



# Shaping Character Through Faith: Evaluating Religious Culture Reinforcement in Schools

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## ABSTRACT

*This study evaluates the reinforcement of religious culture in schools, focusing on the alignment between school vision and mission, the methods used to instill religious values, and the impact on student character development. A qualitative case study approach involved observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Data were collected from 15 participants, including school administrators, teachers, and students, selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and insights regarding religious culture reinforcement. The results indicate that the school's vision and mission strongly emphasize religious character-building, which is reflected in structured religious activities such as Quran recitations, congregational prayers, and religious discussions. Teachers played a crucial role in modeling religious behavior, reinforcing values through daily interactions. However, student engagement varied; some actively participated while others followed religious programs passively. Additionally, while religious reinforcement positively influenced student discipline, honesty, and respect, some students struggled to maintain these values outside the school environment, highlighting the need for more intrinsic motivation and real-world applications of religious teachings. The study suggests that enhancing interactive religious learning methods, strengthening teacher training programs, and collaborating with families and communities can improve religious culture reinforcement. Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of religious education beyond school settings. This study provides empirical insights into the effectiveness and challenges of religious culture reinforcement in schools, offering practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and researchers.*

## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral and ethical values (Dewi et al., 2023; Purwaningsih, 2024; Tiara Ramadhani et al., 2024). In many societies, schools serve as centers of knowledge and environments that nurture religious values, ensuring students develop a strong moral foundation (Akmansyah et al., 2024; Anisah, 2023; Lahmar, 2020). In Indonesia, religious culture reinforcement is an essential aspect of education, as emphasized in the National Education System Law (UU SISDIKNAS No. 20 of 2003), which states that education aims to develop students' potential in faith,

devotion, and noble character ([Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003](#)). Schools implement religious values through various activities such as daily prayers, Quran recitation, religious discussions, and ethical behavioral training ([Jannah et al., 2023](#); [Rohimah, 2024](#); [Yulianto & Darmawan, 2024](#)). These practices contribute to fostering a school environment rooted in religious principles.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist in ensuring the effectiveness of religious culture reinforcement in schools. The growing influence of modernization, a decline in student engagement, and inconsistencies in implementation raise concerns about the long-term impact of these programs ([Ali, 2023](#); [Muhsin et al., 2024](#); [Sessions & Williams, 2024](#)). Evaluating how well religious values are reinforced in schools is crucial to understanding their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. This study focuses on assessing the alignment between school vision, learning experiences, and student outcomes. The research aims to determine how religious culture programs shape students' attitudes and behaviors by examining these aspects.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of religious culture in education. According to [Bucky Wibawa Karya Guna et al. \(2024\)](#), strengthening religious values in schools contributes to developing students' moral and spiritual character, making them more responsible and ethical in society. [Rukmana et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasize that religious education must go beyond rituals and include character-building elements that integrate values into students' daily interactions. Similarly, [Suratin et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that effective religious reinforcement programs should involve classroom teachings and school-wide initiatives that create a holistic religious atmosphere. These perspectives underline the need for a comprehensive approach to religious culture reinforcement, ensuring that students internalize values beyond theoretical knowledge.

The effectiveness of religious culture reinforcement also depends on the methods used by schools. [Watung et al. \(2023\)](#) highlight the role of school leadership in maintaining and developing religious programs, arguing that a strong vision from school administrators can significantly influence the effectiveness of cultural reinforcement efforts. Meanwhile, [Sihono & Cahyo \(2024\)](#) emphasize that students' and teachers' active participation in religious activities strengthens their sense of belonging and commitment to these values. Studies by [Wahid \(2023\)](#) and [Ilham et al. \(2023\)](#) show that structured programs, such as collective worship, religious discussions, and character-based extracurricular activities, directly impact students' ethical development. These findings suggest that reinforcement efforts must be carefully planned and consistently executed to yield meaningful results.

