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## **Integration of Religious Character in School Culture: An Investigation of Character Development Practices in Islamic Elementary School**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to identify strategies employed by schools in integrating religious values into their culture while examining how practices for strengthening religious character are applied in the daily lives of both students and teachers. It offers a novel contribution by combining an exploratory approach to religious character-strengthening practices grounded in school culture at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in, Singosari, Malang. The focus is on three key areas: (a) the role of teachers in reinforcing students' religious character at school, (b) the influence of school culture on the development of students' religious character, and (c) the challenges faced by schools in this endeavor. The findings reveal that teachers serve as role models within the school environment, designing valuable, inspiring, and motivating learning experiences for students. Additionally, the study shows that school culture plays a significant role in reinforcing religious character through practices such as performing dhuha prayers, reciting Asmaul Husna before lessons, participating in congregational dzuhur prayers, commemorating Islamic holidays, and engaging in daily Al-Qur'an reciting and writing. However, the study also highlights challenges schools face in strengthening religious character, including maintaining student discipline in participating in school activities, ensuring student consistency in good habits, and sustaining these positive practices at home. This study can serve as a valuable reference for educational institutions, practitioners, and others interested in education. It offers insights into developing a positive school culture and reflects on **strategic programs for character development in students.**

**Keywords:** Character Building, School Culture, Religious Character, Islamic Elementary school

## INTRODUCTION

Strengthening religious character in students attending Islamic schools is a central issue in education, given the strategic role of religious education in shaping the morals and ethics of the younger generation. In the face of rapid social change and the challenges posed by globalization, it is crucial for Islamic schools to not only impart religious knowledge but also to integrate religious values into students' daily lives through a consistent school culture (Baderiah & Munawir, 2024; Metcalfe & Stozek, 2021). This research is essential because schools bear the responsibility of creating an environment that supports the development of a religious character, guiding students to live in accordance with religious teachings. Furthermore, as the demand for education that emphasizes the strengthening of moral and ethical values grows, this study offers a practical framework and model for Islamic schools to develop a school culture conducive to the formation of students' religious character.

One of the key features of 21st-century education is the emphasis on humanistic aspects, which focus on the development of students' values and character. This underscores that character strengthening is one of the primary objectives of education at the elementary level (Nurhisam, 2017; Rahmawati, 2020). Instilling religious character through school culture is a crucial component aimed at shaping students' moral and ethical awareness. School culture can serve as a vehicle for developing students' religious character through various methods, approaches, and constructive activities (Dewi & Alam, 2020; Metcalfe & Moulin, 2021; Sin & Cahyani, 2022). Additionally, character education practices within the school environment need to be cultivated through strategic programs that foster strong character development (Hill et al., 2015; Lubis, 2017). A school culture that encourages students to appreciate diversity can further reinforce their religious character.

Strengthening religious character through school culture not only shapes students' religious beliefs but also promotes harmonious living in a multicultural society (Cahyanto, 2022). Islamic schools aim to provide educational services aligned with Islamic teachings, with religious character serving as the foundational element for producing exceptional graduates. This goal can be achieved through a combination of *intracurricular*, *extracurricular*, *co-curricular*, and *habituation* activities, which help students deepen their understanding of religious values (Campbell et al., 2020; Sonmez, 2017). These activities enable students to comprehend the role of religion in daily life and enhance the application of these values in their everyday actions.



Through this process, students will learn to appreciate the principles of Islam and the traditions that accompany them, fostering a sense of pride in their Muslim identity.

Equally important is teaching students how to navigate challenges and situations in daily life according to religious principles and teachings. Therefore, strengthening religious character in schools involves not only studying religious materials but also preparing students to face the challenges of the modern world with strong beliefs and morals (Anderson et al., 2001; Kemdikbud, 2017).

