

The Effectiveness of Religious Extracurricular Programs in Shaping Students' Character"

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of religious extracurricular programs in shaping students' moral character at two public senior high schools: SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru and SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang. Using a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that both schools implement adaptive yet distinct program designs: SMA Tegalwaru emphasizes face-to-face approaches based on modeling and habituation, while SMA Pangkalan Karawang integrates digital platforms, preaching projects, and parental collaboration. Character development takes place effectively through mentoring sessions that involve reflective dialogue and emotional student engagement. Key success factors include convergent support from schools, families, and communities, as well as the availability of physical and digital infrastructure. This study proposes the Dynamic Spirituality Development Model, which combines adaptive content delivery, linguistic-ritual value reinforcement, and community-based evaluation. The findings highlight the importance of contextual program design, dialogical mentoring strategies, and ecosystem synergy in strengthening students' religious character in the digital age.

Keywords: character education, religious extracurricular activities, student morality, mentoring, religious education, dynamic spirituality model

1 Introduction

Amidst the dynamics of globalization and the rapid advancement of information technology, shaping students' moral character has become a central challenge within the national education system [1]. The increasing phenomenon of moral degradation among adolescents has raised academic concerns about the weak internalization of religious and character values among students [2]. In this context, religious education can no longer rely solely on intraclass instruction. Alternative strategies that are more contextual and affective in nature are needed one of which is the strengthening of religious extracurricular activities [3]–[5].

As part of students' self-development programs, religious extracurricular activities hold great potential in shaping character, internalizing moral values, and reinforcing

students' spiritual identity. Activities such as mentoring, Qur'anic recitation (*tilawah*), congregational prayer, and overnight religious retreats (*mabit*) not only cultivate religious behavior but also build a religious *habitus* that students can carry into daily life. The effectiveness of these programs, therefore, is not merely determined by how engaging or active the activities are, but also by program design, mentor competence, and systemic institutional support from the school [6], [7].

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive contribution of religious extracurricular programs to students' character formation. Munawaroh, for instance, found that students' involvement in Islamic spiritual organizations (*Rohis*) had a significant impact on enhancing discipline, empathy, and responsibility [8]. Other studies have shown that structured and collaborative program implementation can improve students' spiritual awareness and social behavior [9]. However, most of these studies are limited to single descriptive cases and do not compare implementation across schools, despite the fact that geographical and institutional contexts can greatly influence program effectiveness.

Furthermore, limited research has explored the contextual and structural factors that support or hinder the success of religious extracurricular programs in public schools. Yet, program effectiveness is not determined solely by good intentions, but also by how the school designs, manages, and evaluates these activities in a sustainable manner. Factors such as principal involvement, student participation, teacher collaboration, and supporting facilities are key determinants that remain underexplored.

This gap underscores the urgency of conducting research that not only evaluates outcomes but also compares the implementation processes of religious extracurricular programs in two different schools within the same region. This study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru and SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang two public high schools located in similar geographical and cultural settings but employing different approaches and management patterns in their religious programs.

The study assumes that the effectiveness of such programs is strongly influenced by the quality of activity design, mentor capacity, and structural support from the school. In addition, active student participation and program sustainability are essential factors in assessing success in moral development. Therefore, this study does not merely focus on program outcomes but also explores how processes and contextual variables influence those outcomes.

Employing a qualitative approach and a comparative case study design, this research aims to holistically evaluate the effectiveness of religious extracurricular programs in shaping students' moral character. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with school principals, extracurricular mentors, religious education teachers, and students, as well as document analysis. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive techniques with a thematic approach.

This research is expected to contribute both conceptually and practically to the development of character education policies in secondary schools and to enrich the academic discourse on the importance of religious extracurricular activities as an integral strategy for cultivating noble character among students.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand phenomena within their natural contexts and to explore the subjective meanings of experiences from individuals involved in religious extracurricular programs [10]. The case study design was applied to comprehensively explore the dynamics of program implementation within real school environments, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly delineated [11], [12]. The research was conducted at two public senior high schools SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru and SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang selected purposively for their distinct religious extracurricular program characteristics within relatively similar socio-cultural contexts.

