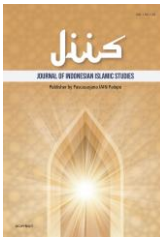
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Strengthening School Culture through Islamic Values in Student Character Formation: A Case Study at a Public Elementary School in Balikpapan

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the strengthening of school culture through the internalization of Islamic values in student character formation at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota. This qualitative study employed a case study design involving the principal and vice principal as purposively selected informants. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings indicate that school culture was strengthened through teacher role modeling, routine habituation, environmental conditioning, curriculum integration, and continuous evaluation. Islamic values were reflected in religious habituation and prayer practices, and were integrated with character values such as discipline, responsibility, politeness, independence, cooperation, and respect. The findings also indicate observable changes in students' discipline, responsibility, independence, self-confidence, and social behavior. The study concludes that school culture in a public elementary school can provide a context for internalizing Islamic and moral values through systematic habituation, role modeling, and collaboration among school stakeholders.

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Introduction

Educational management is a process of organizing educational resources through planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling to achieve educational goals effectively and efficiently. This process extends beyond administrative functions to include curriculum development, teacher quality enhancement, and the development of school culture as an essential component of students' holistic development (Jannah et al., 2025). Hapsari (2023) further explains that educational management seeks to optimize educational components in accordance with institutional vision and objectives. Within this framework, school culture becomes an important medium through which educational values are translated into students' daily experiences and behaviors.

In primary education, character formation is a fundamental objective of schooling. Schools are not only institutions for transmitting knowledge but also social environments in which students learn and internalize values through habituation, interaction, and role modeling. These values include religiosity, discipline, responsibility, integrity, cooperation, and respect (Udin et al., 2021). From the perspective of Islamic education, character formation is closely related to the internalization of moral and religious values. Cahyadi and Della (2021), for example, identified religious, nationalist, independent, mutual cooperation, and integrity values as important character dimensions in Islamic education. Their findings also emphasize the role of Islamic Religious Education in supporting character formation through the integration of values into educational processes. Thus, school culture can serve as a practical context for cultivating Islamic values through everyday educational practices.

School culture is reflected in habitual practices, role modeling, norms, and positive interactions among members of the school community. Rosad (2019) explains that the implementation of character education through school management requires the integration of character values into the broader school environment. In this context, Islamic values can be manifested not only through explicitly religious activities but also through daily behaviors such as politeness, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, respect for others, and care for the environment. Therefore, strengthening school culture provides an opportunity to connect religious values with students' actual behavior in their daily lives. This perspective is consistent with Handayani et al. (2023), who found that the formation of children's Islamic character is influenced by the environment, religious understanding, and patterns of habituation within the family. Although their study focuses on Muslim families, the finding highlights the broader importance of a consistent environment in supporting the internalization of religious and moral values.

Widyaningrum et al. (2022) emphasize that a well-designed and systematically structured learning environment can foster students' motivation and positive behavior. One of the character traits requiring continuous reinforcement is discipline. Discipline is not merely obedience to rules but also involves students' ability to regulate themselves and take responsibility for their actions. From an Islamic educational perspective, such behavioral formation is relevant to the cultivation of moral conduct and responsible behavior. Consequently, character development requires consistent and sustainable habituation within the school culture. In this regard, Putri and Juliana (2026) demonstrated that religious habituation programs in a public school, including routine religious activities

and continuous supervision, can become part of the process of fostering students' Islamic character.

Educational strategy serves as a planned effort to achieve institutional goals effectively. Siregar and Hasibuan (2025) state that strategic management assists schools in formulating objectives, making decisions, and systematically managing programs. In this regard, the principal plays a central leadership role in ensuring that school culture is consistently implemented (Ali & Hasanah, 2021). The strengthening of school culture therefore requires not only administrative planning but also the active involvement of teachers and other school members in translating educational and moral values into daily practices.

Previous studies have indicated that school culture contributes to students' character development. Priasti and Suyatno (2021) found that habituation-based school culture supports the internalization of character values. Indrianingrum et al. (2024) demonstrated that school culture can foster religiosity, integrity, and cooperation, while Norianda (2021) highlighted its role in developing discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. Cahyadi and Della (2021) further showed that character values in Islamic education encompass religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity, demonstrating the close relationship between religious education and broader character development. These findings demonstrate the importance of habituation and school culture in character formation. However, further attention is needed to understand how such practices can function as a context for the internalization of Islamic values, particularly in public schools where religious and character development takes place within a broader educational environment.