Schools as a part that has an important role in efforts to form students' character are expected to be able to accompany the growth and development of students continuously and consistently. The development of student's potential can be done through various things, including by providing diverse learning experiences so that all potentials in students can develop optimally through a good school climate and culture (Cahyanto, 2023). Education is the spearhead of building a responsible civilization in producing superior students in the future. Through the policy of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003, the government explains that the function of national education is to educate and shape the character of the nation. In addition, Kemdikbud (2017) through its curriculum mandate also emphasizes that education must be oriented towards the formation of *Pancasila* Student Profile. All learning in schools is directed to develop competencies and characters that are based on the noble values of *Pancasila*.

Aligned with the vision and mission of the Ministry of Education and Culture, as outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 22 of 2020 concerning the Strategic Plan for 2020-2024, *Pancasila* students are the embodiment of Indonesian students as lifelong learners who have global competence and behave by the values of *Pancasila* (Kemdikbudristek, 2020). The main characteristics of the *Pancasila* Student Profile are 6 core elements, namely: faith, devotion to Allah SWT, noble morals, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. Based on this reality, character is a central part of the orientation of the education roadmap in Indonesia. The first dimension of the *Pancasila* Student Profile, which is meant is that Indonesian students who believe, are devoted to Allah SWT, and have noble morals are students who have morals towards Allah SWT.

Students are expected to be able to understand the teachings of their religion and beliefs and be able to apply their understanding in everyday life both in the family, school, and community environments. In addition, students are expected to



be able to appreciate the existence of Allah SWT which is reflected in their daily behavior as a form of implementing an understanding of religious teachings. To strengthen faith and devotion to Allah SWT, schools need to develop a positive culture so that these values can be internalized properly so that a school climate can be built that prioritizes noble morals to produce superior generations (Lickona et al., 2007; Tharaba, 2020). One of the main factors in shaping students' character is faith. Faith is a strong belief in Allah SWT, religious teachings, and the ability to behave harmoniously in everyday life (Arifin, 2019). This religious dimension is also a fortress to overcome negative behavior such as bullying, anti-tolerance, and other deviant behavior among students.

Religious character is an important part that must be developed and accustomed to by students in their daily behavior as a basic foundation for building their morals (Arifin, 2017). Religious character does not grow and develop by itself but needs to be instilled and cultivated in students from an early age. This aims to produce the next generation who excel intellectually and have a strong character to face the challenges of a very dynamic era. The Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Singosari Malang is an educational institution that has long built the religious character of students through various habits, programs, and role models in the school environment. Based on the results of the researcher's initial interview with the principal and teachers (08/08/2021), it was shown that in schools there are positive habits that are carried out every day by the school community that is oriented towards the formation of religious character, this is done consistently by all school residents to create a religious culture for students from an early age.

Based on the results of the researcher's initial interview with the principal, it was found that initially creating a culture in schools was not easy. However, this can slowly be realized thanks to consistency and discipline. The results of observations at school also show that every morning when the teacher comes, he goes straight to the prayer room and performs *Dhuha* prayer to set an example for the students. This aims to motivate students to be enthusiastic about performing the *Dhuha* prayer at school every morning (Badeni et al., 2019; Lukman et al., 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021). Based on the description above, it can be seen that the school appears to have a good culture in strengthening students' religious character. The school also has a habituation program to strengthen students' religious character, both related to classroom learning and other routine programs outside the classroom.



Previous studies have discussed various aspects related to strengthening religious character in the school environment, such as the role of teachers and the application of school culture in shaping students' character (Mahmud et al., 2023; Rahmah & Ilham, 2022). However, from several previous studies, there are still several gaps that provide opportunities for further exploration. Although previous studies have identified the role of teachers and school culture in strengthening religious character, these studies are often limited to a more general context and are not specific to one school. In this study, the researcher focused on one Islamic educational institution to explore more in-depth and contextual data on how religious character is formed in this school which may have unique characteristics compared to other schools. Previous studies have also focused more on strategies and practices for strengthening religious character but have paid less attention to the challenges faced by schools in this process, so this study attempts to fill this gap by also exploring the culture and challenges faced by schools in strengthening religious character.

