



Religious Culture and Character Education: Strategies and Impacts in an Islamic Primary School

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Abstract

Character education has become a strategic issue in education, particularly at the primary school level, in response to moral degradation and the weakening of ethical values in society. This study aims to analyze the implementation of religious culture in character education, including its forms, strategies, and impacts on students' character development in an Islamic primary school. This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving school principals, teachers, and students. The data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation. The findings indicate that religious culture is implemented through various religious habituation activities, teacher role modeling, and the strengthening of school culture integrated into daily practices. The implementation is carried out through three main strategies: structured and continuous practices, integration of religious values into school life, and early habituation of character values. These strategies effectively foster students' religious values, discipline, responsibility, and politeness. The impact of religious culture is reflected not only in the school environment but also in students' behavior within their families. In conclusion, religious culture serves as a strategic approach to strengthening character education, with sustainable implications for students' character development in Islamic primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central issue in contemporary education, particularly in response to the increasing concerns over moral degradation and the weakening of ethical values among students (Febriani et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2024). Educational institutions are expected not only to develop students' cognitive abilities but also to foster their moral and social character in a sustainable manner. In this context, character education plays a crucial role in shaping students into individuals who possess integrity, responsibility, and respect for social norms (Engkizar et al., 2021; Satrial et al., 2025). In Indonesia, character education is formally embedded in

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the national education system. Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere that enables students to actively develop their potential, including spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and necessary life skills. This emphasizes that character development is an integral part of the educational process. Furthermore, the Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education highlights that character education should be implemented through the harmonization of ethical, emotional, intellectual, and physical development, involving collaboration between schools, families, and communities (Kosim, 2020).

Character education is defined as a systematic effort to instill moral values and develop students' character so that they can be applied in daily life at school, home, and in society. Andriani & Wakhudin (2020) argue that character education is a process of guiding students to become holistic individuals through the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Among the various values embedded in character education, religious values are considered fundamental, as they influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Qoni'ah, 2019; Suyatno et al., 2019, 2022).

One approach that has been widely recognized in strengthening character education is the implementation of religious culture within the school environment. Religious culture refers to a set of religious values, traditions, habits, and symbols that are practiced collectively and continuously, forming a structured system of behavior. In schools, religious culture is manifested through leadership policies, learning processes, extracurricular activities, and daily habituation practices, which together create a distinctive cultural identity. Examples include the practice of respectful communication, discipline, honesty, empathy, and other moral behaviors (Putra, 2017). Ammerman (2020), conceptualizes religion as a system of symbols that shapes strong and lasting moods and motivations by formulating conceptions of the general order of existence and presenting them as factual realities.

School culture plays a significant role in influencing interactions among teachers, students, and the overall learning process, ultimately contributing to students' character formation. (Prabowo, 2023) defines school culture as a pattern of values, traditions, principles, and habits developed over time and shared by all members of the school community, shaping their attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, integrating religious culture into school practices becomes a strategic approach to strengthening character education.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of religious-based character education. Shoimah & Fatoni (2025) found that the implementation of religious character education through school culture successfully fostered students' politeness in language, behavior, and dress. Suryanti & Widayanti (2018) reported that religious-based character education programs improved school quality through habituation activities supported by strategies such as role modeling, learning processes, empowerment, reinforcement, and evaluation. Similarly, Maftukha & Kurniawan (2023) revealed that religious character education was integrated into intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities.

However, despite these contributions, previous studies tend to focus on specific aspects of implementation without providing a comprehensive analysis that simultaneously examines the forms, strategies, and impacts of religious culture in character education, particularly within the context of Islamic primary schools. This indicates a gap in the literature that requires further investigation.

In response to this gap, this study aims to analyze the implementation of religious culture in character education, including its forms, strategies, and impacts on students' character development in an Islamic primary school. This study is

expected to contribute theoretically to the development of character education studies based on religious culture and practically to provide insights for educators and policymakers in designing effective and sustainable character education models.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of *religious culture* in character education within a specific educational context. The study was conducted from November 15, 2025, to January 15, 2026, at an Islamic primary school in Indonesia. The participants of this study consisted of the school principal, teachers, students, and parents who were directly involved in the implementation of religious culture (Ai, 2022; Akyuni et al., 2025; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Engkizar et al., 2023; Volmar & Eisenhardt, 2020). The data sources included both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and participatory observations, while secondary data were derived from school documents, particularly character-based program planning (Ateş & Afat, 2018; Xiao et al., 2022).

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted using a participatory approach to examine daily school activities reflecting religious culture. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in implementing character education (Baroud et al., 2025; Htay et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025). Documentation was used to support and validate findings from observations and interviews. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and method triangulation. Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Engkizar et al., 2024, 2025; Kalsum et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025; Mutiaramses et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Religious Culture in Character Education

Based on the analysis of school program documents, the implementation of religious culture has been systematically designed through daily habituation activities and periodic religious programs.

One of the main programs is the Islamic Personal Development Program, which is designed as a structured and continuous effort to develop students' character based on values of faith, piety, discipline, responsibility, and noble character. The program includes learning materials such as creed, morality, Quranic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, spiritual purification, voluntary fasting, and the development of Islamic worldview. The implementation is adjusted according to students' grade levels and gender, with small group mentoring to ensure effective guidance.

Based on an interview with the school principal, the success of this program is reflected in the development of students' character as seen in their mindset, attitudes, and daily behavior. The principal emphasized that the development of belief strengthens students' faith in God, while moral development fosters polite, responsible, trustworthy, and caring behavior. In addition, worship practices serve as an important indicator, as students demonstrate consistency in performing prayers, remembrance, supplication, fasting, and Quranic recitation.