However, while previous studies have explored religious culture reinforcement, few have systematically evaluated its effectiveness through structured assessment frameworks. Most existing research focuses on implementation strategies rather than measuring the actual impact on students' behavior and character development. Additionally, many studies have been conducted in Islamic or higher education institutions, whereas religious culture reinforcement in public junior high schools remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating religious culture reinforcement in a public junior high school setting, examining its implementation and alignment with the school's vision, and its impact on students' moral development.

This study aims to (1) examine how well the school's vision and mission align with the goal of religious culture reinforcement, (2) analyze the methods and experiences used to instill religious values in students, and (3) evaluate the outcomes of religious culture reinforcement in student character development. The findings are expected to contribute to the ongoing discourse on character education and religious culture in schools, providing educators, policymakers, and administrators with insights on refining strategies to reinforce religious culture. Schools can play a more significant role in fostering a generation that embodies strong religious and ethical values by ensuring meaningful student engagement and consistent implementation.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach ([Elliott & Timulak, 2021](#)) to evaluate the reinforcement of religious culture in junior high schools. A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how religious culture is implemented, how stakeholders perceive it, and how it impacts students. Focusing on real-life experiences and contextual factors provides a rich and holistic understanding of religious culture reinforcement in the school setting.

### **Research Design**

This research adopts a case study design, which is widely used in qualitative research to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context ([Halkias et al., 2022](#)). A case study approach is particularly useful when the boundaries between the subject and its environment are not clearly defined, as it allows for a detailed examination of processes, challenges, and outcomes. In this study, the case being examined is a public junior high school that actively implements religious culture reinforcement programs. Focusing on one specific school, this research aims to provide comprehensive insights into the strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of religious culture reinforcement in an educational setting.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted in a public junior high school where religious culture reinforcement is part of the school's daily activities. This school was selected because it integrates religious values into its educational system, making it a suitable environment to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs.

The total number of participants in this study was 15 individuals, consisting of 3 school administrators, five teachers, and seven students. The school administrators, including the principal and vice-principal, were involved as they oversaw school policies and ensured the implementation of religious programs. Teachers, particularly those who teach religious subjects or are involved in religious activities, were selected because they directly reinforce religious culture among students. Students who actively participated in religious programs were also included, as their perspectives and experiences provide valuable insights into how these programs shape their behavior and character.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, meaning they were chosen based on their relevance to the study's objectives ([Campbell et al., 2020](#)). This method ensures that the data collected comes from individuals directly engaged in religious culture reinforcement, allowing for a more meaningful and focused analysis.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of religious culture reinforcement, data were collected using three primary techniques:



**Figure 1. Data Collection Techniques**

Observations were conducted in classrooms, prayer rooms, and other areas where religious activities occur. The researcher documented daily religious practices, such as morning prayers, Quran recitations, and religious greetings. Student engagement in religious programs was also observed, particularly in terms of their level of participation and attitudes towards these activities. Additionally, the researcher examined the overall religious atmosphere in the school, including the presence of religious symbols, posters, and policies promoting ethical behavior. Observations were non-participatory, meaning the researcher did not interfere with the activities but recorded what was