## **METHODS**

This research was conducted at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Singosari Malang with the main objective of studying in more depth the practice of strengthening religious character in schools. The researcher used a descriptive qualitative approach, which was based on the purpose of this study to study natural conditions and phenomena that emphasize the process, meaning, and understanding in the form of words or descriptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Kusumastuti & Mustamil, 2019). In addition, to obtain accurate research data, researchers also analyzed data obtained from various techniques through data reduction, presentation, verification, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). The researchers aim to make this phenomenon easy to understand by various parties and enable them to produce significant new findings through the selection of appropriate participants, participant observation, in-depth interviews, documentation analysis, and data triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This is done to help researchers see the phenomenon from various perspectives so that they can provide a more complete and comprehensive picture. Through



these steps, researchers strive to understand the phenomenon of strengthening religious character in depth and present it in a way that is easy to understand so that it can make a significant contribution to religious character education in Islamic schools. This study focuses on the role of teachers in strengthening students' religious character, the practice of improving religious character in schools, and the challenges experienced by schools in supporting religious character. This study conducted unstructured interviews to collect data on the views of school residents on strengthening religious character in schools (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2016). In this study, the researcher acts as the main instrument in data collection and acts as a non-participant observer where the researcher goes directly to the field and does not involve himself directly in the daily activities of the observed object but only as an observer and data collector.

Data reduction in this study was carried out by simplifying what was obtained while the researcher was in the field until all data was collected and then presenting the data to draw conclusions. Data analysis was conducted by creating boundaries that emphasize focus, asking analytical questions, planning data collection to follow up on previous observation results, recording general ideas for theme grouping, utilizing existing literature in the field, drawing temporary conclusions, and conducting triangulation to obtain relevant and valid data. We conducted semi-structured interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding (Yin, 2018). In this study, we selected several research participants as follows.

**Table 1.** Data Mining Respondents

No.	Respondent	Position	Description
1	ST	Headmaster	The principal's insights and views are very important for researchers to understand how school culture is formed and maintained and how school habituation policies are implemented and evaluated.
2	IKNF	Classroom teacher	Teachers have a wealth of information about the practices implemented in the classroom, the habituation methods used, and their impact on students' character development.
3	FMI	Classroom teacher	



4	AHR	Student	
5	NHAZ	Student	Students are subjects who directly experience the habituation process and allow researchers to gain an authentic perspective on how the habituation is felt, understood, and internalized by students. In addition, to see the effectiveness of habituation and identify areas where the habituation program can be improved.
6	AZ	Student	
7	ACL	Student	
8	AGS	Student	
9	DMR	Student	

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This research had three main focuses, which include the role of teachers in cultivating student character, the practice of strengthening religious character in schools, and the challenges experienced by schools in strengthening religious character. Based on this focus, the results and discussion in this research were adjusted to the existing direction. These findings were as follows.

### **The Role of Teachers in Strengthening Religious Character in Schools**

#### **1. Teachers as Role Models for Students**

Strengthening religious character at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Singosari Malang is internalized in various programs at school. The role of teachers was also maximized in enhancing students' character in everyday life. The role of the teacher as a role model was related to the teacher's efforts to guide and set an example for students, both in terms of attitudes, actions, and thought patterns. The results of interviews with school principals show that teachers act as role models for students. Teachers must have an attitude and personality that can be used as an example and role model for students. As stated below.

"In everyday life, teachers are expected to be able to set an example, for example in terms of arriving at school. Moreover, role models in doing good deeds that are oriented towards strengthening character can be in the form of regular *dhuha* prayers at school, congregational prayers, and other positive habits that students can emulate. By always providing a good example, students without being ordered will automatically imitate the teacher's behavior" (ST, 2021).



An example was the main pillar in character education (Kurniawan & Miftah, 2021), in school teachers were not only teach, but the educational element must also be strengthened by consistently providing good examples to students (Indrayani et al., 2018; Omeri, 2015). By trying to choose and carry out positive actions, you can indirectly raise the excellent image and authority of the teacher in front of students. Apart from that, teachers can provide examples of good behavior in everyday life at school, such as leaving early before school activities start, carrying out prayers on time, being disciplined in learning, maintaining cleanliness in the school environment, building relationships between school members, and regularly reciting Al-Quran.