Another program is the Quranic Camp Program, conducted once every semester to foster students' love for the Quran through educational and experiential approaches. This program includes memorization activities, collective revision, study

of Quranic stories, and spiritual reflection. Based on interviews, students show high enthusiasm and positive engagement, particularly through activities such as memorization targets and group interaction, which also strengthen their social and emotional development.

The Faith and Piety Development Night Program is also implemented periodically to enhance students' spiritual awareness and character formation. This program includes congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, religious lectures, and self-reflection activities. Through immersive experiences, students internalize religious values in a more meaningful and reflective way.

In addition, daily habituation practices such as the culture of smiling, greeting, addressing, politeness, and courtesy are consistently implemented in school interactions. Students are trained to demonstrate respectful behavior in their interactions with teachers and peers. This practice serves as a foundation for developing social and moral character.

Furthermore, the habituation of daily worship practices, including morning voluntary prayer and midday congregational prayer, is systematically implemented. Teachers actively participate as role models in guiding students, reinforcing discipline, responsibility, and spiritual awareness.

Overall, these findings indicate that the implementation of *religious culture* reflects an integration of structured programs, daily habituation, and teacher role modeling. This is in line with Azhar (2022), who states that religious culture in schools is built through consistent habituation of religious values embedded in daily activities. The strong involvement of teachers also supports the effectiveness of role modeling, which is considered a key factor in character education (Mawikere, 2020).

Linking Religious Culture to Character Education Strategies

The various forms of religious culture activities identified in this study do not merely function as routine school programs, but also represent structured efforts in implementing character education. These activities reflect systematic patterns through which character values are internalized, including value integration, role modeling, habituation, and environmental reinforcement. Therefore, the implementation of these programs can be further analyzed as strategic approaches in instilling character values among students.

Strategies for Instilling Character Values through Religious Culture

Several scholars argue that the main strategies in character education include value integration in learning, role modeling, habituation of positive behavior, and collaboration between schools and parents (Andriyani, 2018; Mujahid, 2021; Pratama, 2022). The findings show that the integration of character values into learning has been consistently implemented. Religious values are not only taught in Islamic education subjects but are also integrated into general subjects through moral reinforcement, prayer habituation, and the incorporation of ethical values into teaching materials. This finding aligns with the theory emphasizing the importance of an integrative approach to avoid fragmented character education (Rumondor & Gobel, 2019; Rusilowati & Wahyudi, 2020).

In addition, role modeling emerges as a central strategy. Teachers actively demonstrate religious practices, polite behavior, and discipline in daily interactions. This finding confirms the theory that students learn more effectively through concrete examples than through verbal instruction alone (Partono et al., 2021). In this context, teachers function as living models of religious values.

Habituation of positive behavior is also implemented through routine activities such as congregational prayer, Quranic recitation, and structured religious programs. This finding is consistent with the theory that character is formed through repeated and consistent behavior (Chebotareva & Volk, 2020; Fu et al., 2018; Sunanih et al., 2025). Furthermore, collaboration between schools and parents is evident, although

not always in formally structured programs. Communication between schools and families occurs through monitoring students' religious practices and aligning values between school and home. This reflects the ecosystem-based approach to character education, although further development is still needed (Andriyani, 2018).

Interestingly, this study also identifies an additional strategy, namely the strengthening of religious culture as a collective value system within the school. This approach transforms the school environment into a comprehensive learning space for character development. This finding supports the concept of school culture as a hidden curriculum that significantly influences students' character formation (Adrivat et al., 2024). Thus, the findings demonstrate that character education is implemented not only through theoretical strategies but also through contextual adaptation within the school environment.

Impacts of Religious Culture on Students' Character Development

The implementation of religious culture has a significant positive impact on students' character development. Based on interviews with the school principal, teachers, and Quranic instructors, religious activities contribute to the development of discipline, responsibility, and moral behavior.

A teacher stated, *"The habit of praying in congregation and reading the Quran every morning helps children become more disciplined and accustomed to performing their religious duties without always needing to be reminded."* Another teacher explained, *"The children are beginning to feel a sense of responsibility for their memorization; they know when to review and correct their recitation."* These findings support Elchardus & Spruyt (2009); Rotem & Shani (2025); Sitohang et al (2021), who argues that structured religious activities foster responsibility and discipline.

The school principal emphasized the importance of teacher role modeling by stating, *"We emphasize that teachers should lead by example, because children are quick to imitate the behavior they see every day."* This aligns with Fikri et al (2023), who highlights that character values are more effectively instilled through habituation and role modeling.

In addition, religious culture positively influences students' social behavior. A teacher noted, *"Now children are more accustomed to greeting one another, showing respect, and helping their classmates without being told to do so."* This finding is consistent with Maftukha & Kurniawan (2023), who found that religious culture contributes to the development of empathy, respect, and social awareness. Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of religious culture contributes to students' character development in a holistic and sustainable manner, encompassing spiritual, moral, and social dimensions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings aligned with the three research objectives, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the forms of religious culture in character education are manifested through integrated daily school practices, including congregational prayers, Quranic recitation and *Asmaul Husna*, the implementation of the Five Values Culture (smiling, greeting, addressing, politeness, and courtesy), as well as structured religious programs. These activities serve as the main medium for instilling religious values and Islamic manners among students.

Second, the strategies for instilling students' character values through religious culture are implemented through consistent habituation, teacher role modeling, and the reinforcement of school rules and culture based on Islamic values. These strategies ensure that character values are not only understood cognitively but also internalized through daily practices within the school environment. Third, the implementation of religious culture has a positive impact on students' character development, as reflected in improved religiosity, discipline, responsibility, and polite behavior, both in school and in family life. Therefore, religious culture can be

considered an effective approach in supporting character education in Islamic primary schools.

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