The implementation of character education also faces various challenges. The rapid development of technology and social media has influenced students' behavior, including politeness and discipline (Santosa & Zuhaery, 2021). In addition, school-based programs for strengthening school culture are not always optimally implemented because of inconsistencies in habituation practices and overly administrative program execution (Musnaeni et al., 2022). Such conditions indicate that character formation requires a structured, systematic, and integrated strategy that connects school policies, teacher role modeling, habituation, and the values practiced by students in their daily lives. Handayani et al. (2023) similarly identified environmental conditions and differences in religious understanding as factors that can influence the formation of children's Islamic character, indicating the importance of a supportive and consistent environment beyond formal instruction.

Moreover, existing studies have tended to examine the relationship between school culture and student character, while relatively limited attention has been given to how school culture strengthening strategies are designed, implemented, and evaluated as part of educational management while simultaneously providing a context for the internalization of Islamic values. Previous research by Putri and Juliana (2026) provides evidence that Islamic character development can also be pursued in public school settings through structured religious habituation and continuous reinforcement. However, their study focuses on teacher–parent collaboration in junior high school, whereas the present study focuses on the broader strategy of strengthening school culture and its implementation in student character formation at the elementary school level. School culture does not

emerge spontaneously but is developed through strategic processes involving leadership, teacher engagement, continuous habituation, and the creation of a supportive environment.

This issue becomes increasingly relevant in rapidly changing urban societies. Schools are expected to develop learning environments that are adaptive to contemporary developments while maintaining students' moral and religious orientation. In this context, SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota provides a relevant setting for examining how school culture is strengthened through structured programs and habituation activities, including religious practices, teacher role modeling, and the cultivation of positive behavior. Although the school is a public elementary school, its school culture provides a context in which religious and moral values can be practiced alongside other character values. This is consistent with the findings of Putri and Juliana (2026), which demonstrate that religious habituation and Islamic character development can be implemented within a public school context.

Based on this background, this study examines how school culture is strengthened through the internalization of Islamic values in student character formation at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota. The study focuses on the strategies employed by the school, the implementation of these strategies in students' daily activities, the roles of school members, and the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the sustainability of school culture. By examining these processes, the study contributes to the discussion of Islamic values and character formation within the context of public elementary education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the strategies for strengthening school culture through the internalization of Islamic values in student character formation at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the practices, experiences, and processes occurring naturally within the school environment. The case study design was used to provide a comprehensive examination of school culture strengthening strategies within a specific institutional and social context (Sulistyo, 2023).

Qualitative research emphasizes meaning-making, interpretation, and naturalistic description of social phenomena, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument in data collection (Sugiyono, 2013). The case study method allows for an intensive and holistic examination of school culture strengthening strategies within a particular setting, namely SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota (Sulistyo, 2023). In this study, particular attention was given to how religious and moral values, including religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, cooperation, and respect, were reflected in school culture practices and students' daily activities.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota in 2026. The site was selected purposively based on its relevance to the research focus, namely the strengthening of school culture and character formation through structured habituation and religious and moral practices. Data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observations, while secondary data were collected from school documents related to school culture programs, religious activities, habituation practices, and character development initiatives (Arikunto, 2006).

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and knowledge of the research focus (Sugiyono, 2013). The informants in this study included the principal and vice principal.

Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain in-depth information regarding school culture strengthening strategies, the implementation of character and religious values, the roles of school members, and the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting the implementation of these practices (Sugiyono, 2013). Observation was conducted to capture factual data regarding the implementation of school culture in students' daily activities, including habituation, religious practices, interaction patterns, discipline, and other character-related behaviors (Creswell, 2016). Documentation was used to complement the data through official school records such as programs, regulations, activity archives, and other documents related to school culture and character development. The combination of these techniques enabled comprehensive data collection and supported the triangulation process (Abdussamad, 2021).

