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CULTURE BASED RELIGIOUS CHARACTER FORMATION IN ISLAMIC SECONDARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF MAS AL-WASHLIYAH TEMBUNG

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana budaya sekolah berbasis nilai Islam berperan sebagai mekanisme sistemik dalam pembentukan karakter religius siswa pada pendidikan menengah Islam. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus di MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya sekolah berfungsi sebagai ekologi moral yang mengintegrasikan praktik ibadah, keteladanan guru, kepemimpinan sekolah, serta kolaborasi keluarga dalam rutinitas harian siswa. Praktik keagamaan seperti salat berjamaah, tilawah, dzikir, dan disiplin berbasis nilai membentuk pengalaman religius yang bersifat praktis dan berkelanjutan, sehingga mendorong internalisasi disiplin, tanggung jawab, dan perilaku sosial yang beretika. Secara konseptual, penelitian ini memperluas kajian karakter dengan menunjukkan bahwa budaya sekolah berbasis agama bekerja sebagai sistem institusional terpadu, bukan sekadar kumpulan aktivitas ritual. Secara internasional, temuan ini memberikan kontribusi bagi diskursus global tentang pendidikan karakter dengan menawarkan perspektif bagaimana budaya sekolah berbasis spiritual dapat mendukung tata kelola pendidikan yang berorientasi nilai. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan studi komparatif lintas konteks untuk memperkuat pengembangan kebijakan pendidikan karakter berbasis budaya.

Kata Kunci: *Pendidikan Karakter Berbasis Budaya; Pendidikan Menengah Islam; Pembentukan Karakter Religius; Habitiasi Moral; Pembentukan Identitas Religious.*



Abstract

This study examines how Islamic school culture operates as a systemic mechanism for religious character formation in Islamic secondary education. A qualitative case-study design was employed at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung using observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that school culture functions as a moral ecology integrating worship routines, teacher role modelling, school leadership, and family collaboration into students' daily experiences. Religious practices such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, dhikr, and value-based discipline create sustained experiential learning that fosters responsibility, self-discipline, and ethical social behaviour. Conceptually, the study contributes to character-education scholarship by demonstrating that faith-based school culture operates as an integrated institutional system rather than a collection of ritual activities. Internationally, the findings inform broader debates on value-driven education by illustrating how spiritually grounded school cultures can support moral education, student wellbeing, and value-oriented school governance. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative and cross-national approaches to strengthen the global relevance of culture-based character education.

Keywords: Culture-Based Character Education; Islamic Secondary Education; Religious Character Formation; Moral Habituation; Religious Identity Formation.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, particularly in an era marked by growing concerns about moral decline, youth delinquency, and the erosion of social values. Across many educational systems, schools are increasingly expected not only to promote academic achievement but also to cultivate ethical awareness, social responsibility, and spiritual development among learners. Religious-based educational institutions have gained particular attention because they integrate moral and spiritual values into everyday learning experiences and institutional practices. Scholars argue that such environments provide structured opportunities for value internalization through both formal instruction and daily social interaction (Warsah et al., 2024). Within this broader context, Islamic secondary schools in Indonesia represent a distinctive model of value-based education. Madrasah aliyah under the Ministry of Religious Affairs carry a dual mandate to deliver general education while simultaneously strengthening Islamic values in students' daily lives, positioning them as important institutions for the development of students' religious character (Ahwadzi & Chusniatun, 2025).



A growing body of international scholarship identifies school culture as a crucial mechanism for character development. School culture refers to shared values, expectations, traditions, and interaction patterns that shape everyday life within educational institutions. Unlike formal curricula, which focus on planned instruction, school culture operates as a hidden curriculum that transmits values through routines, role modelling, peer interaction, and institutional traditions (Norman et al., 2022). Research shows that students internalize moral values more effectively when they are consistently embedded in daily practices rather than delivered through isolated instructional programmes (Mamuaya, 2025). Habituation, collective rituals, and teacher exemplification transform abstract values into lived experiences that gradually shape students' identities (Saifannur, 2025). This perspective positions school culture as a dynamic system of value transmission rather than a collection of isolated activities (Abdussalam et al., 2024). Understanding how this system operates is therefore essential for explaining how schools cultivate discipline, responsibility, and moral commitment in ways that extend beyond classroom instruction and become part of students' everyday behaviour (Hijrawatil Aswat et al., 2022).