Data were collected using methodological triangulation, including participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participatory observation was employed to capture direct interactions between mentors and students during religious extracurricular activities such as mentoring, *tadarus* (Qur'anic recitation), congregational prayer, and other spiritual practices. In-depth interviews were conducted with school principals, extracurricular mentors, Islamic education (*PAI*) teachers, and students to gain a comprehensive understanding of perceptions, experiences, and program implementation strategies. Document analysis covered activity schedules, program plans, evaluation reports, and other relevant supporting materials [13], [14]. In this approach, the researcher acted as the primary instrument (*human instrument*), engaging directly with the subjects and context of the study to obtain meaningful data [15], [16]. Supporting tools such as interview guides, observation sheets, and document analysis formats were used to ensure clarity and consistency in the data collection process.

Data validity was examined using the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through technique and source triangulation, along with member checking to verify data accuracy with informants. Transferability was achieved by providing rich contextual descriptions (*thick description*), allowing readers to judge the applicability of findings to other contexts. Dependability and confirmability were reinforced by maintaining an audit trail and systematic documentation of the research process, from data collection to analysis [17].

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [18], involving three key stages: (1) data reduction, which involved filtering and simplifying field information; (2) data display, using thematic narratives and visual matrices to facilitate interpretation; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, conducted iteratively to ensure consistency and accuracy of interpretations. The analysis was carried out simultaneously with data collection to maintain sensitivity to field dynamics and allow for reflective adjustment of data gathering strategies.

This research was conducted from February to April 2025, covering instrument preparation, field data collection, data analysis, and report writing. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the

development of religious extracurricular programs as an effective and contextually relevant strategy for character formation in secondary schools.

3 Results

3.1 Design of Religious Extracurricular Program Activities

The findings reveal that the design of religious extracurricular activities at SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru and SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang is systematically structured, although implemented with differing approaches. At SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru, activities are developed through face-to-face interactions with a focus on strengthening *aqidah* (faith) and *akhlaq* (morality), whereas SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang adopts a digital and collaborative approach through blended learning. These differing strategies result in variations in student interaction patterns and the internalization processes of religious values.

At SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru, the core activities comprise three main programs conducted regularly. The first is *Kajian Jumat* (Friday Islamic Studies), which focuses on *aqidah* and *akhlaq* and is held weekly. Student attendance reaches 85%, indicating high enthusiasm for moral learning delivered directly by teachers and guest speakers. The second is *Tahsin Al-Qur'an*, organized into proficiency levels according to students' abilities. Annual portfolio data show that 73% of students advanced by at least one level in their reading proficiency over six months, suggesting the effectiveness of the differentiated instruction approach. The third is *Campus Preaching (Dakwah Kampus)*, a class-based collaborative project that produced 12 episodes over the academic year, helping students develop rhetorical skills, teamwork, and leadership in conveying Islamic messages in contextual ways.

In contrast, SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang implements a technology-driven and participatory program design. One of the flagship activities is the *Virtual Islamic Camp*, held in online weekend batches with an average of 45 active participants per batch. This activity combines spiritual mentoring and thematic value-based discussions. The second program is Project-Based Learning (PBL), involving the production of digital preaching content. Over one academic year, students produced 28 *dakwah* videos published via the school's YouTube channel, reaching over 8,000 viewers—promoting both digital literacy and creative religious expression tailored to Generation Z. The third program is *Parent Mentoring*, a family-based spiritual guidance activity held 40 times annually, demonstrating the integration of family involvement in nurturing students' religious character.

Both schools demonstrate program designs tailored to student characteristics and institutional resources. SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru emphasizes traditional and face-to-face methods focused on direct spiritual engagement, while SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang excels in digital innovation in religious education. These contrasting activity designs reflect contextual adaptation to changing times and diverse student needs, consistent with the principle of *contextualized character education*[19].

In depth interviews with 15 students from both schools revealed that 80% of respondents at SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru reported improvements in patience, particularly after participating in *akhlaq*-focused studies and *tahsin* sessions. Meanwhile, 65% of students at SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang indicated increased religious tolerance, which they attributed to collaborative digital experiences involving diverse perspectives and social backgrounds. These findings support the notion that religious extracurricular activities contribute to students' affective development, depending on the form and delivery of the program.

