

Cultivating the Soul in Public Education: Internalizing Islamic Values Through School Culture to Construct Student Moral Character

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Abstract. In the midst of global moral decadence and the digital crisis affecting youth, the integration of religious values within public education has become a critical pedagogical imperative. This study investigates the processes, strategies, and impacts of internalizing Islamic values through school culture at SMP Negeri 3 Cianjur and SMP Negeri 4 Cianjur, Indonesia. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach with a descriptive-narrative design, data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The study analyzes how these public institutions transcend secular limitations by embedding religious praxis into the hidden curriculum. The findings reveal a multi-layered internalization strategy: (1) *Uswah Hasanah* (exemplary role modeling) by educators; (2) Structural habituation of rituals (congregational prayers, Quranic literacy); and (3) Environmental conditioning through Islamic-based regulations. The research concludes that the efficacy of moral formation relies not on dogmatic instruction, but on a symbiotic ecosystem involving school policy, teacher integrity, and parental synergy. These findings offer a reproducible model for value-based education in state-run schools facing modernization challenges.

Keywords: Internalization of Values, Islamic School Culture, Moral Character, Public Education, Character Building.

1 Introduction

Education, in its most profound philosophical sense, is not merely a mechanical transfer of cognitive knowledge but a transformative practice of liberation and consciousness-building. As elucidated by Freire and Habermas, education serves as a vehicle for emancipatory consciousness, liberating individuals from ignorance and moral decay. In the context of Indonesia, a nation grappling with the dual currents of rapid modernization and the preservation of religious identity, the educational landscape faces a formidable challenge: how to cultivate moral integrity (*akhlak*) within the framework of public schooling that is often secular-administrative in nature [1].

The urgency of this inquiry is underscored by the contemporary crisis in student morality. The unchecked infiltration of digital culture has precipitated a shift in values, often leading to an identity crisis among youth. Anwar and Umam [2] argue that

globalization presents a specific crisis for Islamic education, necessitating a reconstruction of pedagogy based on *Adab* (civilized behavior). However, this reconstruction cannot be confined to Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*); it must permeate the state-owned public schools (*Sekolah Menengah Negeri*) where the majority of Indonesian youth are educated.

The phenomenon of moral degradation—manifested in bullying, lack of empathy, and diminishing spiritual awareness—demands a strategic response. Highlight the critical role of school management in mitigating such issues, specifically bullying, through structured intervention. Yet, management alone is insufficient without a core value system. The internalization of Islamic values offers a comprehensive moral compass. This process moves beyond the textual teaching of *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (PAI) as a subject and enters the realm of School Culture—the collective values, beliefs, and habits that characterize a school's atmosphere [3].

Scholars have long debated the efficacy of formal religious education versus cultural habituation. While formal curriculum provides the *logos* (knowledge), school culture provides the *ethos* (character). Sulastrri, Anwar, Suherman, and Cipta [4] propose that modern planning models, even those based on Deep Learning, must be anchored in educational philosophy. Furthermore, the transformative potential of education lies in its ability to emphasize 21st-century competencies while remaining rooted in indigenous spiritual values [5].

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature. While extensive research exists on character education in private Islamic schools, there is a paucity of in-depth narrative studies examining how *public* junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in urban/semi-urban settings like Cianjur effectively internalize these values amidst bureaucratic constraints and diverse student backgrounds. Cianjur, known historically as a City of Santri, provides a unique locus where local wisdom clashes with and adapts to urban modernity.

Drawing upon the concept of *Transformative Education and Kindness-Based Leadership* [6], this article explores the lived experiences of SMP Negeri 3 and SMP Negeri 4 Cianjur. It posits that the internalization of Islamic values is not a passive absorption but an active, dialectical process facilitated by a supportive school culture. The study aims to answer: How is the religious atmosphere engineered in public schools? What are the pedagogical architectures that sustain student morality? By answering these, this research contributes to the global discourse on value integration in state education systems.

2 Method

This This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, specifically chosen to provide a thick description of the internalization phenomena within its real-life context [7]. The locus of the study, SMP Negeri 3 Cianjur and SMP Negeri 4 Cianjur, were selected via purposive sampling due to their distinct reputation for balancing academic achievement with robust religious extracurricular programs in the Cianjur regency.

Data collection was conducted over a period of six months using three primary triangulation techniques:

- a. Participant Observation: The researchers immersed themselves in the school environment, observing daily rituals (morning prayers, Dhuha), classroom interactions, and recess behavior to capture the unspoken culture.
- b. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including Principals, PAI teachers, counseling guidance staff, students, and representatives from the school committee (parents). The questions probed the strategic planning, perceived changes in student behavior, and obstacles faced.
- c. Documentation Study: Analysis of academic regulations, strategic plans (RENSTRA), photos of activities, and student violation records to corroborate verbal data.