To bridge the discussion from theoretical perspectives to empirical practices in schools, it is crucial to stress that school culture is shaped not only by institutional policies or vision statements, but also by students' lived religious experiences in everyday school life (Hayati et al., 2020). A culture based approach to character education emphasizes repeated experiences, active participation, and emotional engagement as key mechanisms for value internalization, as seen in habituation of congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, 5S practices, and other routines that gradually form school habits and ethos (Mahbubi & Hasanah, 2024). In this view, religious values are not limited to cognitive knowledge but are transformed into stable habits through systematic practice embedded in daily school activities, extracurricular programs, and school-wide traditions (Murod, 2022). This framework implies that religious character formation requires integrating formal instruction with structured everyday practices and school culture, where policies, rituals, and interactions consistently embody religious values (Mashoedi et al., 2025). Therefore, before discussing the implementation of specific programs, it is essential to understand how practices beyond the formal curriculum—such as routine worship, character routines, and value-laden extracurriculars—become a crucial foundation for building a sustainable religious environment in schools (Jakandar et al., 2025).

In addition to the formal curriculum, religious character formation at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung is reinforced through routine activities and school traditions.



Programs such as tahfiz, tilawah, tadarus al-Qur'an, congregational prayers, and dzikir are integrated into the daily schedule as worship habituation, similar to practices in many Islamic schools and pesantren-based madrasah that link learning with continuous religious practice (Syarnubi et al., 2021). A distinctive program is the *ujian syafahi* (oral examination), which assesses not only students' cognitive mastery of religious subjects but also their readiness to become graduates capable of continuing to Islamic-based universities and being well accepted in society, in line with findings that madrasah and pesantren can bridge students toward higher education while nurturing a strong religious identity and moderate, responsible character (Jusubaidi et al., 2024). Through gradual and continuous training, these programs are expected to shape students' religious character, reflected in disciplined worship, noble morals, and a sense of responsibility toward themselves and others in their social environment, as also emphasized in international and regional studies on Islamic education and character formation (Mujahid, 2021).

Although many educational institutions carry a religious label, a strong religious atmosphere alone does not automatically produce students with solid religious character if it is not supported by an effective, systematic, and sustainable internal school culture (Harfi et al., 2025). In this context, it becomes crucial to investigate how the internal culture of MAS Al Washliyah Tembung actually works in shaping students' religious character, in line with research that highlights the central role of school culture, leadership, and institutional management in character formation (Ataman et al., 2024). This study therefore examines the background, forms, and implementation of Islamic value-based internal culture—covering worship habituation programs, school rules and discipline, teacher role modeling, and the climate of social interaction—and its influence on students' attitudes and behaviors, following case study approaches widely used in madrasahs and pesantren-based schools (Arifianto et al., 2025). Internationally oriented and Scopus-indexed studies also show that structured school culture, leadership, and teacher example are key mechanisms for integrating religious values into students' daily lives and strengthening moral and spiritual character in diverse educational settings (Ma`arif et al., 2024).