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the principal and vice principal, while technique triangulation involved cross-checking data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. This process was conducted to identify consistencies and differences in the information concerning the implementation of school culture, the internalization of religious and moral values, and student character development (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing information relevant to the research focus, including strategies for strengthening school culture, the internalization of Islamic values, character development practices, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Data were then displayed in descriptive and thematic forms to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn and verified continuously throughout the research process to ensure systematic and credible interpretation of the findings (Miles & Huberman in Sugiyono, 2013).

Results

Meaning of School Culture as the Foundation of Student Character Formation

Based on the interview findings, both the principal and vice principal shared a similar understanding that school culture serves as the fundamental foundation for student character formation at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota. School culture is not merely defined as written rules or formal regulations, but as a system of habits, traditions, and a positive school climate embedded in daily school life. One informant stated:

"*School culture is the core foundation of all school activities, where character cannot be formed through theory alone but must be built through a positive environment*."

Similarly, another informant explained:

"*School culture is the basic foundation in educating children to become better individuals in the future*."

These statements indicate that school culture is perceived as a continuous and lived process that shapes students' behavior through everyday experiences in the school environment. In this sense, character formation is understood as an ongoing habituation process rather than a short-term instructional outcome. This finding highlights that school culture functions as a medium for internalizing character values through consistent social interaction within the school context.

Value Orientation in School Culture

Based on the interview results, the character values developed in SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota are aligned with the school's vision and mission, including religiosity, integrity, independence, cooperation, nationalism, and discipline. These values are consistently integrated into daily school activities and routines. One informant stated:

"*The main character values we target include religiosity, integrity, independence, cooperation, and nationalism, which are implemented in daily activities*."

Another informant added:

"*The priority character values are religiosity, integrity, independence, and nationalism, which are applied in students' daily behavior*."

These findings show that character values are not only introduced at the conceptual level but are continuously reinforced through school routines such as prayers, flag ceremonies, and disciplined behavior. This demonstrates that value internalization is achieved through structured habituation within the school culture system.

Implementation of School Culture Strategies in Character Development

Based on the findings, the implementation of school culture strengthening strategies is carried out through role modeling, habituation, environmental conditioning, and curriculum integration. Teachers act as role models in demonstrating discipline, responsibility, and ethical behavior, while habituation is embedded in daily routines such as greetings, prayers, and morning assemblies. One informant stated:

"*The strategies we implement include role modeling by teachers, routine habituation, environmental conditioning, and curriculum integration*."

Another informant emphasized:

"*All school members must serve as examples for students, and character values can be integrated into all subjects*."

These statements indicate that school culture is implemented in an integrated manner involving all school components. Character education is not treated as a separate program but embedded within both instructional and non-instructional activities. This reflects a systemic approach in which values are continuously reinforced through everyday school practices.

Collaboration Among School Members

The findings show that the implementation of school culture involves all school stakeholders, including the principal, teachers, and education staff. The principal functions

as the policy leader and program coordinator, while teachers serve as the main actors in character education delivery. One informant stated:

"*The principal acts as a manager and policymaker, while teachers are the frontline because they interact directly with students*."

Education staff also contribute by maintaining a clean, orderly, and supportive school environment. These findings indicate that school culture strengthening requires collective commitment and collaboration among all school members to ensure consistency in character value implementation.

Actualization of School Culture in Students' Daily Activities

School culture is reflected in students' daily behaviors both inside and outside the classroom. In classroom settings, students demonstrate discipline, responsibility in completing tasks, polite communication, and orderly learning behavior. One informant stated:

"*In the classroom, it is reflected in queueing behavior, polite discussions, and discipline in submitting assignments."*

Outside the classroom, students show discipline during assemblies, apply the 3S principle (smile, greet, and salute), maintain cleanliness, and demonstrate respect toward teachers and visitors. Another informant added:

"*Students show discipline during morning assemblies and polite behavior toward teachers and guests*."

These findings indicate that character formation occurs through continuous habituation, which gradually becomes an integral part of students' daily behavior.

Changes in Student Character as Reflected in School Culture

The findings reveal observable changes in student behavior during the implementation of school culture strengthening. Both informants reported a decrease in bullying behavior and an increase in students' independence and responsibility. One informant stated:

"*We observed a decrease in bullying behavior and an increase in student independence*."

Students also demonstrated improved self-regulation, such as disposing of waste properly without repeated instruction and becoming more confident in expressing themselves in class. Another informant added:

"*Students are more confident in presenting in class and more responsible in completing their tasks*."