The findings of the study revealed that the role of teachers as role models in strengthening religious character at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Singosari Malang was very visible. This shows the importance of integration between cognitive and affective aspects in character education (Rini et al., 2020). Teachers were not only function as transmitters of teaching materials, but also as figures who provide concrete examples in everyday life. According to Lickona (2021), character education involved aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, where teacher exemplars were an important part of shaping students' moral actions. This finding also supported the habituation theory put forward by Aristotle, where character was formed through repeated habits. By always exemplifying positive behavior, teachers created a learning environment that was conducive to the internalization of religious values in students. Teacher exemplars also had a significant impact on moral authority in the eyes of students.

As stated by Omeri (2015), teacher authority came not only from their formal position but also from their ability to display behavior that was consistent with the values they teach. The implication of this finding for religious-based character education in schools is the importance of consistency in teacher behavior. However, on the other hand, it was important to acknowledge that the success of teacher role models also depended on the personal integrity of the teacher himself. (Cahyanto et al., 2021; Lickona et al., 2007) emphasize that role models will only be effective if teachers truly believed in and consistently practice these values. The findings of this study underscored the importance of the role of role models in religious character education in schools. Teachers who were consistent in exemplifying good behavior not only facilitated the learning of religious values but also strengthened their moral authority in the eyes of students.





## **2. Teachers as Value Learning Designers**

The teacher as a value learning designer means the teacher had the role of designing or making learning plans. From the design developed by the teacher, students can have various learning experiences. Without good design, learning activities will not be meaningful. To strengthen religious character in *intracurricular* learning in the classroom, teachers can integrate it through activities that foster students' religious character, such as reciting prayers before learning, reciting *Asmaul Husna*, and other activities that can develop students' affective dimensions. The interview results with the teacher of Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Singosari Malang are as follows.

“Before daily learning is carried out, we always develop teaching tools. It contains plans for learning activities that students will go through, including how good values or character are integrated into students' learning activities and experiences which are also reflected in other programs outside the classroom” (IKNF, 2021).

This is in line with Nugroho et al., (2021) who explained that besides designing interdisciplinary learning programs in class, teachers can also create activities outside of class that can strengthen students' religious character. This also included activities outside the classroom, teachers had the responsibility to design activities that were able to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. This can prepare students with learning practices that can balance the cognitive aspects learned while at school and the affective aspects through school culture (Adams, 2011; Singh, 2019). It can be concluded that the role of the teacher as a designer of learning values includes designing learning, managing, and assessing student development and learning outcomes, as well as directing and guiding students to achieve the goals set by the school.

This finding highlights the role of teachers as learning designers who had the responsibility to integrate religious values into students' learning experiences. At the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Singosari Malang, this role was not only limited to preparing learning plans that include cognitive aspects but also to designing activities that develop students' affective dimensions. In this case, activities such as reciting prayers before studying and reciting *Asmaul Husna* are



examples of how religious aspects were integrated into daily routines that support the formation of students' character. This finding also emphasized that without good learning design, learning activities will not have significant meaning for students. This was in line with the constructivist view which emphasizes the importance of designing learning that allowed students to build knowledge and values through meaningful learning experiences.

The role of teachers as learning designers was vital in developing religious character education in schools (Dewi & Alam, 2020; Metcalfe & Moulin, 2021). By designing integrative learning that focuses on values, teachers can facilitate the formation of students' character that is balanced between cognitive and affective aspects. The practical implication was that schools must provide adequate support to teachers in developing effective learning strategies, as well as provide space for innovation in designing programs that enrich students' learning experiences inside and outside the classroom.

### **3. Teachers as Inspiration for Students**

Teachers as inspirers had the understanding that in everyday life they were expected to be able to inspire students' learning progress. Teachers were also likely to have good personalities so that they would become student role models. Based on observations at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in, teachers can give students guidance regarding ways to solve learning problems experienced by students and how to behave on a daily basis. This showed that the teacher had inspired instilling good values and strengthening the academic field so children's potential can develop optimally (Hoy et al., 2013; Munna & Kalam, 2021). Apart from that, teachers were also committed to working professionally and responsibly. His commitment to guiding students was demonstrated in his disciplined work, punctuality, and prioritization of his duties as an educator above personal interests (Cahyanto et al., 2024). This is reinforced by the principal's statement as follows.