By uncovering these mechanisms at MAS Al Washliyah Tembung, this research is expected to contribute conceptually and practically to the development of Islamic Religious Education and character education in madrasahs and other Islamic schools, and to provide input for policy design aimed at reinforcing school culture in responding to moral degradation and the challenges of the digital era (Arifianto et al., 2025)



LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture based religious character formation in Islamic secondary education is grounded in the idea that school culture functions as a lived moral ecology where values are enacted, not only taught. Comparative work on faith schools and Islamic schooling highlights the role of shared rituals, symbols, and narratives in shaping communal identity and student dispositions. In Muslim contexts, religious character is commonly framed through integrated dimensions of iman, ibadah, and akhlaq, with school culture translating these into structured routines and expectations. International literature on character education and school ethos also stresses that moral formation is most effective when values are embedded across the whole school environment policies, relationships, and daily practices rather than confined to formal religious instruction (Hayati et al., 2020). Global work conceptualizes school culture as shared meanings, norms, and habitual practices that organize interaction and behavior in classrooms and across the institution (Jukić & Kakuk, 2019) Studies show that formal policies, leadership styles, and informal routines together create a cultural ecosystem that shapes students' moral and social dispositions over time (Makarova et al., 2025).

Islamic schools are often designed as moral communities where everyday culture, rituals, and relationships systematically shape students' religious character, not just their academic outcomes. Across madrasah, Islamic elementary schools, and pesantren, character education is most effective when values are lived through routine practice, role modeling, and social interaction. Islamic school culture is described as a consistent system of values, norms, and habits that forms a religious habitus in students' daily lives (Mahfudi & Rifa'i, 2025), Activities such as congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, and politeness toward teachers embed religious norms and moral expectations into school life (Mu'min et al., 2025). School environments that integrate curriculum, rituals, space, and community involvement make character education a lived experience, not just written policy (Arif et al., 2024).

Religious character can be described as a configuration of attitudes and behaviors rooted in religious teachings, reflected in faith, piety, moral integrity, and ethical interaction with others (Alfarisy & Iswandi, 2025). Core dimensions include obedience in worship, discipline, honesty, responsibility, respect, and tolerance, realized both in personal devotion and social life (Said et al., 2025). In Islamic education, religious character is closely linked to akhlaq al karimah (noble ethics), where belief in God is manifested in polite speech, concern for others, and consistent implementation of Islamic norms in daily routines (Syari'ah et al., 2025). This character is not instant; it develops gradually through internalization processes supported by habituation and role modeling in families and schools (Maskanah et al., 2024). Schools contribute by embedding routine



religious practices—such as congregational prayers, Qur’an recitation, infaq, and greeting or 5S culture—into school culture, so that worship and moral behavior become stable habits rather than occasional acts (Nurizah & Amrullah, 2024). Empirical studies in Indonesian Islamic schools and madrasahs show that such culture-based religious character education significantly strengthens students’ religious awareness, discipline, and prosocial behavior in and beyond school (Karmilah et al., 2025).

Education is a major arena for shaping students’ religious character, and teachers occupy a central, strategic position in that process as *uswah hasanah* (good exemplars) (Kandiri et al., 2021). When teachers display disciplined worship, honesty, and consistent moral conduct, students’ internalization of Islamic values and actual moral behavior significantly increases (Tohet et al., 2025). In Islamic schools and madrasahs, teachers’ active participation in structured religious routines—such as *dhuha* and *fardhu* prayers in congregation, Qur’anic recitation, *dhikr*, and *muhadharah*—strengthens value internalization by linking taught norms with visible daily practice (Fauzan et al., 2024). Teachers who integrate Islamic values across all subjects and school activities (not only in PAI lessons) further reinforce students’ understanding of faith, worship, and *akhlaq* in a holistic way (Triana et al., 2025). Research in Indonesian contexts shows that effective religious character formation depends strongly on teacher consistency and moral integrity, supported by a school culture of habituation, reward-punishment systems, and clear religious norms (Tambak et al., 2021). Through these combined efforts, students develop greater discipline, responsibility, and stable patterns of religious behavior inside and outside school (Rahmatilla et al., 2025).