These findings suggest that consistent school culture practices were reflected in students' character development through continuous habituation.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation of school culture is supported by strong commitment from all school members, support from the school committee, and parental involvement. One informant stated:

"*The main supporting factor is strong commitment from all school members and parental involvement*."

However, challenges remain, particularly external environmental influences and inconsistencies between school and home environments. The principal noted:

"*Sometimes home conditions are contrary to the habituation practices implemented at school*."

These findings indicate that character formation is influenced not only by the school environment but also by family and social contexts, highlighting the need for strong synergy between school and parents.

Continuous Evaluation of School Culture

Evaluation of school culture implementation is conducted regularly through morning briefings, monthly meetings, classroom supervision, and reflective discussions. One informant stated:

"*Every activity is evaluated regularly through morning briefings and monthly meetings*."

The principal further emphasized that:

"*We hope that school culture becomes a lasting character that students carry into society.*"

These findings indicate that school culture strengthening is not only aimed at short-term behavioral improvement but also at long-term character formation that extends beyond the school environment.

Discussion

School culture plays a crucial role in shaping students' character through structured, habitual, and value-based practices embedded in daily school activities. At SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota, the strengthening of school culture is implemented as a systematic educational strategy involving teachers, students, and school management. The findings indicate that various strategies are applied to ensure that character values are consistently internalized within the school environment. Importantly, the findings also show that religious habituation, particularly prayer practices, is integrated with broader character-forming practices such as discipline, politeness, responsibility, cooperation, and respect. The detailed findings of school culture strengthening strategies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Findings on School Culture Strengthening Strategies in Student Character Formation

No	School Culture Strategy	Form of Implementation	Character Developed

1	Role modeling	Teachers act as behavioral role models	Discipline, politeness, responsibility
2	Routine habituation	3S (smile, greet, salute), prayer, morning assembly, and other routine habituation activities	Religiosity, discipline, nationalism
3	Environmental conditioning	Educational posters, wall magazines, clean and comfortable environment	Environmental awareness and responsibility
4	Curriculum integration	Character values embedded in learning activities	Integrity and independence
5	School activities	Flag ceremony, class duties, queuing culture	Discipline and cooperation
6	Continuous evaluation	Monthly meetings, briefings, classroom supervision	Consistency of school culture

The findings show that the strengthening of school culture at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota is implemented through discipline habituation, teacher role modeling, communication among school members, and structured routine activities that support student character development. These practices are reflected in punctuality habits, greeting culture, behavior supervision, and teachers' consistent demonstration of disciplined behavior. This indicates that school culture is not merely constructed through formal rules but through continuous value internalization in daily school life. This finding is consistent with Suardi and Irmawati (2015), who state that school culture consists of values, norms, and habits consistently practiced by all school members and serves as behavioral guidance for students.

From the perspective of Islamic values, the findings demonstrate that religious practices are integrated into the broader school culture rather than treated as isolated activities. Prayer practices provide a concrete form of religious habituation, while politeness, respect, responsibility, cooperation, and discipline represent behavioral dimensions that accompany these practices. Cahyadi and Della (2021) found that character values in Islamic education include religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. Their study also shows that religious education has an important role in supporting character formation by connecting religious learning with students' behavior. Thus, the present findings indicate that the internalization of religious values at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota occurs through everyday practices that connect religious habituation with broader character development.

The implementation of school culture strengthening also reflects a systematic educational management strategy through planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. The principal and teachers collaboratively design and implement habituation programs aimed at fostering discipline, responsibility, religious behavior, and social conduct among students. Teachers function not only as instructors but also as supervisors and role models in implementing these values. This aligns with Riswanto et al. (2024), who argue that educational strategy is a structured effort designed to achieve organizational goals through effective and integrated resource management. Thus, school culture

strengthening can be understood as an educational strategy aimed at creating an orderly, conducive, and character-oriented learning environment while providing a context for the practice of religious and moral values.

The findings further reveal that teacher role modeling is a dominant factor in strengthening school culture. Teachers consistently demonstrate discipline, responsibility, politeness, and care, which are directly observed by students. This suggests that character formation is achieved not only through theoretical instruction but also through habituation and behavioral modeling. This finding is consistent with Salman (2022), who emphasizes that teacher role modeling is a key strategy in school culture development because students learn through observation and imitation. In the context of Islamic values, teacher role modeling also provides an opportunity for students to observe how moral and religious values are translated into everyday conduct. Therefore, the teacher's role extends beyond academic instruction to include the embodiment of values within the school environment.