“Habits in this school have been going on for quite a long time, namely since 2010, we hope that students can not only continue to learn at school but also outside of school. In carrying out good behavior outside and inside school, parents are also needed to support students so that they can do it consistently. For example, students who leave early are dropped off by their



parents, meaning that parents tell their children to wake up and leave early so as not to be late. The willingness of parents to control and accompany their children in the morning is very much needed in the process of developing or habituating student character” (ST, 2021).

The role of teachers as inspirators had the consequence that teachers not only function as teachers but also as figures who provide inspiration and moral guidance that supports the development of student’s character as a whole. Based on the findings, the role of teachers as inspirators had significant implications in character education where teachers were not only required to teach academic knowledge but also to be role models in moral and ethical aspects. Sin & Cahyani (2022) emphasized that the inspiration given by teachers can motivate students to develop optimally, both in academics and character development (Ahsani & Rusilowati, 2022). Teachers who acted as inspirators and role models had a major impact on the development of students’ character. By showing a strong commitment to professionalism and responsibility, teachers can motivate students to imitate the positive behavior they saw, thus confirming that the role of teachers as inspirators was key in character education.

#### **4. Teachers as Motivators for Students**

The teacher’s role was not just to direct and provide learning material in class, but the teacher must also be able to motivate students. This means that teachers were also expected to be able to encourage students to increase enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Moreover, character education will be effective if students have high motivation in efforts to habituate positive behavior at school. This was also in line with Tillman & Hsu (2018) who explained that students with high motivation in learning tend to have better learning outcomes. Motivation was one of the main factors in supporting the success of strengthening student character (Haslip & Haslip, 2013; Lickona, 1996). This is reinforced by the results of interviews with students as follows.



“I was motivated by teachers, in our lessons we are often told stories about children whose success started with good behavior. “The teachers also motivate us always to do good wherever we are “ (AHR, 2021).

Motivation was one of the main factors that supported the success of strengthening students' character. Motivation given by teachers had a major impact on the effectiveness of character education in schools. As expressed by Berkowitz (2022) students with high motivation tend to show better learning outcomes and were more effective in internalizing character values. This was in line with the view of Maphalala & Mpofu (2018) who explained that high learning motivation was directly related to the achievement of better learning outcomes. In this context, teachers played as a key role in generating motivation that can encourage students to develop positive habits. The motivation given by teachers can be a strong driver for students to internalize and get used to positive behavior at school. Based on the findings, recommendations for schools should support teachers in developing effective motivational strategies that can help students achieve their maximum potential in character development.

## **School Culture in Strengthening Students' Religious Character**

### **1. Get Used to *Dhuha* prayers**

*Dhuha* prayer was an activity of worshipping Allah SWT, *dhuha* prayer was one of *sunnah* prayers recommended by Allah SWT and the Messenger of Allah for every Muslim. The time for *dhuha* prayer was from sunrise to before *Dhuhr* time, the minimum number of *rakaat* for the *dhuha* prayer was 2 *rakaat* and a maximum of 12 *rakaat*. At the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in, the *dhuha* prayer was held in the morning before the first-hour starts or before learning, to be precise at 06:30 am. Students went to class first and then to the mosque to perform the *dhuha* prayer. Teachers always explained to students that one of the benefits of the *dhuha* prayer was to facilitate good fortune. The *dhuha* prayer was carried out before daily activities so that it was an effort to expand one's future. The *dhuha* prayer was carried out as shown in the following picture.





**Figure 1.** Students Perform *Dhuha* Prayers in the Morning

Also, *dhuha* prayers at school strengthened religious character and increased student discipline (Bates, 2019; Lee & Atkinson, 2001). As confirmed by the following principal.

