

ISLAMIC SCHOOL CULTURE AND THE FORMATION OF STUDENTS RELIGIOUS CHARACTER: INSIGHTS FROM SMAN 2 TANGGUL

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Abstract

The rapid development of globalization has brought significant changes to students' ways of thinking and behavior, which in many cases has raised concerns about the weakening of religious values. This condition encourages schools to instill Islamic values through a living and meaningful school culture. This study aims to describe the forms of Islamic school culture, the strategies used in its implementation to foster students' religious character, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors at SMAN 2 Tanggul in the 2022/2023 academic year. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model with source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that Islamic culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is reflected in the habituation of congregational and dhuba prayers, Qur'an memorization, Islamic holy day commemorations, charitable giving, courteous behavior, and teacher role modeling. The implementation of Islamic culture is carried out through school policies, consistent habituation, and persuasive and humanistic approaches, including principal-led policy-based authority strategies, persuasive strategies through religious activities, and normative-educative strategies through teacher exemplification. The implementation is supported by the active involvement of all school members, the availability of human resources and facilities, and the presence of a school mosque, while obstacles arise from the diverse backgrounds of school members and teachers' limited capacity to address students' substantive issues, particularly in character development.

Keywords: *Islamic Culture; Religious Character; Educational Strategy; Islamic Values; Public School*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, characterized by rapid flows of information and cross-border cultural exchanges, the education sector faces increasingly complex challenges. Globalization introduces new values that are not always aligned with moral principles and religious teachings, leading to identity crises and moral degradation, particularly among adolescents. Young people represent a strategic pillar for the sustainability of a nation's future, as they function both as agents of change and as long-term investments in civilization. Adolescence is a highly critical transitional phase marked by identity exploration and emotional development, which play a central role in psychosocial growth. Therefore, ensuring the quality of adolescents' development is not merely a domestic responsibility of families but has become an urgent national agenda. The success or failure in guiding this generation will determine whether Indonesia's demographic bonus becomes a significant

strength or a future social burden.

However, empirical realities indicate increasingly alarming challenges, as reflected in the rise of juvenile delinquency, including bullying, gang violence, drug abuse, risky social behavior, and criminal acts. Juvenile delinquency extends beyond student brawls to a broader spectrum of deviant behaviors. According to data from the EMP Pusiknas of the Indonesian National Police Criminal Investigation Agency, from January 1 to February 20, 2025, hundreds of children were recorded as suspects in cases of theft, assault, group violence, drug abuse, and student altercations. Notably, some perpetrators were under the age of twelve, indicating that children are becoming involved in criminal activities at increasingly younger ages. Numerous studies suggest that these conditions are influenced by internal factors such as identity crises, weak self-control, and emotional immaturity, as well as external factors including limited family supervision, psychological trauma, peer environment influences, and the normalization of violence in children's surroundings (Pusiknas Bareskrim POLRI, 2025).

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), as an independent state institution mandated by Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, has emphasized that the protection and fulfillment of children's rights in Indonesia continue to face serious structural challenges. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023 show that the child population reached approximately 88.7 million, accounting for nearly one-third of Indonesia's total population, making the quality of child protection a decisive factor for sustainable national development. However, the 2024 National Survey on the Life Experiences of Children and Adolescents (SNPHAR) revealed that one in two children aged 13–17 has experienced at least one form of violence during their lifetime. Throughout 2024, KPAI received 2,057 complaints of child-related cases across 78 regions, with dominant issues including family and alternative care problems, sexual violence, physical and psychological abuse, bullying in educational settings, and digital-based crimes. The high proportion of victims among toddlers and adolescents indicates children's multiple vulnerabilities within family environments, educational institutions, and digital spaces, while also reflecting the continued weakness of prevention and response systems oriented toward the best interests of the child.

Furthermore, KPAI's monitoring of the clusters of Fulfillment of Children's Rights (PHA) and Special Protection for Children (PKA) highlights the complexity of child-related issues, including barriers to identity rights, access to education and basic health services, increasing economic and sexual exploitation, children's involvement in political activities, and heightened risks in underdeveloped, frontier, and conflict-affected areas. These findings

indicate that child-related problems are not merely individual in nature but are deeply rooted in structural factors such as poverty, dysfunctional parenting, low levels of digital literacy, weak inter-institutional coordination, and limited service capacity at the local level. Based on these monitoring results, KPAI recommends strengthening child protection governance through an integrated national data system, harmonization of central and regional policies, preventive approaches based on family and education, and professional, restorative law enforcement. These findings underscore that efforts to realize Indonesia's Golden Generation face a "steep path," requiring cross-sectoral commitment, evidence-based policymaking, and sustained collaboration among the state, society, and children as primary rights holders.