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [8], comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure validity and reliability, the study employed source triangulation and member checking, where preliminary findings were presented back to key informants for verification. The narrative is constructed to reflect the phenomenological reality of the school community, moving from descriptive data to theoretical abstraction.

3 Result

The internalization of Islamic values at SMP Negeri 3 and SMP Negeri 4 Cianjur manifests not as a monolithic, top-down program, but rather as a dynamic ecosystem of practices that permeates the entire school culture. The findings indicate that value transmission is not an isolated event but a continuous process embedded in the social and physical fabric of the institutions. These findings are categorized into three major thematic streams: The Architecture of Exemplary Leadership, The Ritualization of Piety, and The Environmental Conditioning of Morality.

3.1. The Architecture of Exemplary Leadership (*Uswah Hasanah*)

The cornerstone of value internalization in both institutions is a fundamental philosophical shift from the concept of teaching—understood merely as the transfer of cognitive knowledge—to being, where the educator embodies the curriculum. In the specific context of SMP Negeri 3 Cianjur, the principal and senior teachers function as the primary agents of *Uswah Hasanah* (the good example). Narrative data collected from the field reveals that the process of internalizing values commences well before the commencement of formal academic instruction. A critical practice observed is the requirement for teachers to station themselves at the school gates to implement the 5S culture (*Senyum, Salam, Sapa, Sopan, Santun* — Smile, Greet, Address, Polite, Courteous). This morning ritual transforms the physical boundary of the school into a psychological threshold; by welcoming students with genuine warmth and respect, teachers validate the students' existence and set a tone of hospitality and ethical conduct for the day.

This pedagogical approach aligns closely with the recent findings of regarding the efficacy of kindness-based leadership in educational settings [4], [6]. Observational data indicates that the pedagogical impact of non-verbal cues often supersedes verbal instruction. For instance, when a teacher is observed engaging in menial acts of service,

such as picking up scattered trash in the hallway, or arriving early to the mosque to prepare for congregational prayers, the moral resonance with students is significantly higher than when similar values are merely dictated in a classroom setting. At SMP Negeri 4, this Teacher as Model strategy is not left to chance but is codified within the teacher's professional code of conduct. The consistency of educators performing the voluntary *Dhuha* prayer alongside students serves to dissolve the traditional hierarchical barrier between the instructor and the instructed. In the shared spiritual space of the mosque, where teachers and students stand shoulder to shoulder, a shared spiritual experience is created that humanizes the authority figures and makes the values they preach tangible and accessible.

However, the implementation of such a high standard of role-modeling is not without its structural and human challenges. Deep interviews with the administration revealed that maintaining spiritual and behavioral consistency across all staff members is an arduous task, given the varying levels of personal motivation and external pressures. Recognizing this potential volatility, the school administration adopted a strategic approach utilizing SWOT analysis to identify these internal weaknesses.[9] Consequently, the schools have institutionalized regular spiritual guidance (*pembinaan mental*) programs specifically for the teachers. This mechanism ensures that the source of the values—the teachers themselves—remains pure and spiritually recharged, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the values transmitted to the students.

3.2. The Ritualization of Piety: From Habit to Character

The second major finding concerns the structural integration of worship into the academic timetable, effectively dismantling the secular dichotomy between study time and pray time. Both schools have engineered a schedule where religious practice provides the rhythm for the academic day. The school day commences with The Morning Spirit, a dedicated fifteen-minute window for *Tadarus Al-Qur'an* (recitation) and the chanting of *Asmaul Husna*. This practice is not merely a ritualistic formality but functions as a deliberate conditioning of the mind and soul. By engaging the cognitive and spiritual faculties through scripture before engaging with secular subjects, students are primed to approach learning with a sense of calm and purpose [10], [11].

Following this morning conditioning, the integration of the *Zhuhr* prayer in congregation (*Jamaah*) serves as the midday anchor of the school's moral curriculum. The mandatory nature of this prayer requires a logistical feat of managing hundreds of students, which in itself becomes a hidden curriculum in discipline, time management, and social organization. The act of forming straight rows (*saf*) teaches students about social equality and solidarity, erasing class distinctions as they stand before God. Furthermore, this ritual practice is intellectually supported by religious literacy programs that include reading Islamic history and ethics, ensuring that the students' piety is informed by knowledge rather than blind imitation.