“Students carry out the *dhuha* prayer routinely every morning. Another positive impact is that apart from children being closer to sunnah worship, they are also more disciplined. “The level of student delay in learning has decreased because indirectly they have to come to school earlier” (ST, 2021).

The *dhuha* prayer performed every morning before teaching and learning activities began was not only a form of worship but also an effort to shape students’ characters that were oriented toward spiritual values. The implementation of *dhuha* prayer in this school illustrates the application of the concept of integrating worship in character education, where religious activities became an inseparable part of students’ daily lives. The routine implementation of *dhuha* prayer also had positive implications for students’ spiritual and emotional well-being, so in addition to being a form of obedience to Allah SWT, it can also provide inner peace for students. The *dhuha* prayer performed every morning functions as a spiritual foundation that strengthens students’ character and helps them face life’s challenges. This finding implied that the integration of worship in the school curriculum can be an effective strategy in character education, which was not only focused on cognitive aspects but also on aspects of students’ spiritual and moral development.

## 2. Reciting *Asmaul Husna* Before Learning

*Asmaul Husna* were the excellent names of Allah SWT. There are 99 names of Allah SWT that Muslims must know. The names of Allah SWT contain very noble meanings and contain goodness in them. At the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in always recited *Asmaul Husna* every morning, this was done so that students had a sense of love for Allah SWT by glorifying the greatness of his name. The students were guided to read *Asmaul Husna* in a distinctive tone, which aimed to provide brain stimulation to make it easier to memorize the tone and recite it. In the higher classes, almost all students had remembered the *Asmaul Husna* reciting, while in the lower classes, students continued to be accompanied to memorize. In line with (Akbar et al., 2014; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013), explained that the role of schools was not only limited to strengthening students' cognitive aspects but also changing their affective aspects. Usually, teachers provided *Asmaul Husna* paper sheets in each class, which were given to students when the reciting began to make it easier for students who had not memorized the whole thing.



**Figure 2.** Reciting *Asmaul Husna* Before Learning

The recitation of *Asmaul Husna* every morning at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in was a form of integration of religious-based character education that aims to instill a love for Allah SWT. Teachers at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in Malang used a differentiation approach in teaching *Asmaul Husna* to students from various grade levels. This approach was in line with learning theory that emphasizes the importance of paying attention to individual differences in the learning process. By providing *Asmaul Husna* sheets to students who had not fully memorized them, teachers ensured that all students, regardless of their abilities,



could participate in the activity. These findings also indicated that regular recitation of *Asmaul Husna* contributed to the development of the character and spirituality of students at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in. Schools can consider developing new methods in teaching *Asmaul Husna*, such as the use of multimedia or interactive technology to increase the appeal and effectiveness of learning.

### **3. Congregational *Dzuhur* Prayer**

*Dzuhur* prayer was an obligatory prayer that Muslims must carry out. The students at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyiin habitually performed *dzuhur* prayers in the congregation at the mosque. The school carried out this habit to ensure that students can continue to increase their purity by carrying out Allah SWT commands in the congregation and on time. Congregational *dzuhur* prayers were held during the midday break, after learning was finished, students flocked to the mosque to prepare for *dzuhur* prayers. This happened without any coercion from the teacher, and they were used to doing it regularly. In this way, schools showed that educational institutions successfully promote good character and values to students (Lickona et al., 2007; Susilo et al., 2022). As confirmed by students as follows.

“At first when break time came, we often bought snacks or ate lunch first. But after getting used to doing midday prayers in congregation, we now prioritize midday prayers over resting. So the rest at the end will be calmer” (ACL, 2021).