Observing these increasingly alarming phenomena in adolescent life has become a shared concern for various stakeholders, including schools, parents, and the surrounding community. In addition, the active roles of law enforcement institutions, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), and other relevant ad hoc bodies are equally important. Adolescence should ideally be a period in which young people grow in a healthy environment, experience joyful learning at school, receive warm attention from their parents, and enjoy social interactions appropriate to their developmental stage.

However, this ideal condition is increasingly challenged by shifts in adolescents' perspectives driven by rapid technological advancement and changing lifestyle trends. These developments have significantly influenced how young people interact, dress, communicate, behave, and socialize. The uncontrolled influx of social media content often lacking clear boundaries between what is appropriate for children and adults exposes adolescents to violent material, explicit content, offensive language, bullying-related narratives, and other non-educational content. Furthermore, the growing prevalence of online gambling, fraudulent investments, and predatory online lending schemes targeting Generation Z has emerged as a serious social problem that now affects multiple generations.

Based on data from the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) highlighting the phenomenon of *juvenile delinquency 2.0* migrating into the digital sphere, there has been a significant transformation in deviant youth behavior in the digital era. Social media no longer functions merely as a space for expression, but has become a medium for planning, legitimizing, and commodifying violence. Research findings presented in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) organized by BRIN in collaboration with ThinkTank.ID and the Community Development Directorate of the Metro Jaya Regional Police revealed that practices such as gang fights and bullying are now planned through digital platforms,

livestreamed, and even sponsored by online gambling accounts. A survey involving 408 senior high school students in the Greater Jakarta area showed that more than 90 percent of respondents perceived gang fights as a normalized practice, with peer pressure and the need for digital visibility identified as dominant factors driving youth involvement in such behaviors.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that this shift in juvenile delinquency is not merely technological in nature, but also structural and cultural. It is characterized by a declining perception of legal risk, the normalization of violence, and the weakening of family caregiving functions. Conventional forms of delinquency, such as gang fights and theft, have been redefined as recreational activities or expressions of identity in virtual spaces, and have even expanded into high-risk activities such as online prostitution and the management of online gambling by school-aged adolescents. Therefore, cross-institutional collaboration initiated by BRIN underscores the urgency of evidence-based social–digital policies that adopt humanistic, preventive, and restorative approaches to address the increasingly complex challenges of youth development occurring simultaneously in physical and virtual environments (BRIN, 2025).

Based on the conditions described above, schools function not only as educational institutions but also as protective environments that prepare students to become resilient, strong, emotionally stable, and optimistic individuals. Such an environment needs to be deliberately created, one of which is through a school climate that is safe, peaceful, educative, and rich in value internalization and positive habits. In this context, Islamic school culture serves as an important medium for fostering students' religious character. Strong religious education at school, supported by positive religious practices and the cultivation of Islamic manners and ethics, functions both as a form of moral guidance and as a protective mechanism that helps students resist various harmful influences.

Strengthening the implementation of religious education through the development of Islamic school culture has therefore become a necessity. When Islamic culture is cultivated consistently, it creates a positive learning ecosystem in which religious values and spirituality are embodied in daily religious activities, the reinforcement of ethical conduct and moral virtues (*akhlak al-karimah*), and social service initiatives. This process has direct implications for the formation of a solid religious character, which functions not only as a marker of religious identity but also as a form of mental and moral resilience that protects students from negative behaviors and destructive environmental influences. By integrating religious values into school culture, religious education is transformed from merely theoretical instruction into lived practice that guides adolescents toward becoming polite, tolerant, and

responsible individuals.

Education plays a strategic role in shaping individuals who are morally grounded, faithful, and socially responsible. As stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System of Indonesia, education is a deliberate and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process that enable students to actively develop their potential, possess spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed for personal and societal life. Therefore, educational success should not be measured solely by academic intellectual achievement, but must also emphasize the development of attitudes, mental resilience, self-regulation, moral values, spirituality, and social awareness.

One approach considered effective in instilling religious values in schools is the development of Islamic school culture. Islamic school culture encompasses several dimensions. First, it is rooted in values derived from Islamic teachings, such as monotheism (*tauhid*), leadership, and justice (M. Yasir et al., 2022). Second, Islamic culture is manifested in concrete practices, including Islamic dress codes, collective religious practices such as congregational prayers and Qur'an recitation, ethical communication reflected in smiling and greeting others, as well as the consistent emphasis on moral behavior and noble character (Abdurrahman R. Mala et al., 2015).

Islamic school culture refers to a way of life grounded in Islamic law (*shari'a*) and constitutes an essential foundation for implementing value-based education in schools, particularly those with an Islamic orientation. This culture is reflected in various attitudes and behaviors, such as *tabassum* (smiling), respect for time, love of knowledge, *mujahadah* (hard and optimal effort), *tanafus* (healthy competition), and *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) (Didin Hafidhuddin & Hendri Tanjung, 2003).