School culture in religious character education is implemented through systematic efforts to embed religious values into daily routines, school rules, and interpersonal interactions (Fitriah et al., 2025). Culture-based character programs typically include regular religious activities, spontaneous moral actions, teacher role modeling, and a learning environment that supports students’ religious development (Cahyanto et al., 2024). Repeated practices such as *dhuha* prayer, recitation of *Asmaul Husna*, proper ablution, and other forms of worship habituation foster discipline, spiritual awareness, and moral sensitivity in students (Mahfudi & Rifa’i, 2025). In madrasah or pesantren-based schools, activities like congregational prayers, Qur’an memorization, yellow book study, *mujahadah*, and Islamic holiday celebrations help personalize and reinforce internalization of religious values in everyday life (Erbayanti et al., 2025). Research also indicates that effective implementation depends on strong instructional leadership, supportive and consistent policies, and active participation from teachers, students, and parents, so that school culture can sustainably shape students’ religious character over



time (SARIP) (Dinda Aulia & Munawir Pasaribu, 2025)

Research shows that the effectiveness of school culture in religious character education is shaped by a combination of supporting and inhibiting factors (Retnasari et al., 2023). Supporting conditions include committed school leadership, active teacher participation, structured religious programs (such as daily prayers, Qur'an recitation, and routine worship), adequate facilities like mosques or prayer rooms, and consistent support from families and communities (Marlina et al., 2025). These elements create a conducive environment for the internalization of religious values and help sustain students' religious habits over time (Bela & Santosa, 2023). However, implementation is often constrained by diverse student backgrounds, weak or inconsistent supervision, students' low self-discipline, and limited parental reinforcement at home (Niskaromah et al., 2025). Environmental factors such as unsupportive neighborhoods, peer influence, and negative impacts of technology or media can further dilute the influence of religious school culture (Maulidin et al., 2024). Schools that strategically strengthen leadership, improve facilities, build teacher-parent collaboration, and address these external pressures are more likely to succeed in shaping students' religious identity and moral behavior in a sustainable way (Risma Solehah et al., 2025).

Previous studies on school culture and character education have examined various educational levels and institutional types (Basuki, 2021). Research in Islamic elementary schools and pesantren-based institutions shows that religious character is developed through routine activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, dhuha prayer, memorization programs, and spontaneous moral actions embedded in daily school life (Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023). These practices, combined with role modeling and supportive environments, are consistently reported to strengthen students' religiosity and moral behavior (Shiddiq et al., 2024). Other studies emphasize school culture-based habituation at the primary and junior secondary levels, where religious routines, discipline culture, and environment-based madrasah programs form the core of character education initiatives (Karnoto & Syafi'i, 2025). However, much of this research focuses on general or basic education settings, with relatively fewer studies exploring religious school culture in Islamic senior secondary madrasahs (Madrasah Aliyah). This gap underscores the need for more contextual research on how internal religious culture is specifically implemented at Islamic senior high madrasah. The present study responds to this need by exploring the distinctive cultural practices that shape students' religious character at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung, thereby enriching the literature on Islamic education at the upper secondary level (Mujahid, 2021)



RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how school culture shapes students' religious character at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung (Sithole, 2025). A qualitative approach was selected to gain deep insight into social interactions, practices, and lived experiences related to the school's religious culture, aligning with views that qualitative inquiry is suitable for capturing complex educational phenomena (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The study sought to describe the internal religious culture of the madrasah, its concrete implementations in daily routines and programs, and the supporting and inhibiting factors in forming students' religious identities (Pristine Adi et al., 2024). Participants consisted of the principal, Islamic education teachers, and students actively involved in religious and cultural activities, reflecting typical sampling in studies of school culture and character education (Setyawan et al., 2023). Data were collected through direct observation of school life, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of documents such as school policies, program plans, and institutional records (Sari & Sumedi, 2024). The combination of these techniques enabled data triangulation and produced rich, contextualized descriptions of how religious character is nurtured within the madrasah environment (Mahfudi & Rifa'i, 2025).