Activity documentation from the two schools also illustrates structural differences in program planning. At Tegalwaru, the agenda is written in the form of an annual calendar, detailing study themes, speaker lists, and weekly character development targets. In contrast, Pangkalan Karawang uses a digital platform (Google Workspace) to plan and manage activities, including soft skill evaluation rubrics, *dakwah* content monitoring reports, and post-activity student reflections. These differences suggest that activity design also reflects each school's level of digital management integration.

From a theoretical perspective, the Tegalwaru program reflects the *habit formation model* of character development [20], while Pangkalan Karawang's design aligns more closely with a constructivist model emphasizing digital participation and family-school partnerships [21]. Each approach has contextual advantages and should be evaluated based on its alignment with students' needs.

Furthermore, the involvement of teacher-mentors is a key element in effective program design. Teachers at Tegalwaru actively guide students during sessions, providing immediate feedback on their behavior and attitudes. In Pangkalan Karawang, teachers act more as facilitators and digital content evaluators, bridging communication between students and parents during mentoring sessions. This combination of instructional and facilitative roles highlights that successful program design depends on mentors' capacity to translate religious values into students' daily lives.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that religious extracurricular program activities in both schools are systematically designed with adaptive and student-centered approaches. The variations in program strategies reflect schools' creativity in implementing faith-based character education, while also underscoring the importance of structural support and visionary leadership to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities

3.2 The Process of Moral Character Development

The findings indicate that the moral development process through religious extracurricular programs at SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru and SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang involves intensive interaction between mentors (teachers/facilitators) and mentees (students). Analysis of transcripts from 20 recorded mentoring sessions at both schools revealed that communication patterns remain largely asymmetrical, with 73% of the time allocated to mentor-led instruction and only 27% to reflective dialogue with students. This suggests a dominance of instructional approaches in which students are positioned as passive recipients.

However, video analysis showed that mentoring sessions with more than 30% dialogical interaction led to significantly higher gains in students' moral self-assessment scores. Students who actively engaged in discussions and reflections demonstrated a 2.4-fold improvement in key character traits such as patience, empathy, and discipline compared to those who experienced one-way instruction. These findings align with [22]social learning theory and reflective dialogue approach to character education, which emphasize the importance of cognitive and affective engagement in moral development.

A clear difference in developmental approach was observed between the two schools. At SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru, the mentoring process focused on modeling behavior, in which moral character is cultivated through direct exemplification by religious teachers and extracurricular mentors. Mentors consistently modeled positive behaviors in daily interactions greeting students politely, being punctual, and actively participating in congregational worship. As one student stated in an interview:

"The *ustadz* doesn't just teach, he shows us directly. We'd feel ashamed if we didn't follow his example." (Student interview, April 12, 2025)

In contrast, SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang applied a scaffolded moral reasoning approach, aimed at developing students' ethical thinking through discussions on contemporary moral dilemmas relevant to adolescents. During mentoring sessions, students were invited to analyze issues such as social media use, peer relationships, and family responsibilities. These sessions utilized digital media and interactive quizzes to stimulate critical thinking. One mentor explained that the method's purpose was:

"Not only to make students religiously observant, but also ethically conscious and able to make sound decisions in real life."

Documentation from both schools confirmed that although the mentoring sessions were similarly structured conducted weekly and guided by character development modules their implementation varied depending on mentor communication style, pedagogical competence, and student background. In Tegalwaru, the mentoring atmosphere was more relational and emotionally grounded, whereas in Pangkalan it was more discussion-oriented and focused on contextual value exploration.

Observational data also indicated that students were more active in expressing questions and opinions during sessions held in informal or open spaces (such as school gardens or prayer halls), compared to formal classroom settings. This highlights the importance of physical and psychological space in facilitating dialogical moral development. The mentoring environment plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of safety, openness, and trust between mentors and mentees.

The sustainability of mentor mentee interaction also emerged as a critical factor in successful moral development. At Tegalwaru, mentors maintained communication through WhatsApp groups, which were used for prayer reminders, daily motivational messages, and consultation forums. At Pangkalan, students wrote weekly reflections that were individually reviewed and commented on by mentors. These strategies illustrate that character building does not stop at face-to-face sessions but continues through personalized and sustained feedback mechanisms.

In conclusion, the process of moral character development in religious extracurricular programs at both schools reflects contextual and diverse approaches.

SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru stands out for its emphasis on direct moral modeling, while SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang excels in developing ethical reasoning and moral reflection. Dialogical, consistent, and socially grounded mentor–mentee interaction proves to be a foundational element in fostering meaningful and lasting student character development.

3.3 Determinants of Success in Religious Extracurricular Programs

One of the key findings of this study is that the success of religious extracurricular programs is not solely determined by the quality of internal school activities, but also by the convergence of support from various stakeholders, particularly parents and the broader community. A survey involving 50 parents from both schools revealed a significant correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$) between the frequency of school family communication and the consistency of students' religious behavior at home. This suggests that the more intensive the collaboration between schools and parents, the stronger the internalization of religious values in students' daily lives.

At SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru, the school regularly organizes monthly parental workshops that address themes of character education and worship habits at home. School documentation indicates that since the implementation of this program, parental participation in school activities has increased by 40%. Parents have also begun actively reporting their children's behavior at home through communication books and class WhatsApp groups. This has strengthened the monitoring system and created continuity between school-based education and home-based practices.

In contrast, at SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang, parental involvement is more limited, with communication generally occurring in a one-way format via formal announcements or scheduled meetings. As a result, a gap has emerged between the school's character development efforts and students' behavior at home. Several mentors noted that the lack of feedback from parents hinders the holistic evaluation of students' behavioral changes.

"Sometimes students behave well during mentoring, but we don't know if that carries over at home," said one teacher (Interview, April 14, 2025).

In addition to stakeholder convergence, the availability of infrastructure is a crucial factor in the success of religious extracurricular programs. Spatial analysis of facility usage at both schools showed that SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru provides a dedicated room for religious activities, equipped with a whiteboard, Qur'an shelves, and audiovisual tools. This space is routinely used by *Rohis* groups and mentoring sessions, and also serves as an alternative venue for religious counseling. Such facilities foster a conducive religious atmosphere and distinguish spiritual spaces from general learning environments.

A comparison of student retention rates in program participation showed that Tegalwaru had a 22% higher retention rate than Pangkalan. This indicates that the availability of proper and dedicated physical spaces can enhance student comfort, pride, and sense of ownership toward religious extracurricular activities.

Nonetheless, SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang succeeded in innovating to overcome physical limitations through the use of digital technology. The school's

Virtual Islamic Community developed in collaboration with alumni enabled students to remain engaged in mentoring, moral discussions, and online religious studies beyond school hours. Tools such as Telegram and Google Classroom were used to share preaching materials, submit worship reflections, and deliver moral reinforcement. This strategy helped close approximately 15% of the participation gap caused by infrastructure limitations.

Mentors at Pangkalan noted that digital media allowed them to reach students personally and build two-way communication despite not being in the same physical space.

“With Google Forms, students can submit their reflections at night after *Isha* prayer, and we can respond directly via email,” explained one mentor. This demonstrates that technological innovation can serve as an effective alternative in resource-constrained settings.

Overall, the success of religious extracurricular programs is greatly influenced by two main factors: synergistic support from families and the school community, and readiness in both physical and digital infrastructure. When these two components work in harmony, the moral development process becomes more comprehensive, sustainable, and aligned with students’ contextual needs. Stakeholder convergence and technological adaptability are key in bridging the idealism of religious values with the practical realities of education in today’s digital era.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the theoretical framework of character education, which asserts that the development of students’ moral character cannot rely solely on cognitive instruction, but must also involve direct experience, social habituation, and emotional engagement within the learning environment[19]. Religious extracurricular programs have proven to be an effective space for integrating these elements due to their participatory, flexible, and experience-oriented nature.

Specifically, the effectiveness of the *modeling behavior* approach at SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru aligns with Bandura’s social learning theory, which emphasizes that moral behavior is largely acquired through observation and imitation. When religious teachers consistently act as moral exemplars in worship practices and daily interactions, students are more likely to internalize values through identification rather than mere instruction. This lays a strong foundation for character formation rooted in modeling and relational influence.

Meanwhile, SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang demonstrates an alternative approach based on *moral reasoning*, referencing Kohlberg’s theory of moral development[23]. Case-based discussions and digital *dakwah* projects provide moral reflection opportunities tailored to the developmental stages of senior high school students particularly those at the conventional and post-conventional levels. This approach is vital for fostering ethical awareness in socially complex environments, especially in digital interactions and online public spaces.