Developing an Islamic school culture is especially important in public (non-Islamic) schools, which are not formally based on religious orientations. Public schools often face the challenge of maintaining a balance between universal values and religious values in students' daily lives. Without systematic efforts to cultivate such a culture, education in public schools risks losing its fundamental spiritual dimension. Therefore, research on the implementation of Islamic school culture in public schools is both relevant and strategic, as it offers insights into how religious values can be integrated into school life in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

SMAN 2 Tanggul in Jember Regency represents an interesting example of a public

secondary school that has successfully integrated Islamic values into everyday school life. Although it is a public school and not formally labeled as an Islamic institution, the school implements various religious programs, including Qur'an recitation before lessons, congregational dhuha and zuhr prayers, tahfidz activities, hadrah, and the commemoration of Islamic holy days. The principal, teachers, and educational staff play an active role in creating a disciplined and sustainable religious atmosphere. These practices demonstrate that Islamic school culture can develop organically even in public schools when it is managed through appropriate strategies.

Previous studies have shown that Islamic school culture in schools or Islamic educational institutions plays a significant role in introducing and instilling Islamic values among students. Through the consistent implementation of Islamic culture, students' development is continuously guided by Islamic teachings, thereby fostering *akhlak al-karimah* (noble character). Furthermore, Islamic school culture helps transform religious values into enduring traditions that are preserved, practiced, and maintained within educational institutions (Arian Fitry, 2022).

The implementation of Islamic school culture through habituation practices such as smiling, greeting, courteous communication, discipline enforcement, Islamic dress codes, regulation of male–female interactions in accordance with Islamic ethics, and the strengthening of social bonds through shared meals between teachers and students has a direct impact on the creation of a religious, inclusive, and character-oriented educational climate. These practices function not merely as symbolic representations of Islamic values, but also as pedagogical instruments that foster emotional closeness, mutual respect, and exemplary conduct within teacher–student relationships.

The arrangement of physical spaces and interaction patterns that remain open yet principled creates a balance between warmth and educational authority, which contributes to increased student motivation, discipline, and internalization of moral values. Consequently, the implementation of Islamic school culture plays a significant role in strengthening holistic character development and serves as a strategic foundation for teachers in continuously evaluating students' academic, social, and spiritual growth (Eni, M. J., & Rahman, A., 2023).

The success of Islamic school culture is strongly influenced by the leadership role of the principal, which serves as a key determinant in sustaining and institutionalizing school culture. Through effective leadership strategies, principals, teachers, vice principals, and all school stakeholders collaboratively contribute to the development and strengthening of Islamic culture within the school environment (Arian Fitry, 2022; Salam, Wahidmurni, & Tharaba, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic school culture, a significant research gap remains in the context of non-Islamic public schools that implement Islamic cultural values as a strategy for fostering students' religious character. Most existing studies predominantly focus on Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas or pesantren, while empirical investigations in public schools are still limited and underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the strategies used to implement Islamic school culture at SMA Negeri 2 Tanggul, as well as identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the enrichment of school culture management studies within the framework of Islamic education. Practically, the findings are expected to offer a contextual model for developing Islamic school culture in public schools as a means of strengthening students' religious character and reinforcing the national education system.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Islamic school culture is an integral component of the Islamic education system that functions as a medium for shaping students' character to become morally upright, faithful, and devoted to Allah SWT. In the educational context, Islamic school culture is not merely understood as ritual religious activities, but rather as a comprehensive value system that permeates all behaviors, social interactions, and institutional life within the school environment. Islamic values serve as moral and spiritual foundations that guide the conduct of all school members in both academic and social activities. Thus, Islamic school culture constitutes a fundamental pillar in creating a religious, harmonious, and character-based learning environment aligned with the objectives of national education and Islamic education, which aim to develop *insan kamil*—individuals who are intellectually competent and morally virtuous (Mala, 2015; Mujib, 2017).

Abdurrahman defines Islamic school culture as Islamic values that function as the basic rules governing school activities, including Islamic dress codes, congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and the cultivation of ethical Islamic communication patterns (Abdurrahman R. Mala et al., 2015). This perspective is reinforced by Habib Naufal Ridho et al., who found that school culture can effectively internalize Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and ethical interaction among students (Habib Naufal Ridho et al., 2024).

Tracing the conceptual roots of *culture*, the term originates from the word *budhi*, meaning intellect or reason, which in anthropological discourse is understood as a system of

values, norms, and habitual practices that characterize a particular social group (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). From an Islamic perspective, culture cannot be separated from religious values, as all human activities are ideally grounded in Islamic teachings based on *tawhid*, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Islamic culture thus reflects the values, norms, traditions, and creative expressions of Muslim communities in everyday life that are aligned with Islamic principles. Fundamentally, it is rooted in *tawhid*, integrates spiritual and social values, is universal and dynamic in nature, and aims to build civilization oriented toward faith and noble character (Miftahuljannah & Daulay, 2025).

