



Model for Strengthening Islamic Character Education Through School Culture Among Students

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Abstract

This study examines the model for strengthening Islamic character education through school culture among students at SMPI Sawahan Turen. The research employed a qualitative method using a case study approach to explore the implementation of Islamic school culture and its contribution to students' character formation. The focus of the study included forms of Islamic school culture, strategies for strengthening Islamic character, the role of principals and teachers, students' religious habituation, and the impact of school culture on students' behavior. Data were collected through observations, in depth interviews, and documentation involving the principal, Islamic education teachers, general teachers, homeroom teachers, students, and school documents. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. The findings indicate that Islamic school culture was implemented through daily religious practices, exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers and school leaders, disciplinary regulations, and socio-religious activities. These practices contributed significantly to the development of students' spiritual discipline, moral responsibility, social awareness, and religious behavior. The study concludes that school culture functions as an effective hidden curriculum that supports the holistic strengthening of Islamic character education through habituation, role modeling, and a conducive religious environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of Islamic character education has become an increasingly important issue in contemporary society because moral and spiritual values among adolescents are facing significant challenges in the era of globalization and digital transformation (Acetylena & Zaironi, 2026; Zaironi, 2026; Zaironi & Acetylena, 2026). Educational institutions are expected not only to develop students' academic competence but also to cultivate ethical awareness (Azaim et al., 2025), discipline, responsibility, and religious commitment (Afandy et al., 2026; Firghol et al., 2026). The growing influence of social media, consumerism, individualism, and declining social sensitivity has affected students' behavior in various educational contexts (Abbas et

al., 2019). Consequently, schools are required to establish educational environments capable of integrating moral formation into daily learning experiences (Tirta & Zaironi, 2025; Zaironi et al., 2026). Islamic character education through school culture is important because it emphasizes habituation, exemplary conduct, and social interaction as practical foundations for character building (Antika et al., 2026). Therefore, strengthening Islamic character through school culture is essential for developing morally responsible, disciplined, and spiritually grounded students in modern society (Azizah et al., 2026; Fakhridana et al., 2026; Mufarrohah & Zaironi, 2026).

One of the major problems faced by contemporary society is the weakening of students' moral behavior despite the increasing development of formal education systems (Nwachukwu & Azuka, 2024; Rafikov et al., 2021). Many students demonstrate disciplinary problems, low social awareness, disrespectful communication, and limited religious commitment in everyday life (Lumbantobing & Sihombing, 2025). Educational processes in some schools still focus predominantly on cognitive achievement while neglecting moral and spiritual development (Azaim et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2026). As a result, character education is often implemented only as theoretical instruction without meaningful internalization in students' behavior. This condition creates a gap between educational objectives and the actual moral conduct of students within society. In Islamic educational contexts, the absence of consistent religious habituation and exemplary behavior from educators may reduce the effectiveness of character formation (Nia Hasanah, Muchammad Syamsul Ma'arif, Nurul Ma'rifah, 2025; Nuraini Maulidia, Sabrina Nurhaliza, Ramadhanti Syifa Salsabila, 2025; Sobirin & Zaironi, 2025). Therefore, schools require comprehensive cultural approaches capable of integrating Islamic values into students' daily routines, interactions, attitudes, and social responsibilities in sustainable educational practices.

Field phenomena indicate that several Islamic schools have attempted to strengthen students' character through the development of religious school culture and daily habituation programs (Fahrurrosi et al., 2026; Luluk Ananta, Fajriah, 2025; Subairi & Zaironi, 2025). At SMPI Sawahan Turen, Islamic values are integrated into various educational activities, including congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, collective supplication, Islamic greetings, social service activities, and disciplined behavioral practices. Teachers and school leaders actively demonstrate exemplary

conduct through respectful communication, punctuality, responsibility, and religious discipline. These practices create a conducive educational atmosphere that supports the internalization of Islamic values among students. Observations also reveal that students gradually develop stronger spiritual awareness, social empathy, responsibility, and behavioral discipline through continuous habituation. The existence of such cultural practices demonstrates that Islamic character education can be implemented more effectively through practical school culture rather than relying solely on classroom instruction or theoretical moral teaching.