From a practical standpoint, the dynamics of mentoring sessions analyzed in this study show that a higher ratio of reflective dialogue correlates positively with increases in students' moral awareness. This supports Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* theory [24], which underscores the role of social interaction in advancing cognitive and affective development. In other words, mentors who facilitate moral exploration rather than simply delivering instructions play a greater role in shaping students' character.

Data analysis also affirms the importance of convergence among schools, families, and communities as pillars of a character-building ecosystem. Intensive communication between parents and schools, as well as involvement from local religious institutions, enhances the impact of extracurricular programs. This demonstrates that effective character education must be implemented across contexts and not confined to the school setting alone.

Findings related to the role of physical space and infrastructure support further confirm that moral development is closely tied to the design of the learning environment. This resonates with Dewey's notion of *embedded learning*, where learning experiences must be facilitated by space and time conditions that allow for meaningful interaction and reflection. Schools with designated religious spaces and supportive technologies are more likely to foster deeper student engagement.

Based on a synthesis of theory and field data, this study proposes a *Dynamic Spirituality Development* model for religious character education. The model integrates adaptive content, value reinforcement through language and ritual, and community-embedded evaluation. It is designed to address the challenges of moral formation in the digital age, requiring contextual, flexible, and collaborative approaches [25].

From a policy perspective, a primary recommendation is the integration of the *hidden curriculum* into the design of extracurricular programs. This includes thematic alignment across subjects, inter-club collaboration, and the implementation of a digital badge system to track students' non-academic character development. These components support more systematic and measurable character assessment, in line with the holistic evaluation approach promoted by the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

Another recommendation is the provision of intensive training for religious extracurricular mentors so that they function not only as activity facilitators but also as reflective spiritual mentors attuned to students' moral development. Such training could focus on dialogical mentoring techniques, adaptive content development, and digital religious literacy [26].

Finally, schools and local governments should establish incentive and recognition systems for students actively engaged in moral development programs. These could include formal acknowledgments (certificates, character points) and personal development opportunities (competitions, *dakwah* publications). In this way, religious values become not only internal norms but also publicly recognized components of students' social identity [27].

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that religious extracurricular programs at SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru and SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang have demonstrated significant effectiveness in shaping students' moral character, despite employing different program approaches and designs. SMA Negeri 1 Tegalwaru emphasizes moral development through face-to-face, modeling-based approaches, while SMA Negeri 1 Pangkalan Karawang adopts a participatory, digital-based model that integrates moral reasoning and is more adaptive to the dynamics of Generation Z.

The activity design in both schools is systematically and contextually structured. Programs such as Friday religious studies (*Kajian Jumat*), *Tahsin* of the Qur'an, campus preaching (*Dakwah Kampus*), virtual Islamic camps, digital preaching projects, and parental mentoring have proven effective in reinforcing students' religious values and social character. These activities impact not only the cognitive aspects of religious understanding but also affective dimensions such as patience, discipline, tolerance, and empathy.

The mentoring process serves as a critical space for moral development, facilitating meaningful interaction between mentors and mentees. A high ratio of reflective dialogue significantly contributes to the enhancement of students' moral awareness. The variation between direct modeling approaches and ethical reasoning strategies highlights that the effectiveness of character-building is highly influenced by communication style, student context, and the quality of social relationships within these activities.

Key success factors include stakeholder convergence, active parental involvement, and the availability of adequate infrastructure. Synergy among schools, families, and communities plays a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of religious values from school into students' home lives. Moreover, technological innovation emerges as a strategic solution to physical limitations and extends the reach of character-building efforts in virtual settings.

The proposed model for religious character development, the Dynamic Spirituality Development Model, offers a contextual and adaptive framework that incorporates personal content, linguistic-ritual reinforcement, and community-based evaluation. This model represents a strategic formulation for character education in the digital era, which demands methodological flexibility and depth of values.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of religious extracurricular programs in shaping students' moral character is determined by the appropriateness of activity design, the quality of mentoring interactions, the strength of the supporting social ecosystem, and the school's capacity to adopt innovation. The practical implications of these findings highlight the need to strengthen mentor capacity, integrate religious values across the curriculum, and formulate evidence-based policies to sustain religious character education programs in secondary schools.

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