Islamic school culture is essentially centered on the internalization and practice of core Islamic values—such as piety, honesty, simplicity, and compassion—as guiding principles for social interaction. As articulated by Abdul Wahid et al. (2018), Islamic teachings provide normative values that emphasize justice, integrity, and mutual respect. Abdurrahman R. Mala (2015) further demonstrates their practical manifestations in educational settings, including the implementation of Islamic dress codes, congregational prayers, and compassionate communication practices. Therefore, Islamic school culture can be defined as a set of Islamic religious values that are collectively embraced and serve as guiding principles for the attitudes, behaviors, and traditions of all school members. The foundational basis of Islamic school culture lies in Islamic values that direct and shape social interactions within the school environment, which can be systematically integrated into the curriculum, instructional practices, religious rituals, and routine habituation activities.

As emphasized by Supardi (2015), these values highlight spiritual and moral dimensions that guide students, teachers, and school staff to live in accordance with Islamic principles that are tolerant, inclusive, and socially responsible. Furthermore, Ngainun Naim (2012) asserts that Islamic school culture is manifested through daily religious rituals, social values, and symbolic practices that become an integral part of educational traditions. Therefore, school principals and teachers serve as key agents in managing and sustaining Islamic school culture through exemplary leadership and the creation of a conducive learning environment (Nurhadi, 2017).

Islamic school culture is grounded in strong philosophical and normative foundations within Islamic teachings. Philosophically, the principle of *tawhid* serves as the basis for all human behavior and life systems, while normatively, these values are derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of building harmonious and respectful social relationships, as articulated in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13), which calls upon humanity to recognize and appreciate diversity. In addition, the significance of education and the pursuit of knowledge is underscored in Surah Al-'Alaq (96:1–5), which commands human

beings to read and seek knowledge as an act of devotion to Allah SWT. These foundations demonstrate that Islamic school culture functions as a medium for internalizing Islamic values rooted in divine revelation and applied within social and educational life.

In practice, Islamic school culture is manifested through various forms of activities encompassing ritual, social, symbolic, and institutional dimensions. The ritual dimension is reflected in practices such as congregational prayers, collective dhikr, and Qur'anic recitation, which become routine activities for the school community. The social dimension appears in daily interactions characterized by politeness, mutual respect, and the cultivation of *ukhuwah* through habits such as smiling, greeting, and courteous communication. Meanwhile, the symbolic dimension is evident in the implementation of Islamic dress codes, the arrangement of religiously nuanced school spaces, and the provision of adequate worship facilities within the school environment. The institutional dimension is reflected in the school's vision and mission grounded in Islamic values, Islamic-oriented leadership, and school policies that support religious habituation (Mala, 2015).

From the perspective of organizational theory, Schein (2010) explains that organizational culture consists of shared basic assumptions learned by members as they solve problems of adaptation and integration. Accordingly, Islamic school culture can be understood as a system of values, symbols, and behaviors that are collectively internalized to shape the identity of an Islamic-oriented school.

The development of Islamic school culture may be implemented through three primary approaches: structural, cultural, and participatory. The structural approach is realized through school leadership policies, the formulation of Islamic-based vision and mission statements, and systematically planned and sustainable religious programs. The cultural approach emphasizes the internalization of Islamic values in daily school life, teacher role modeling, and socio-religious activities that foster students' spiritual awareness. The participatory approach involves all school stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the wider community, in cultivating a harmonious and inclusive religious culture (Daulay, 2014; Mujib, 2017). The synergy of these three approaches ensures that Islamic school culture functions not merely as a formal program but becomes deeply embedded in the behaviors and traditions of the school community.

Religious Character

According to Agus Wibowo, religious character refers to attitudes and behaviors that demonstrate obedience in practicing one's religious teachings, tolerance toward the religious practices of others, and the ability to live harmoniously within a pluralistic society (Wibowo, 118 | FAJAR Jurnal Pendidikan Islam

2012). Religious character constitutes an integral dimension of Islamic education, encompassing the strengthening of individuals' spiritual, moral, and social capacities.

Thomas Lickona (1991), a leading figure in character education, emphasizes that character is a synthesis of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which together shape an individual's personality. Effective character education, therefore, does not merely focus on cognitive understanding of moral values but also prioritizes emotional engagement and the habituation of ethical behavior in everyday life, enabling moral values to be deeply internalized and reflected in consistent attitudes and actions.