For data analysis, this study employed the interactive approach of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Mezmir, 2020). Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw field data into meaningful units that highlighted key insights relevant to the research objectives (Rijali, 2019). The reduced data were then systematically organized and presented in structured forms to facilitate interpretation and the identification of patterns and relationships (Umar et al., 2024). Conclusions were drawn by examining recurring themes and connections across the data, and these provisional conclusions were continuously checked and refined throughout the analysis process. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, the research applied triangulation of sources, techniques, and time by comparing information from different informants, methods, and moments of data collection (Ahmed, 2024), (Morgan, 2024) This strategy enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, so that the conclusions accurately reflected the actual implementation of school culture at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung (Noble & Heale, 2019), (Santos et al., 2020)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Field data demonstrate that the internal culture of MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung is operationalized through daily routines that visibly regulate students' academic and social behavior. Observations showed structured morning Qur'an recitation, compulsory



congregational prayers, punctuality checks, and teacher-led moral reminders integrated into classroom transitions (Said et al., 2025). Students consistently associated these routines with discipline and responsibility; one participant explained, "When the bell rings for dhuha prayer, everyone stops studying and goes to the mosque together it feels like part of who we are as a school." Another student noted that teachers "correct behavior immediately but gently, using religious advice." These findings indicate that Islamic values are not only written in rules but enacted through repetitive practices, shared expectations, and role modelling. This pattern reflects broader scholarship on value-based school culture in Islamic education, which interprets such routines as mechanisms for embedding faith, sharia, and akhlaq into everyday schooling (Syari'ah et al., 2025). Thus, the institutionalization of worship and ethical habituation appears to function as a collective moral framework shaping student character development (Zubairi Muzakki & Nurdin, 2022).

Building on the broader school culture described earlier, field observations show that structured religious routines operate as the most visible daily mechanism shaping students' habits. Each morning begins with collective Qur'an recitation led by rotating student groups, followed by dhuha prayer that temporarily halts academic lessons. Teachers supervise quietly while reminding students about intention, discipline, and cleanliness before entering the mosque. One student described, "If we forget to bring our Qur'an, friends will remind us because everyone reads together." A teacher added, "Students who used to arrive late now come earlier so they can join the recitation." During Islamic commemorative events, students actively prepare speeches, decorations, and charity programs, indicating participation beyond ritual performance. These practices demonstrate how repeated worship and shared preparation create lived experiences of religious responsibility and cooperation. The data suggest that systematic habituation strengthens self-regulation, empathy, and collective discipline, reinforcing the continuity of religious culture established through leadership and daily school routines.

Consistent with the previously described routines, behavioural observations and interviews reveal measurable changes in students' everyday conduct that signal the strengthening of religious character. Teachers reported that students now remind peers to attend congregational prayers, maintain classroom cleanliness, and speak more politely during lessons. One teacher explained, "Students rarely need repeated warnings about prayer time because they organize themselves," while a student shared, "I try to control my words because we are taught that manners reflect faith." During group work, students were frequently seen sharing tasks, greeting teachers respectfully, and avoiding



disruptive behaviour. These recurring patterns indicate that religious values are increasingly translated into visible social practices rather than remaining abstract ideas. The findings suggest that sustained exposure to structured worship, leadership modelling, and daily moral reminders contributes to discipline, accountability, and respectful interaction. Overall, the data demonstrate that religious school culture plays a tangible role in shaping consistent moral habits across academic and social contexts.

Extending the patterns identified in earlier findings, interviews and observations highlight the principal's consistent presence as a stabilizing force that sustains the continuity of religious routines and behavioural expectations. The principal was frequently observed leading short reflections after congregational prayers, visiting classrooms during Qur'an recitation, and reminding teachers to integrate moral advice into lessons. One teacher noted, "When the principal checks prayer attendance and joins the line, we feel encouraged to stay consistent," while a student commented, "It feels different when the principal reminds us directly because we know the school really cares." Leadership involvement also includes evaluating religious programs and supporting teachers who initiate moral-development activities. These practices demonstrate how institutional vision is translated into daily supervision and shared commitment. The findings indicate that visible leadership participation reinforces teacher motivation and student compliance, ensuring that the established religious routines and character-building practices continue to function coherently across academic and social activities within the school environment.