Previous studies on Islamic character education have generally emphasized classroom instruction, curriculum development, and religious learning strategies as the primary instruments for moral formation (Arisih & Muhammad, 2026; Azizah et al., 2026; Bisri et al., 2026). Several researchers have argued that Islamic education contributes significantly to students' ethical behavior through cognitive understanding of religious teachings and moral values (Ismet et al., 2025; Sahin, 2018). Other studies have examined the importance of teachers' roles, religious activities, and disciplinary systems in supporting character development within Islamic schools (Rochim & Khayati, 2022; Supriyandi et al., 2025). In addition, research concerning school culture has demonstrated that educational environments strongly influence students' attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns (Braun et al., 2018; Liao & Li, 2019). Nevertheless, many previous studies focus primarily on isolated educational activities rather than examining the integration of religious habituation, leadership, teacher exemplarity, and social interaction within a comprehensive school culture model (Ni & Zaironi, 2026). Consequently, the holistic process through which Islamic school culture strengthens students' character remains insufficiently explored in qualitative educational research contexts.

Furthermore, previous research frequently concentrates on theoretical discussions regarding Islamic moral education without sufficiently investigating how school culture functions as a hidden curriculum in everyday educational practices (Sahin, 2018; Zaman et al., 2023). Existing studies often examine character education from normative or conceptual perspectives while paying limited attention to students' lived experiences and the social dynamics of school environments (Hidayati &

Nihayah, 2025). Some researcher have highlighted the importance of habituation and exemplary conduct, yet they rarely analyze how these components interact systematically within institutional culture (Hald et al., 2021; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021). In addition, limited qualitative case studies specifically investigate Islamic junior high schools in local Indonesian contexts. This research gap indicates the need for deeper exploration concerning the mechanisms through which Islamic school culture shapes students' moral awareness, discipline, social sensitivity, and religious identity. Therefore, this study contributes to educational research by providing contextual and holistic analysis of Islamic character strengthening through school culture implementation.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on school culture as an integrated and holistic model for strengthening Islamic character education among students. Unlike previous studies that mainly focus on curriculum or instructional methods, this research explores the interaction between religious habituation, teacher exemplarity, disciplinary culture, leadership practices, and socio-religious activities within daily school life. This study also positions Islamic school culture as a hidden curriculum that continuously influences students' moral behavior through environmental conditioning and social interaction. Another important contribution of this research is its contextual analysis of Islamic character education within an Indonesian Islamic junior high school setting. The issue is important to address because schools increasingly face challenges in maintaining students' moral integrity amid rapid social and technological transformation. Therefore, effective cultural approaches are urgently needed to support sustainable Islamic character formation in educational institutions.

Based on the issues above, this study investigates how Islamic school culture strengthens character education among students and examines the roles of teachers, school leaders, religious habituation, and disciplinary practices in shaping students' behavior. The research argues that Islamic character education becomes more effective when implemented through continuous cultural practices rather than through theoretical instruction alone. Habituation, exemplary conduct, and positive social interaction are assumed to create a conducive educational environment that supports

students' spiritual, moral, and social development holistically. This study also assumes that school culture functions as a strategic medium for internalizing Islamic values into students' everyday experiences and behavioral patterns. The findings of this research are expected to contribute theoretically to Islamic educational studies and practically to schools seeking effective models for strengthening students' Islamic character through sustainable and culturally integrated educational practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study (Gammelgaard, 2017; Viera, 2023) approach to explore the implementation of Islamic character education through school culture. The qualitative method was selected because it enables in depth understanding of social interactions, educational practices, and cultural experiences within natural settings. The case study approach was considered appropriate for examining the holistic processes of character strengthening in the school environment. The research was conducted at SMPI Sawahan Turen. This location was selected because the school consistently implements Islamic cultural practices through religious habituation, disciplinary programs, and character-building activities. In addition, the institution demonstrates strong integration between academic learning and Islamic values, making it relevant for investigating the implementation of school culture in strengthening students' Islamic character education.