One of the most strategic mediums for character formation is Islamic religious education, which emphasizes the reinforcement of faith (*tawḥīd*), worship practices, noble character (*akhlāq al-karīmah*), and social responsibility. Islamic teachings instruct believers to uphold goodness and avoid wrongdoing as a manifestation of devotion to God through obedience to divine commands and adherence to religious prohibitions. Moreover, Islam promotes the cultivation of honesty, patience, discipline, and tolerance in social life—not only toward fellow adherents but also toward those of different religious backgrounds.

To safeguard public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), Islamic education upholds the fundamental principles of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), which encompass five essential protections: preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), safeguarding intellect (*ḥifẓ al-‘aql*), preservation of lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and protection of property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). These principles provide a comprehensive ethical framework for nurturing religious character that is spiritually grounded, socially responsible, and aligned with human dignity.

In the concept of *tarbiyah* or Islamic education, strong emphasis is placed on the importance of *taẓkiyah al-nafs* (spiritual purification) and *ta’dib* (the cultivation of proper conduct and ethics) as the foundational elements in the formation of religious character (Muslich, 2013). Character education in Islam is not merely concerned with teaching religious rituals; rather, it aims to internalize comprehensive moral values so that students develop piety (*taqwa*) and noble character (*akhlāq al-karimah*) in their social lives. This represents the essence of character education, particularly religious character, which must be systematically nurtured in schools. Accordingly, Asmaun Sahlan (2017) emphasizes that religious character education should be contextual and adaptive to social dynamics and multicultural realities, enabling students to face global challenges with strong religious values and a tolerant attitude.

The Indonesian government positions religious character as one of the main pillars in

student character development through various national education policies. Based on Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, religiosity is identified as a priority character dimension that fosters spiritual awareness and attitudes in practicing religious values in a moderate and inclusive manner. This policy underscores that religious education should not be confined to religious subjects alone but must be integrated into all aspects of learning and school culture.

Furthermore, the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 20 of 2018 on Graduate Competency Standards highlights character formation as a crucial educational objective that requires greater attention in schools. Students are not only expected to achieve academic competence and intellectual mastery but also to develop strong character as a fundamental foundation. One of the most prominent character dimensions emphasized is religious character, which encompasses faith, piety, and noble conduct in accordance with each student's religious teachings. Schools are therefore encouraged to institutionalize these values through various policies, particularly by strengthening religious character across school activities. As reinforced by Fauziah (2021), this policy framework requires schools to implement comprehensive character education programs that integrate the development of religious school culture, habituation of worship practices, and the active role of educators as moral role models.

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The Indonesian government has positioned religious character as one of the core pillars in the development of students' character through various national education policies. Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education identifies religiosity as a priority dimension, fostering spiritual awareness and attitudes in practicing religious values in a moderate and inclusive manner. This policy affirms that religious education should not be confined to religious subjects alone, but must be integrated across

all learning processes and school culture.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 20 of 2018 on Graduate Competency Standards emphasizes character formation as a central educational objective that requires greater attention in schools. Students are expected not only to achieve academic competence and cognitive excellence but also to develop character as a fundamental foundation. Among the most prominent character dimensions is religious character, encompassing piety, faith, and noble moral conduct in accordance with each student's religious teachings. Schools are therefore encouraged to institutionalize this character through various policies, particularly by strengthening religious values in school activities. As reinforced by Fauziah (2021), this policy demands that schools implement comprehensive character education programs that involve the reinforcement of religious school culture, habituation of worship practices, and the active role of educators as moral role models.

Strategies for Developing Islamic School Culture and Students' Religious Character in Public Schools

The formation of students' religious character requires a comprehensive and integrated approach so that the educational process genuinely reaches the core dimensions of character development and is continuously reinforced through engagement in positive religious and cultural activities, such as Islamic school culture. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that extracurricular religious activities serve as strategic platforms for fostering students' religious character. Programs such as regular religious discussions, socio-religious activities, and structured spiritual development initiatives have been shown to significantly enhance students' spiritual awareness and social responsibility (Ega Nasrudin et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the cultivation of students' religious character must be carried out in an integrated manner through curricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular activities to ensure that religious values do not remain confined to the cognitive domain but are internalized and manifested in students' attitudes and behaviors. Within the curricular domain, habitual practices such as exchanging greetings and reciting prayers before and after learning activities contribute to the development of sustained religious awareness. Through these practices, students are encouraged not only to understand religious teachings conceptually but also to internalize them as guiding principles that shape moral conduct and everyday behavior in accordance with their religious beliefs (Narimo & Sanusi, 2020).

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conduct) as the foundational elements of religious character development (Muslich, 2013). Character education in Islam is not merely concerned with teaching religious rituals; rather, it aims to instill comprehensive noble values so that students become pious individuals (*muttaqin*) who embody *akhlak al-karimah* in their social lives. This reflects the true essence of character education, particularly religious character, which must be cultivated within schools. Therefore, Asmaun Sahlan (2017) argues that religious character education should be contextual and adaptive to social dynamics and multicultural realities, enabling students to face global challenges while maintaining strong religious values and a tolerant attitude.