Further evidence shows that leadership support also shapes how teachers sustain religious routines and reinforce moral expectations in classrooms. Several teachers described receiving regular encouragement to integrate short moral reminders, prayer preparation, and reflective discussions into daily lessons. One teacher explained, "We are asked to connect lesson topics with values, even in non-religious subjects, so students see consistency." Classroom observations confirmed that teachers paused lessons to remind students about prayer time, respectful speech, and cooperative behaviour. Students recognised this consistency, with one noting, "Every teacher gives the same reminders, so we know the rules apply everywhere." This shared commitment indicates that leadership influence extends beyond formal programs into everyday teaching practices. The findings suggest that coordinated supervision and support foster alignment between institutional vision and classroom implementation. As a result, teachers maintain consistent expectations, and students experience a stable environment where religious routines and character-building practices are reinforced across academic, social, and spiritual activities.



Complementing the leadership and classroom practices described earlier, school-wide religious events further reinforce students' shared experiences of faith and responsibility. Observations during Islamic commemorations showed students organizing charity drives, preparing speeches, and decorating classrooms with religious messages under teacher supervision. One student explained, "When we prepare events together, we learn to cooperate and remember the meaning behind the celebration." A teacher added, "Students who are usually quiet become more confident when involved in religious programs." Participation was not limited to ritual attendance; students were actively assigned roles such as event coordinators, Qur'an reciters, and charity organizers. These activities extend religious learning into collaborative practice and social engagement. The findings indicate that large scale religious programs strengthen empathy, teamwork, and responsibility while maintaining the continuity of daily worship routines. Overall, these shared events deepen students' sense of belonging and reinforce the integration of religious values across academic, social, and extracurricular dimensions of school life.

Alongside these positive outcomes, field data also reveal several challenges affecting the consistency of religious culture implementation. Teachers reported that students enter the school with varied family backgrounds, levels of religious literacy, and prior habits, which influence how quickly they adapt to structured routines. One teacher explained, "Some students are already familiar with congregational prayer, while others need repeated guidance and reminders." A student similarly shared, "At first it was difficult to wake up early and follow all the routines, but friends and teachers helped me adjust." Observations showed that a small number of students occasionally required additional supervision to maintain punctuality and participation. Teachers also expressed concern about external influences such as social media and peer environments that sometimes contradict school values. These findings indicate that character development is shaped not only by school programs but also by broader social contexts. Recognizing these challenges highlights the need for supportive, inclusive strategies that accommodate diverse student backgrounds while sustaining the continuity of religious routines.

In response to these challenges, the school implements adaptive strategies aimed at strengthening student adjustment and sustaining the continuity of religious routines. Teachers described providing individual guidance, monitoring attendance in worship activities, and offering gentle reminders for students who struggle with punctuality or participation. One teacher explained, "We approach students personally, talk with them after class, and try to understand their difficulties before giving advice." Communication



with parents also plays an important role; regular meetings and messaging groups are used to align expectations between school and home. A parent reportedly shared appreciation that “teachers inform us when children need support so we can remind them at home.” Observations further showed that teachers periodically evaluate religious programs and adjust schedules when necessary to maintain student engagement. These findings indicate that continuous supervision, collaboration with families, and reflective program adjustments help preserve the relevance of religious school culture while ensuring that students with diverse backgrounds receive the support needed to participate consistently.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the sustained integration of religious routines, leadership modelling, classroom reinforcement, and family collaboration forms a coherent cultural system that supports students’ moral and spiritual growth. Observations across daily worship, classroom behaviour, and school events show that students gradually internalize discipline, responsibility, and respectful interaction as shared expectations. One teacher summarized, “Over time we see students reminding each other, not because they are told, but because it has become a habit.” A student similarly reflected, “The routines feel normal now; they shape how we behave inside and outside school.” These patterns indicate that students experience Islamic values as lived practices embedded in everyday school life. The data suggest that the consistency of routines, supported by leadership and parental involvement, strengthens the sustainability of character formation. Overall, the school environment operates as a continuous moral ecosystem in which religious values are practiced collectively, reinforcing students’ developing religious identity and responsible social conduct.