**Figure 3.** Students Perform *Dzuhur* Prayers in the Congregation

#### 4. Commemoration of Special Islamic Day

Commemoration of a particular Islamic day was a routine activity carried out at school. Celebrating major holidays at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in was part of the school's efforts to foster student religiosity by commemorating and remembering historical Islamic events. Celebrations of major holidays such as (1) *Hijriah* New Year, the celebration of this moment is carried out by holding Islamic activities such as children's Islamic competitions, (2) *Isra' Mi'raj*, the moment of celebration of *Isra' Mi'raj* was carried out by holding Islamic recitation or study activities, (3) Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the celebration was carried out by holding joint prayer activities, Islamic studies, and thanksgiving in the form of eating together and exchanging food with friends, (4) Eid al-Fitr, this activity was carried out a week after Eid al-Fitr holiday, there are friendly activities and greetings to teachers or apologizing to all school members, and finally (5) Eid al-Adha, which was usually commemorated by holding sacrificial animal slaughter activities at school, which were then distributed to the surrounding community and all school members. This was in line with (Cahyanto et al., 2021; Lickona et al., 2007), which explained that promoting good character and school values can integrate them into daily and incidental routine activities involving the entire school community.



**Figure 4.** Implementation of Commemoration of Special Islamic Day

#### 5. Recite and Write the AL-Quran Every Day

The Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in students also got into the habit of reciting the Al-Quran in class. This was carried out daily to foster in students a love of the Al-Quran from an early age. At the same time, students also learned





and improved how to recite and write the Al-Quran properly and correctly. Regular Al-Quran reciting activities also have the benefit of helping improve students' concentration and focus (Bagus Cahyanto et al., 2022; Mussafa, 2018). This is in line with what was conveyed by the school principal as follows.

“This activity is routine so thank Allah SWT, the students who graduate can now read the Al-Quran. This will also become capital for students in living their future lives. “At least students can get close to and understand the holy book so that their hopes can be implemented in everyday life” (ST, 2021).

The habit of reciting the Al-Qur'an at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in was an integral part of religion-based character education which aimed to build students' love for the Al-Qur'an and improve their skills in reciting and writing the Al-Qur'an correctly. This was in line with the view expressed by Cahyanto et al. (2022) that routined activities of reciting the Al-Qur'an not only improve reciting and writing skills but also develop students' emotional and spiritual closeness to the holy book. The activity of reciting the Al-Qur'an also provided cognitive benefits, such as increasing students' concentration and focus. This was due to the structure of the Al-Qur'an text which required special attention in reciting and memorizing it, thus training students' brains to be more focused and trained. By introducing and getting used to reciting the Al-Qur'an from an early age, the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in had succeeded in creating an environment that supports the development of religiosity in schools.

## **Challenges in Strengthening Religious Character in Schools**

### **1. Student Discipline in Participating in Activities**

To realize the success of strengthening students' religious character through habituation at school, it needed to be supported by student discipline. These were interrelated parts because no matter how good the program developed by the school was if it was not supported by student discipline in implementing it, the results would not be optimal (Tharaba, 2020; D. Tillman, 2012). Based on data from various informants at the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in, one of the challenges experienced by the school was related to student discipline. Even though this was not often found, there were still students who were often late. This results



in students being unable to carry out routine activities at school. This was in line with the teacher's statement as follows.

“Every activity has its challenges. For the challenges experienced so far, several children arrive late when they are accustomed to the dhuha prayer in the morning. The students who come late do not want to attend the dhuha prayer because they are embarrassed that they have come late and don't have any friends. “So the good habits in this school need to be supported by students' disciplined attitudes” (AHR, 2021).

Student discipline in supporting the success of the religious character-building program in schools was a key aspect in achieving maximum results. The results of the study showed that the challenges faced by the Islamic Elementary School Roudlotun Nasyi'in were related to student discipline, especially in terms of delays that can affect the implementation of the habituation program in schools. The implementation of the religious character-building program requires active and consistent student involvement. To overcome challenges related to student discipline, an integrated strategy was needed between the school, students, and parents. The implementation of clear discipline policies, as well as effective communication between teachers, students, and parents must be strengthened to help improve student discipline. This was to the theory of educational management, as stated by Caldwell & Spinks (2013) consistent enforcement of discipline policies can improve the regularity and commitment of students to character education programs.

