarding character education, both madrasahs integrate sustainability values through five leading indicators: environmental awareness, social responsibility, integrity, independence, and global awareness. MAN Bontang focuses

more on a coastal ecosystem-based approach, social entrepreneurship, and strengthening sustainability-based leadership. Meanwhile, MTsN Model Samarinda prioritizes environmental education programs, character development through extracurricular activities, and implementing a zero-bullying policy to create an inclusive and safe environment for all students. Implementing the child-friendly environment concept in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan has created an educational ecosystem that focuses on academics and forms students who care about the environment, have high social awareness, integrity, independence, and global insight. This model can be an example for other educational institutions to build a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also. Supporting and inhibiting factors in creating a child-friendly environment for strengthening student character based on sustainability in Islamic educational units in East Kalimantan include policies that support character education, integration of sustainability values in the curriculum, community participation, and support for facilities and infrastructure. However, inhibiting factors such as unequal awareness, limited resources, social environmental challenges, and lack of evaluation systems are obstacles that need to be overcome to ensure the sustainability of this program. Therefore, synergy between schools, communities, and the government is required to strengthen the implementation of character-based education and sustainability more effectively and sustainably.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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