The Indonesian government has positioned religious character as one of the primary pillars in the development of students' character through various national education policies. Based on Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, one of the prioritized character dimensions is religiosity, which fosters spiritual awareness and attitudes in practicing religious values in a moderate and inclusive manner. This policy emphasizes that religious education should not be confined solely to religious subjects but must be integrated across all aspects of learning and school culture.

Furthermore, Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 20 of 2018 concerning Graduate Competency Standards underscores that character formation is a crucial educational direction that requires greater attention in schools. Students are not only encouraged to develop academic competencies and cognitive abilities but also character as their primary foundation. One of the most prominent character dimensions is religious character, which encompasses piety, faith, and noble moral conduct in accordance with each student's religious teachings. Schools are expected to institutionalize these values through various policies, particularly by strengthening religious character across diverse school activities. As reinforced by Fauziah (2021), this policy requires schools to implement comprehensive character education programs that involve strengthening religious school culture, habituation of worship practices, and the active role of educators as moral role models.

Role modeling and habituation strategies are widely recognized as effective approaches in shaping students' religious character, playing a crucial role in nurturing young generations who possess noble character, discipline, and strong spiritual awareness. The roles of teachers and school principals are particularly vital as moral exemplars whose consistent attitudes and behaviors significantly influence the development of students' religious character (Shodiq & Kuswanto, 2024).

Furthermore, synergy between schools, families, and the wider community is

indispensable to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of religious character education. Support from external social environments, such as families and community institutions, reinforces the values instilled at school and contributes to the creation of an inclusive and holistic character education ecosystem. Collaboration among parents, schools, and communities plays a strategic role in shaping children into morally upright and ethical individuals. Parents serve as primary agents through guidance and exemplary conduct, schools provide a supportive educational environment through curricula and learning activities, and communities contribute through social values and everyday interactions (Saputri, Rafifah, & Chanifudin, 2024).

Despite its importance, the implementation of character education often encounters challenges, including differences in individual values and cultural backgrounds, limitations in communication and resources, as well as rapid social and technological changes. Nevertheless, these challenges can be effectively addressed through synergistic cooperation, open communication, and effective coordination among all stakeholders. Through collective efforts, character education is expected to shape students into individuals with strong character, noble morality, and the capacity to contribute positively to society.

Through the integrated application of these strategies, the development of Islamic school culture and students' religious character in public schools can be implemented effectively and sustainably, producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also possess high-quality religious character and moral integrity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design grounded in the interpretive paradigm of educational research. Rather than seeking quantitative generalization, the study aimed to understand and describe the lived experiences of implementing Islamic school culture within a public secondary school, namely SMA Negeri 2 Tanggul, Jember Regency, Indonesia. The research was conducted during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, focusing on the processes, key actors, and contextual dynamics that shape students' religious character through school culture.

The primary research participants included the school principal, the vice principal for student affairs, Islamic education teachers, homeroom teachers, and students who were actively involved in religious activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis of school policies, activity schedules, and institutional records related to the implementation of Islamic school culture.

The research instruments consisted of interview and observation guidelines developed in accordance with the study's focus on school culture management and religious

character formation. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which involves three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the study employed source and method triangulation, as well as member checking with key informants. This methodological design enabled a holistic and contextual understanding of how Islamic values are internalized and institutionalized within a public school setting, while also providing insights into the managerial, pedagogical, and sociocultural dimensions that support the development of a religious school ethos.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic School Culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul

Based on the research findings, Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is understood as a set of Islamic values, norms, habits, and symbols that are lived and practiced in the daily life of the school community. This culture is not limited merely to ritual religious activities but is also reflected in the habituation of moral conduct, patterns of interaction, and socio-religious activities grounded in Islamic teachings. In this regard, Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul functions as a comprehensive value system that guides the behavior of students and all members of the school community. This understanding aligns with the perspective of Abdurrahman R. Mala (2015), who emphasizes that Islamic school culture consists of Islamic values that permeate attitudes, behaviors, and the overall organization of school life.

Interestingly, although SMAN 2 Tanggul is a public secondary school widely recognized for its culture of quality and academic achievement, the strengthening of religiosity is positioned as a fundamental foundation for students' character development. This finding demonstrates that the school does not separate academic excellence from moral and spiritual reinforcement; rather, both are viewed as an integrated and inseparable whole. This supports Supardi's (2015) assertion that religious values in schools serve as moral and spiritual foundations that sustain the overall quality of education.

Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is manifested through various consistently implemented practices, including congregational prayers, Dhuha prayers, Qur'an memorization and recitation, commemoration of Islamic holy days (PHBI), infaq activities, and the habituation of polite behavior and noble character. The consistency of these practices indicates that the internalization of Islamic values is achieved through sustained and

continuous habituation. In the context of character education, Lickona (1991) asserts that moral values are more effectively internalized when they are repeatedly practiced within a consistent environment. In other words, Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is not merely taught but actively lived in students' daily experiences.

The formation of this Islamic school culture did not occur instantaneously but evolved through systematic planning and long-term commitment. The leadership of the principal plays a crucial role in positioning religious values as the foundation of students' character development. This is reflected in the school's vision: *"To realize a generation that is characterized, high-achieving, and rooted in a culture of quality."* This vision demonstrates an educational orientation that balances character formation with academic achievement. From an organizational culture perspective, Schein (2010) explains that organizational values and beliefs are shaped and reinforced through leadership and subsequently institutionalized through vision and policy. The findings at SMAN 2 Tanggul confirm that this vision genuinely functions as a shared direction in developing the school's culture.

The values embedded in the school's vision—such as religiosity, integrity, independence, mutual cooperation, and quality orientation—are closely aligned with Islamic values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), responsibility, and a work ethic based on *ihsan* (excellence). Consequently, the school vision serves not merely as a slogan but as a value framework that guides students' behavior in their daily lives, both within and beyond the school environment.

This commitment is further strengthened through school policies that support religious practices and the habituation of Islamic values. The scheduling of congregational and *Dhuha* prayers, Qur'anic memorization programs, PHBI activities, *infaq*, and moral habituation ensures structure and continuity in the implementation of Islamic culture. This indicates that Islamic school culture has been institutionally embedded in a structural manner. Mujib (2017) affirms that religious culture in schools can function effectively when supported by consistent institutional policies and exemplary conduct from educators.

In daily practice, teachers and educational staff play a crucial role as role models in embodying Islamic values. Polite attitudes, ethical modes of interaction, and discipline in performing religious practices serve as concrete examples that are observed and emulated by students. This finding is consistent with Nurhadi's (2017) view that role modeling is a key element in managing school culture, as values are more effectively internalized when they are demonstrated through real behavior rather than merely conveyed verbally.

Furthermore, socio-religious activities such as Islamic holiday commemorations (PHBI) and *infaq* programs contribute significantly to strengthening the social dimension of

Islamic school culture. These activities are not merely ceremonial; rather, they function as meaningful social learning experiences that foster empathy, social concern, and a sense of togetherness among students. Through such activities, students learn that Islamic values encompass not only a vertical relationship with God but also a horizontal relationship with fellow human beings.

Overall, Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul has been formed through a continuous and systematic process, beginning with strong leadership commitment, reinforced by the school's vision and policies, realized through religious practices and moral habituation, and enriched by socio-religious activities. Islamic values, norms, practices, and symbols—such as discipline in congregational prayers, Qur'anic memorization programs (tahfiz), infaq culture, teachers' role modeling, and an Islamic school climate—have become an integral part of the school's identity. From Schein's (2010) organizational culture perspective, this condition indicates the establishment of a living and collectively internalized religious organizational culture.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is not merely symbolic or ritualistic in nature, but serves as a concrete foundation for the formation of students' religious character. Islamic culture functions as an effective medium for character education, as proposed by Lickona (1991), while simultaneously supporting the development of a culture of quality and academic excellence within the school.

Efforts to Shape Students' Religious Character Through Islamic Culture

Based on the research findings, the formation of students' religious character at SMAN 2 Tanggul is carried out through the strengthening of Islamic culture, which is designed and implemented systematically. Islamic culture is not understood merely as religious ritual activities but as a character development process that touches upon students' spiritual, moral, and social aspects. This understanding aligns with Agus Wibowo (2012), who defines religious character as the attitude of obedience to religious teachings, tolerance towards diverse religious practices, and the ability to live harmoniously in social life.

One of the main findings of this study is the strong commitment of the school principal in driving Islamic culture as a strategy for shaping students' religious character. The principal does not only act as an administrator but also as a manager, supervisor, and primary driver of school culture change. This commitment is evident in the principal's willingness to allocate time, attention, and responsibility to ensure that Islamic culture programs are implemented consistently. From an educational management perspective, leadership commitment is a decisive factor in the successful implementation of school programs. This

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is in line with Asmaun Sahlan (2017), who asserts that the principal holds a strategic role in building a religious culture through the power of authority, exemplary behavior, and continuous guidance.