This underlines the importance of a holistic approach in school management, where student discipline was an inseparable part of overall character development efforts. Schools must be able to develop various strategies and superior programs to support the optimality of all educational activities and services in schools so that they can create a conducive environment for student character development. By implementing planned and integrated superior strategies and programs, schools can support student character development effectively and encourage the creation of a conducive learning environment.

## **2. Student Consistency in Implementing Good Habits**

Consistency was the ability to act stably, regularly, and sustainably. Challenges that often arise in maintaining consistency in instilling religious character in schools



include several factors, namely internal and external. Internally, students experience challenges in managing time and priorities in daily activities. The students' busyness with school assignments, hobbies, or activities at home can prevent them from applying religious values consistently (Akbar et al., 2014; Omeri, 2015). On the other hand, external factors such as the influence of peers and the social environment influence students' consistency in implementing positive habits. Peers can sometimes be a distraction and influence students to reduce the intensity of their worship. A school environment and social environment that was less supportive can be a factor that prevents students from maintaining consistency in religious practices.

Therefore, it was important for teachers and parents to continuously provide support and guidance to students to overcome these obstacles and maintain consistency in developing religious character wherever they were. Given these challenges, the role of teachers and parents was critical in providing ongoing support and guidance to help students overcome barriers to consistency. Theories on parent involvement and teacher and student relationships emphasize the importance of support systems in helping students navigate and balance multiple demands (Tharaba, 2020). Teachers and parents can facilitate this by creating a supportive environment, assisting with time management, and encouraging religious practice through reinforcement and modeling.

### **3. Controlling the Continuity of Good Habits at Home**

Good habits at school should ideally be continued in the family or home environment, so this can truly become a character for students. To control the continuity of student activities at home, collaboration and communication between the school and parents were needed (Kemendikbud, 2017). However, the fact was that it often happens that the good habits that students have adopted at school cannot be continued at home. As stated by the principal as follows.

“The challenge that is often experienced when implementing habituation programs is the lack of involvement of all school members. This can come from students and teachers. Indeed, if we have created a program, we must be ready to pursue the program, starting from learning in class, we must also use media that is interesting to students, for example, material on moral beliefs with stories, and teachers can use media from schools. “From



that, students can more easily digest what they see and hear through the audiovisuals used by the teacher” (ST, 2021).

Then for students, there were also challenges between programs created at school and at home that were not in sync. This was also confirmed by the principal’s statement as follows.

“For example, schools have a daily *dhuha* prayer program and students are used to this activity. But when they are at home, students do not continue this habit, and this is to control the school’s difficulties. In fact, if this habit is carried out continuously and used daily, it will become a strong character for students. “So the programs at this school are sometimes not continued and not supported when they are at home” (ST, 2021).

Data from these informants showed that to realize good school programs, good synergy was needed between the school, parents, and the community (Akbar, 2010; Asriati, 2012). In this way, students can continue the habituation program at school while they were outside school.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal several important dimensions in strengthening students’ religious character in schools. Based on the focus of the study on (a) the role of teachers in strengthening students’ religious character, (b) school culture in strengthening students’ religious character, and (c) challenges faced by schools in strengthening religious character, it was found that teachers hold several significant key roles. Teachers are not only function as role models, but also as designers of value learning, inspirators, and motivators. In addition, school culture which includes habits such as *Dhuha* prayer, reciting *Asmaul Husna*, *Dzuhur* prayer in congregation, commemorating Islamic holy days, and reciting and writing the Al-Qur’an regularly, plays an important role in strengthening students’ religious character. In addition, there are also challenges such as student discipline in participating in school activities, student consistency in carrying out good habits, and control over the sustainability of good habits at home.



This study makes an important contribution to the development of character education theory by emphasizing that the role of teachers as role models, learning designers, inspirators, and motivators is an integral element in strengthening students' religious character. This study also provides recommendations on the importance of integrating religious habits into school culture as a way to strengthen students' religious character so that these findings can be used as a practical guide for Islamic educational institutions to design policies and programs that integrate religious values into school culture. Overall, these findings indicate that strengthening students' religious character in schools is greatly influenced by the multi-role of teachers and school culture that supports religious habits.



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