Data were collected through observation, in depth interviews, and documentation (Mbanaso et al., 2023). Observations were conducted to examine religious activities, students' interactions, and daily cultural practices within the school environment. In depth interviews involved the principal, Islamic education teachers, general teachers, homeroom teachers, and students. Documentation included school regulations, character education programs, activity schedules, photographs, and institutional records related to Islamic cultural implementation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Khan et al., 2025). The researcher organized and interpreted the collected information systematically to identify patterns and themes related to Islamic

character strengthening through school culture. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking to enhance credibility, consistency, and accuracy of the research findings obtained from various participants and documentation sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Model for Strengthening Islamic Character Education through School Culture among Students

The findings reveal that the model for strengthening Islamic character education through school culture refers to a systematic process of integrating Islamic values into students' daily educational experiences through habituation, exemplary behavior, discipline, and socio-religious interaction. Operationally, the model is implemented through religious routines such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, collective supplication, Islamic greetings, and disciplined behavioral practices regulated by the school institution. The model also emphasizes the role of teachers and school leaders as moral exemplars whose behavior continuously influences students' character formation. In this context, school culture functions not merely as institutional regulation but as a hidden curriculum shaping students' moral awareness, social sensitivity, responsibility, and spiritual discipline through continuous interaction within the educational environment. Consequently, Islamic character formation develops naturally through consistent educational and social practices.

Table 1. Excerpt From Interview With Informant

Interview Excerpts	Indicators	Informants
"Students are accustomed to performing congregational prayers and reading the Qur'an before lessons begin."	Religious habituation	Principal
"Teachers consistently demonstrate discipline, polite communication, and Islamic behavior in daily interactions."	Exemplary conduct	Islamic Education Teacher
"Students gradually become more disciplined and responsible because school rules are implemented consistently."	Discipline and responsibility	Homeroom Teacher
"Religious and social programs encourage students to care about others and strengthen Islamic brotherhood."	Social and religious awareness	General Teacher

"Daily religious activities make students more respectful and obedient in their behavior."

Behavioral transformation

Student

The data presented above demonstrate that Islamic school culture operates through interconnected educational practices rather than isolated religious activities. Religious habituation becomes a central mechanism through which Islamic values are repeatedly internalized into students' daily behavior. The interview excerpts indicate that continuous exposure to religious routines contributes significantly to students' spiritual awareness and behavioral discipline. Furthermore, teachers' exemplary conduct appears to strengthen the effectiveness of character education because students observe practical manifestations of Islamic values within real social interactions. This condition confirms that character formation is not solely achieved through theoretical instruction but through continuous social experiences. The integration between habituation, discipline, and exemplary behavior creates a consistent educational environment that supports students' moral development comprehensively and encourages the formation of sustainable Islamic behavioral patterns within the school context.

In addition, the findings reveal that school culture contributes significantly to the development of students' social responsibility and emotional awareness. Socio-religious programs such as charity activities, Islamic celebrations, and collective worship encourage students to develop empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect. The consistency of school regulations and collective participation in religious activities strengthens students' sense of belonging to the Islamic educational community. Critically, the findings suggest that character education becomes more effective when supported by institutional culture involving all educational stakeholders simultaneously. Teachers, school leaders, and students collectively construct an environment where Islamic values are practiced socially and symbolically in everyday life. Therefore, the effectiveness of Islamic character education depends not only on curriculum content but also on the sustainability of cultural practices and interpersonal relationships within the educational institution itself.

Observational findings further strengthen the interview data regarding the implementation of Islamic school culture. During school activities, students consistently participated in congregational prayers, greeted teachers respectfully,

maintained classroom cleanliness, and demonstrated disciplined behavior in academic and social interactions. Researchers also observed that teachers actively monitored students' conduct while simultaneously providing direct examples of politeness, punctuality, and responsibility. School facilities such as prayer spaces, Islamic posters, and religious slogans visually reinforced the institutional commitment to Islamic values. These observations indicate that Islamic character education is embedded not only in formal instruction but also within the physical, social, and symbolic dimensions of school culture. The researcher interprets these findings as evidence that environmental conditioning significantly contributes to the internalization of Islamic moral values among students through repeated educational experiences.