These synchronized routines create a distinct religious rhythm that governs the school day. The longitudinal observations of this study suggest a specific trajectory of moral development among the students. Initially, for first-year students, participation often stems from forced compliance (*paksaan*), requiring strict supervision and external motivation. However, as the routine is repeated, it evolves into a habit (*kebiasaan*). By the third year, teachers report that the movement towards the mosque becomes automatic and internalized as character (*karakter*). This progression validates the

educational theory posited by Anwar[1], which frames education as a practice of liberation. In this context, the disciplined structure of the school liberates the student from the lethargy of the ego and the chaos of adolescence, guiding them toward the self-discipline necessary for a mature spiritual life.

3.3. Environmental Conditioning and Policy Integration

Beyond human agency and ritual schedules, the physical and regulatory environment of the schools acts as the third teacher in the internalization process. The very walls of the institutions are utilized as pedagogical tools, adorned with calligraphy and motivational quotes that emphasize honesty, cleanliness, and diligence. This environmental design is deeply rooted in the concept of *Ecopedagogy*, where monotheistic values (*Tauhid*) are integrated with environmental awareness, as emphasized. This theoretical framework is operationalized through programs such as Clean Friday (*Jumat Bersih*). By explicitly linking these cleaning activities to the prophetic tradition that Cleanliness is part of Faith, the schools elevate environmental stewardship from a chore to an act of worship, thereby instilling a sense of ecological responsibility framed within religious duty [12].

The impact of this environmental and policy conditioning is empirically observable in the student disciplinary data. Records from both schools indicate a consistent downward trend in major violations, such as brawls and truancy, over the last three years. Perhaps the most significant indicator of internalized morality is the Honesty Canteen (*Kantin Kejujuran*) experiment. Despite facing initial operational hurdles, the increasing rate of payment compliance signals a profound shift in the students' moral locus of control. The canteen, which operates without a cashier, forces students to engage in internal moral monitoring. The act of paying for goods when no one is watching demonstrates that the values of honesty have transitioned from being externally enforced rules to internally held convictions, validating the efficacy of the school's comprehensive ecosystem of value internalization.

4 Discussion

The findings from SMP Negeri 3 and SMP Negeri 4 Cianjur illustrate a successful implementation of a holistic educational model that transcends the dichotomy of public versus religious schooling. The effective internalization of Islamic values here supports the proposition by Anwar and Umam [5] regarding the reconstruction of Adab-based pedagogy. The schools have successfully created a micro-society where Islamic values are the dominant currency of social interaction.

The centrality of the teacher as a role model (*Uswah Hasanah*) confirms the resilience of traditional Islamic pedagogy even within a modern state school framework. Unlike the western secular model which often detaches the teacher's private morality from their professional competency, these schools view the teacher's spiritual standing as integral to their pedagogical authority. This aligns with the notion of transformative education [5], [13], [14], where the educator is a catalyst for the student's 21st-century competency and spiritual depth.

Furthermore, the integration of *Ecopedagogy* within the school culture represents a progressive step. By linking environmental stewardship to *Tauhid*, the schools are producing students who are not only pious ritually but socially and environmentally responsible. This addresses the need for high-order thinking skills in sustainable development [15].

However, the study also highlights the fragility of this culture in the face of the digital era. As noted by Ulfah and Anwar [12], [16], digital innovation is a double-edged sword. While the school culture is strong, the virtual culture students inhabit post-school hours competes for their moral allegiance. The friction between the disciplined school environment and the permissive digital world is the new frontier for these educators. The Crisis in Islamic Education mentioned is palpable here; globalization threatens to erode local values unless the internalization process is strong enough to create an internal filter within the student [17]–[19].

The synergy between school, family, and community remains the critical variable. Where parental support is weak, the internalization process stutters. This validates the findings of Helmendoni [20] and Kurnia [21] regarding the necessity of school-family alignment.

5 Conclusion

The study concludes that internalizing Islamic values in public schools requires a comprehensive, systemic approach that goes beyond curricular instruction. SMP Negeri 3 and SMP Negeri 4 Cianjur demonstrate that *School Culture* is the most effective medium for moral formation. The success relies on three pillars: the spiritual integrity of the teaching staff (Leadership), the consistency of religious rituals (Habitation), and the enforcement of value-based regulations (System).

While the schools have succeeded in creating a religious enclave, the challenge remains in sustaining these values against the digital onslaught. Future strategies must involve more aggressive integration of technology in moral monitoring and a stronger Parenting School program to align domestic and scholastic values. Education, as a practice of liberation, must eventually liberate the student to be a moral agent independent of the school's supervision.

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