DISCUSSION

The findings reinforce the literature on school-based character education by demonstrating that daily religious habituation functions as a mechanism for forming a sustained religious habitus (Ilmi Nur Hidayah et al., 2025). However, the main contribution of this study lies not merely in confirming existing frameworks but in showing that religious routines operate as an integrated social system linking structure, practice, and shared meaning (Supriyadi et al., 2024). Unlike general character education models that emphasize cognitive or curricular approaches (Alfarisy & Iswandi, 2025), the practices observed at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung indicate that spirituality acts as a driving force of social discipline (Amrullah & Chanda Chansa Thelma, 2025). Congregational prayer and morning Qur’an recitation function not only as rituals but also as mechanisms for time regulation, collective identity formation, and social responsibility (Riantina, 2025). In this sense, Islamic school culture extends the discourse



of character education by positioning worship practices as value-based social regulation that simultaneously integrates spiritual, social, and academic dimensions within everyday school life.

While the findings confirm the positive influence of religious routines on students' discipline and sense of responsibility, classroom and field observations also reveal adaptation dynamics that expose tensions between newly imposed institutional habits and students' diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Some students do not immediately adjust to highly structured routines, especially those unfamiliar with congregational worship practices or strict time discipline, echoing evidence that habituation requires gradual, consistent mentoring and may be weakened by home-school inconsistencies (Solihah et al., 2024). This suggests that religious character formation is not a linear process but a social negotiation shaped by habituation, peer interaction, teacher guidance, and collaboration with families and communities (Maksum et al., 2025). This perspective advances character education theory by underlining the importance of transitional phases in value internalization, where students gradually move from external compliance to personal commitment through repeated practice and supportive school culture (Rosadi et al., 2025). School culture shapes character not only through formal rules and regulations, but also through sustained mentoring, modelling, and social reinforcement embedded in daily routines such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and 5S/6S practices (Susanti et al., 2024). Therefore, religious character development calls for inclusive and adaptive pedagogical strategies that acknowledge students' varied social and cultural experiences, provide space for plural expressions of religiosity, and accompany them during their transition into a value-oriented school environment (Aji Saepurahman et al., 2025)

In Islamic schools, routine religious activities function as the main vehicle for realizing a religious school culture. Regular congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, daily supplications, and Islamic festivity programs create a structured pattern of practice that deepens students' spiritual consciousness and strengthens self-control. Through continuous repetition, learners encounter religious values in real-life situations, so that moral teaching becomes concrete, experiential, and meaningful rather than merely theoretical (Iriyanti, 2025). The fixed scheduling of these programs reflects strong institutional commitment and helps sustain long-term character formation (Indriani et al., 2024). These practices go beyond symbolic worship; they operate as deliberate pedagogical strategies for nurturing responsibility, discipline, empathy, and social concern among students (Galaksi, 2025). Overall, the evidence supports the view that experiential learning, combined with consistent habituation, is crucial for embedding



Islamic moral values into students' everyday behaviour inside and outside school (Slamet Panuntun et al., 2025).

Teachers occupy a central position in linking school culture with students' learning so that religious values become lived habits rather than mere knowledge. Their active participation in religious activities and the integration of Islamic values into lessons and extracurricular programs strengthen students' internalization of morality and ethics (Safitri, 2024). Consistent role modelling—where teachers' daily conduct reflects what they teach—emerges as one of the most effective strategies for character formation (Christina Turner et al., 2024). A holistic approach is required, extending beyond Islamic Religious Education to general subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Language, so that ethical and spiritual dimensions are embedded across the curriculum and school routines (Maideja et al., 2023). School-wide practices such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, charity programs, and value-based cultural activities create a coherent moral environment that aligns classroom messages with social practice (Juwairiyah & Fanani, 2025). Through these integrated efforts, teachers function as cultural and spiritual agents who ensure that Islamic values remain visible, contextual, and meaningful in everyday school life, supporting students' academic development while nurturing disciplined, responsible, and empathetic personalities (Rofiatul Hosna et al., 2025).