The researcher interprets the findings as indicating that Islamic character strengthening through school culture is fundamentally a process of value internalization achieved through continuous habituation, social interaction, and moral exemplarity. Religious practices become educational instruments shaping students' spiritual discipline and behavioral awareness within everyday school experiences. Simultaneously, the active involvement of teachers and school leaders reinforces students' understanding of Islamic values through observable conduct rather than abstract explanation alone. The data also demonstrate that students respond positively to educational environments characterized by consistency, discipline, and religious atmosphere. Consequently, Islamic school culture serves as an effective hidden curriculum capable of influencing students' moral attitudes and social behavior comprehensively. This model enables character education to function practically, contextually, and sustainably within the educational institution.

The data pattern indicates that Islamic character education develops through the interaction between religious habituation, exemplary leadership, disciplinary consistency, and socio-religious participation. These components function collectively in creating a conducive educational environment that supports moral transformation among students. The findings consistently show that students' behavioral improvement emerges gradually through repetitive cultural experiences rather than through isolated instructional activities. Another visible pattern is the dominant

influence of teachers and school leaders in shaping students' conduct through practical example and interpersonal interaction. The integration between institutional regulations and daily religious activities also strengthens students' emotional attachment to Islamic values within school life. Therefore, the overall pattern suggests that Islamic school culture functions as a holistic and sustainable model for strengthening students' Islamic character education comprehensively.

Table 2. The influence of strengthening Islamic Character Education

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"School culture must reflect Islamic values in every educational activity and interaction."	Institutional leadership
Islamic Education Teacher	"Students imitate teachers' attitudes more quickly than verbal instruction."	Moral exemplarity
General Teacher	"Religious habituation gradually shapes students' discipline and social responsibility."	Habituation process
Homeroom Teacher	"Consistent supervision strengthens students' obedience to school regulations."	Behavioral control
Student	"Religious activities make us more respectful, disciplined, and responsible."	Character transformation

The table demonstrates that the ideal influence of Islamic school culture originates from the interaction between institutional leadership, teacher exemplarity, habituation processes, and behavioral supervision. School leaders establish educational policies and cultural directions that reinforce Islamic values systematically within school activities. Simultaneously, teachers function as practical role models whose attitudes significantly influence students' behavioral development. The findings indicate that students are more responsive to direct social examples than theoretical moral instruction. Furthermore, habituation practices supported by consistent supervision contribute to the gradual formation of disciplined and responsible behavior. This condition suggests that Islamic character education requires collaborative cultural implementation involving all educational stakeholders. Therefore, the influence of school culture becomes effective because Islamic values are continuously experienced, observed, and practiced collectively within the educational environment.

Critically, the findings also reveal that institutional consistency functions as a determining factor in sustaining students' character transformation. The integration between leadership commitment, teacher participation, and student involvement

creates educational coherence that strengthens moral internalization. Students perceive Islamic values not merely as formal regulations but as collective social norms practiced within everyday school interactions. This phenomenon demonstrates that school culture possesses transformative power because it shapes students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions simultaneously. The data also indicate that positive social control within the school community reinforces students' obedience, empathy, and spiritual awareness. Consequently, Islamic character education becomes more sustainable when supported by an institutional culture emphasizing collective responsibility, continuous exemplarity, and meaningful religious experiences throughout educational activities and interpersonal relationships.

The overall data pattern shows that effective Islamic character strengthening emerges from the integration of cultural consistency, leadership influence, religious habituation, and collective participation within school life. Educational stakeholders function collaboratively in creating a moral environment where Islamic values become practical behavioral standards rather than theoretical concepts. Another significant pattern indicates that repeated religious experiences gradually transform students' discipline, social sensitivity, and spiritual awareness. Therefore, the findings confirm that school culture operates as a strategic medium for strengthening Islamic character education holistically, sustainably, and contextually within the educational institution.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic character education becomes more effective when implemented through school culture rather than relying solely on classroom instruction. This result aligns with educational theories emphasizing the importance of habituation and environmental influence in shaping students' behavior (Padil, 2026). The findings support Thomas Lickona who argues that character education requires moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within educational environments (Arif et al., 2023). The implementation of religious routines, disciplinary practices, and socio-religious activities confirms that students internalize values more effectively through repetitive social experiences. However,

this study extends previous discussions by emphasizing the role of Islamic school culture as a hidden curriculum that continuously influences students' moral development through everyday interactions and institutional practices.