In addition, school culture strengthening is implemented through continuous routine activities such as morning assemblies, collective prayers, neatness checks, and student behavior guidance. These activities serve as mechanisms for internalizing character values through consistent practice. This finding aligns with Lickona (2013), who states that character education involves not only moral knowledge but also the habituation of virtuous behavior in real life. The findings are also relevant to Cahyadi and Della (2021), who demonstrate that religious values in Islamic education are expressed through relationships with God, other people, and the surrounding environment. In the present study, religious habituation is therefore connected with social and behavioral practices such as politeness, respect, cooperation, and environmental responsibility.

The findings are further supported by Putri and Juliana (2026), who found that religious habituation can be implemented as part of Islamic character development in a public school context. Their study highlights the role of routine religious activities, teacher involvement, and continuous reinforcement in fostering students' Islamic character. This is relevant to the present study because SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota is also a public elementary school, demonstrating that the cultivation of religious and moral values can be examined within a public-school environment without changing the institutional identity of the school.

The role of the surrounding environment is also evident in the supporting and inhibiting factors identified in the study. Strong commitment from school members, school committee support, and parental involvement support the continuity of school culture. Conversely, differences between school and home environments can create inconsistencies in students' habituation. This finding corresponds with Handayani et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of environmental conditions, religious understanding, and habituation in the formation of children's Islamic character. Their study indicates that character formation is not determined solely by formal educational settings but is also influenced by the consistency of values experienced in the child's surrounding environment.

This condition demonstrates that school culture strengthening requires synergy among school and family environments. When religious and moral values practiced at school receive support in the home environment, the process of internalization can be reinforced. Conversely, differences between the two environments may create challenges

for maintaining consistent habituation. Therefore, parental involvement in the present study should not be understood merely as administrative participation but as part of the broader social environment supporting students' character development.

The study also identifies continuous evaluation as an important component of school culture strengthening. Morning briefings, monthly meetings, classroom supervision, and reflective discussions provide opportunities for school members to review the consistency of habituation practices and identify areas requiring reinforcement. This demonstrates that school culture is not a static system but a continuously maintained process. The principal and teachers therefore have an important role in ensuring that religious, moral, and character values remain embedded in everyday school practices.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that school culture strengthening at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota is a collaborative, systematic, and continuous process. Its Islamic dimension is primarily reflected in the integration of religious habituation, particularly prayer practices, with broader moral practices such as politeness, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and respect. In this sense, the study shows that a public elementary school can provide a context for the practice and internalization of Islamic values through school culture without necessarily being institutionally categorized as an Islamic school.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the strengthening of school culture at SD Negeri 014 Balikpapan Kota is implemented through teacher role modeling, habituation programs, environmental conditioning, integration of character values into learning activities, and continuous program evaluation. These strategies are operationalized through daily practices such as the 3S principle (smile, greet, and salute), prayer, morning assemblies, queuing habits, and classroom responsibilities. Through these practices, the school facilitates the development of religiosity, discipline, responsibility, independence, cooperation, politeness, and nationalism.

The findings further indicate that the internalization of Islamic values occurs through the integration of religious habituation with students' everyday social and moral behavior. Religious practices such as prayer are accompanied by habituation in politeness, respect, responsibility, cooperation, and discipline. Thus, Islamic values are manifested not only in explicitly religious activities but also in students' daily interactions and behavioral practices within the school environment.

The implementation of school culture involves the principal, teachers, education staff, school committee, and parents. The findings indicate observable changes in students' behavior, including reported changes in discipline, responsibility and independence, self-confidence, and bullying behavior. These changes are understood as manifestations observed during the implementation of school culture rather than as statistically measured effects.

Several challenges remain, particularly differences between school and home environments and external social influences. Nevertheless, continuous collaboration among school members and parents supports the sustainability of the habituation process. Overall, the study demonstrates that school culture in a public elementary school can function as a context for the internalization of Islamic and moral values through systematic habituation, teacher role modeling, environmental conditioning, and continuous evaluation.

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