Effective school leadership is a key driver for sustaining religiously oriented character education. Principals who personally engage in Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, and other religious routines, and who align rules and policies with core values, create consistent religious school cultures that shape students' morals and discipline (Cinantya et al., 2024). Transformational and spiritual leadership, in which principals act as role models, managers, and supervisors of religious programs, translates the school mission into concrete daily practices and motivates teachers to participate actively (Usman et al., 2021). Such value-based leadership improves school climate, teacher engagement, and student obedience to norms, reinforcing long-term character formation (Widodo, 2025). Studies in Islamic and broader educational settings using value-based or spiritual leadership frameworks similarly report increased student discipline, stronger moral values, and more effective character education when leaders continuously guide, coordinate, and evaluate religious culture programs (Muaddyl Akhyar et al., 2024).

Research shows that religious facilities, programmed worship, and school culture (e.g., congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, dormitories) strengthen discipline and moral behavior in students (Nasichin Al Muiz & Machali, 2023)



Collaboration between teachers and parents, and a strong home-school interface, are crucial for internalizing religious values and sustaining them outside (Darmody et al., 2016). Teacher role modeling and coordinated religious programs are repeatedly highlighted as central mechanisms for building students' religious character (Maksum et al., 2025). At the same time, negative media/technology influences, limited supervision, weak school-parent cooperation, and diverse levels of religiosity and background can inhibit character education (Wasehudin et al., 2024). Inclusive and multicultural approaches in Islamic Religious Education help manage diversity and promote tolerance and harmonious relations in plural settings (Tepsing et al., 2025).

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that religious school culture functions as a moral ecosystem shaping students' religious identity in a sustainable way. The integration of Islamic values into routines, leadership practices, teaching approaches, and family partnerships creates a coherent value-oriented environment. This study contributes to the refinement of school-culture theory by illustrating how religious culture operates as a systemic mechanism in Islamic secondary education. By embedding values into everyday experiences, the school enables students to internalize faith-based principles as part of their identity. These findings affirm that character formation becomes most effective when values are not only taught but consistently lived within the entire school environment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious school culture functions as an integrated system that shapes students' character through the alignment of routines, leadership, pedagogy, and family collaboration. The findings show that religious practices at MAS Al-Washliyah Tembung operate not only as ritual activities but as institutional mechanisms that regulate time, social interaction, and moral expectations. By embedding worship, ethical reminders, and value-based discipline into everyday school life, the institution creates a lived environment in which students gradually internalize responsibility, respect, and self-discipline. The study therefore advances school-culture scholarship by illustrating how faith-based routines can operate as a coherent moral ecosystem in Islamic secondary education, extending existing character-education frameworks beyond cognitive and curricular approaches toward experiential and communal value formation.

The study also offers theoretical and policy implications that extend beyond the immediate context. Conceptually, the research refines school-culture theory by demonstrating how spirituality can function as a central organizing principle of institutional life, linking structure, meaning, and social practice. From a policy



perspective, the findings highlight the importance of leadership engagement, teacher role modeling, and strong home-school partnerships in sustaining value-oriented education. These insights contribute to wider international discussions on character education by showing how culturally grounded and faith-based schooling can inform global debates on moral education, student wellbeing, and value-driven school governance.

Several limitations remain. The research was conducted in a single institution and therefore reflects a context-specific cultural setting. Differences in socio-cultural backgrounds, family environments, and technological influences may shape the transferability of the findings. Future studies should employ comparative, multi-site, and longitudinal designs to examine how religious school culture evolves across diverse contexts and over time. Further research could also explore cross-national perspectives to better understand how faith-based school cultures contribute to global conversations on character education and educational policy development.

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