The findings also correspond with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals develop behavior through observation and imitation of role models within social environments (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Teachers and school leaders in this study functioned as moral exemplars whose conduct significantly influenced students' discipline, politeness, and religious awareness. Previous studies frequently discuss teacher exemplarity conceptually, yet this research demonstrates its practical implementation within daily school culture. The findings reveal that students respond more positively to observable moral behavior than abstract theoretical instruction. This difference indicates that Islamic character formation requires authentic educational interactions supported by consistent role modeling. Therefore, exemplary conduct becomes an essential element in strengthening students' Islamic values within institutional educational settings.

Furthermore, the findings strengthen behavioristic perspectives asserting that repetitive habituation contributes significantly to behavioral transformation (Jeremiah et al., 2025; McDiarmid et al., 2019). Daily religious activities such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, collective supplication, and disciplined routines gradually shaped students' spiritual awareness and moral responsibility. Previous research often focuses on formal religious learning processes, while this study highlights the importance of cultural continuity and environmental conditioning in sustaining students' character development. The findings suggest that Islamic values become deeply internalized when repeatedly practiced within supportive educational environments. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic educational discourse by integrating behavioristic theory, social learning perspectives, and Islamic moral education concepts into a holistic cultural framework. Consequently, Islamic school culture emerges as a strategic educational medium for strengthening sustainable character formation.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that schools should prioritize cultural approaches in implementing Islamic character education programs.

Educational institutions need to create consistent religious environments supported by collective participation from school leaders, teachers, students, and institutional policies. This study confirms that effective character education cannot depend exclusively on curriculum content or formal moral instruction. Instead, students require direct experiences within educational cultures promoting discipline, empathy, responsibility, and religious commitment. The findings also imply that teachers should continuously maintain exemplary behavior because students observe and imitate their conduct in everyday interactions. Therefore, educational policymakers and school administrators should strengthen institutional culture, religious habituation programs, and collaborative moral supervision to support holistic Islamic character development among students in contemporary educational contexts.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Islamic school culture functions as a comprehensive and sustainable model for strengthening Islamic character education among students. The integration between habituation, exemplary conduct, discipline, and socio-religious interaction creates a conducive educational atmosphere supporting moral transformation holistically. The findings differ from conventional educational approaches emphasizing cognitive achievement as the primary educational objective. Instead, this research confirms that moral and spiritual development require continuous social experiences embedded within school culture. Theoretically, the study enriches Islamic educational scholarship concerning hidden curriculum and character formation. Practically, it offers contextual insights for Islamic educational institutions seeking effective strategies to strengthen students' moral awareness and religious behavior through culturally integrated educational practices within rapidly changing social and technological environments.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study indicates that Islamic character education is strengthened effectively through school culture integrating religious habituation, exemplary conduct, discipline, and socio-religious interaction within daily educational practices. The study demonstrates that students develop moral awareness, spiritual discipline, responsibility, and social empathy more successfully

through continuous cultural experiences than through theoretical instruction alone. Consequently, school culture functions as an effective hidden curriculum.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to Islamic educational scholarship by presenting school culture as a holistic model for strengthening Islamic character education. This research integrates perspectives from Islamic moral education, social learning theory, and behavioristic approaches within a contextual educational framework. The study also contributes practically by offering educational institutions applicable strategies for developing sustainable character education through culturally integrated practices and institutional consistency.

This study is limited because it focuses only on one Islamic junior high school using a qualitative case study approach, thereby limiting broader generalization of findings. In addition, the research primarily examines internal school culture without exploring family or community influences on students' character formation. Future studies are recommended to involve comparative research across educational institutions and integrate quantitative approaches to measure the effectiveness of Islamic cultural practices systematically.

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