This commitment is then realized in school policies that support the implementation of Islamic culture. Based on the findings, the principal establishes various structured religious programs, such as the 7S culture, morning Qur'an recitation, dhuha prayer, congregational prayers, Friday prayer, Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), PHBI (Islamic holidays celebration), hadrah, and the formation of religious student organizations or mosque youth groups (REMAS). These policies serve as operational guidelines binding all members of the school community. Within the framework of character education theory, such policies reflect efforts to institutionalize religious values so that they are not incidental. Thomas Lickona (1991) emphasizes that effective character education must include the moral action dimension, which provides space and systems for students to practice moral values in daily life.

Another prominent strategy highlighted in the research findings is habituation. Islamic culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is developed through daily routines such as reciting prayers, Qur'an reading sessions (tadarus), the implementation of the 7S culture, and congregational prayers. This habituation transforms religious activities from being perceived as burdensome into a need and a positive habit for students. These findings reinforce Lickona's (1991) theory regarding the importance of habituation as a bridge between moral knowledge and moral action. Religious values cannot merely be understood cognitively; they must be practiced repeatedly to be internalized into students' character.

In addition to habituation, the strategy of role modeling is an essential element in implementing Islamic culture. The findings indicate that the principal, teachers, and educational staff actively participate in religious activities and strive to serve as *uswatun hasanah* (good role models) for students. This role modeling facilitates students in imitating and following the Islamic cultural practices implemented in the school. These findings align with Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1977), which emphasizes that individual behavior is largely shaped through observation and imitation of models in their environment. Thus, the actions of educators at school directly serve as a reflection for shaping students' religious character.

Another strategy identified is the use of a persuasive and humanistic approach in student development. The principal and teachers do not prioritize punishment when addressing student misconduct but instead employ a dialogical and personal guidance approach. This method fosters closer relationships between educators and students, making it easier for students to improve themselves and recognize their mistakes. This strategy aligns

with the concept of normative re-educative strategy proposed by Asmaun Sahlan (2017), which involves cultivating religious culture through encouragement, role modeling, and moral reasoning without coercion.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Islamic School Culture

From the supporting perspective, the research findings indicate that the implementation of Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul is strengthened by the availability of adequate human resources and supporting facilities. The active involvement of the principal, Islamic education teachers, subject teachers, administrative staff, and students constitutes a major driving force in fostering a religious school culture. The presence of a school mosque as the center of religious activities further reinforces the internalization of Islamic values through congregational prayers, Islamic holiday commemorations, and regular religious studies.

However, this study also identifies several inhibiting factors in the implementation of Islamic school culture. These challenges include the uneven capacity of teachers in character education, the diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of school members, and the school's status as a public, non-Islamic-based institution. These conditions contribute to varying levels of student discipline in participating in religious activities and limited enthusiasm toward the habituation of Islamic cultural practices. The findings suggest that religious character formation cannot rely solely on programs and facilities but is highly dependent on the quality of educative interactions between teachers and students.

Analytically, these findings emphasize that the development of Islamic school culture in public schools must adopt an inclusive and persuasive approach. Within a pluralistic context, Islamic culture should be framed through universal values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social care to ensure broader acceptance among all school members. This approach aligns with national policies on Strengthening Character Education (Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017) and Graduate Competency Standards (Ministerial Regulation No. 20 of 2018), which position religious character as a foundational element in shaping students who are faithful, pious, morally upright, and capable of practicing religious values in a moderate and inclusive manner.

CONCLUSION

Islamic school culture at SMAN 2 Tanggul has developed through a consistent process marked by the strong leadership of the principal, supported by a clear vision, institutional policies, and the exemplary conduct of teachers and educational staff. Despite challenges arising from the diverse backgrounds of school members and varying capacities in character

development, the application of persuasive and humanistic approaches has enabled Islamic values to be accepted inclusively. Overall, this Islamic school culture has been proven to make a tangible contribution to shaping students who are religious, morally grounded, moderate, and capable of living harmoniously within a pluralistic school environment.

Schools and educational policymakers are encouraged to continuously strengthen and adapt Islamic school culture in accordance with the diversity of school communities, particularly in public schools, while giving greater attention to reinforcing teachers' roles in character education. For future researchers, this study may serve as a reference point for examining similar practices in other schools or for employing alternative research approaches to enrich the discourse on Islamic school culture and religious character formation.

The researchers express their sincere gratitude to all parties who have contributed to and supported this research process. Special appreciation is extended to the principal, teachers, educational staff, and students of SMAN 2 Tanggul for their openness and cooperation. The support and insights provided by various stakeholders have been invaluable in the completion and refinement of this study.

PLAGIARISM CHECK

All submitted manuscripts will undergo a plagiarism screening process, with a maximum acceptable similarity index of 25%, using a plagiarism detection application. Subsequently, the manuscripts will be processed in accordance with the editorial and managerial mechanisms of the Open Journal System (OJS) of the Faculty of Tarbiyah, Universitas Islam Jember.

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