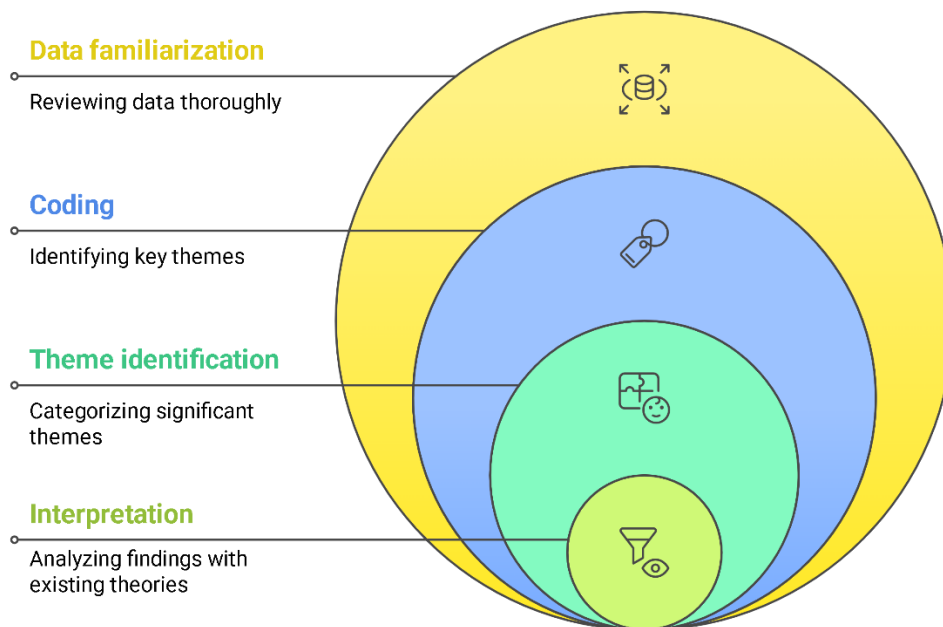
happening in a natural setting. This method provided firsthand evidence of how religious culture is reinforced in daily school life.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth perspectives from administrators, teachers, and students. The administrators were interviewed to understand how school policies support religious culture reinforcement. Teachers were asked about strategies to integrate religious values into their teaching and interactions with students. Meanwhile, students were encouraged to share their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward religious programs in school. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into interesting responses while maintaining a structured framework.

In addition to observations and interviews, document analysis was conducted to examine school policies and records related to religious culture reinforcement. The school’s vision and mission statement were reviewed to assess how religious values are incorporated into its official objectives. Curriculum and lesson plans were analyzed to determine how religious teachings are integrated into various subjects. Reports on religious activities, such as attendance records for prayers, religious events, and disciplinary records related to ethical behavior, were also examined. Document analysis provided a historical and policy-based perspective on religious culture reinforcement, complementing the findings from observations and interviews.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the data. The analysis process followed these steps:



**Figure 2. Data Analysis**

First, data familiarization was conducted by thoroughly reviewing observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents. Then, coding was performed to categorize key themes related to religious culture reinforcement, such as student engagement, school policies, and teacher involvement. Once the data were coded, the next step was identifying significant and recurring themes that helped structure the understanding of how religious culture is reinforced. Finally, these themes were interpreted in terms of existing theories and previous research on religious culture in education. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, triangulation was used by cross-checking data from different sources, including observations, interviews, and document analysis. This process helped validate the findings and reduce bias by confirming that conclusions were consistent across multiple forms of evidence.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Ethical approval was obtained before conducting the study, and all participants provided informed consent after being informed of the research objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants' identities were anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and all data were securely stored. Additionally, special care was taken to ensure that religious beliefs and personal viewpoints were respected throughout the research.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Alignment of School Vision and Mission with Religious Culture Reinforcement***

The findings indicate that the school's vision and mission emphasize character building through religious values. Document analysis of the school's official vision and mission statement highlights the goal of producing students who are academically competent, religiously devoted, and morally upright. The school's vision states:

*"To nurture a generation that excels in science and technology while upholding religious and ethical values."*

This commitment is further reflected in the school's policies, which mandate daily religious activities and integrate Islamic values into student life. Interviews with school administrators confirmed this institutional commitment. One school administrator stated:

*"Our school's vision and mission emphasize faith-based education. Every student is expected to develop a strong religious character, so we integrate religious activities into curricular and extracurricular programs."*

Observations supported these claims, as religious messages were displayed throughout the school. Posters promoting ethical behavior based on Islamic teachings, Quranic verses about honesty and discipline, and motivational messages encouraging students to uphold religious values were present in classrooms, hallways, and common areas. Morning assemblies included reminders about the importance of religious conduct, reinforcing the alignment between the school's vision and its implementation. However, despite these efforts, not all students fully internalized these values. Interviews with teachers revealed that while the school promotes religious culture reinforcement, some students participate only because they are required to, rather than out of genuine commitment. One teacher noted:

*"Some students follow the religious programs because it is part of the school routine, but when outside school, their behavior does not always reflect these values."*

### ***Methods and Experiences Used to Instill Religious Values in Students***

The study found that the school employs a combination of structured activities, habitual practices, and teacher modeling to instill religious values. Formal religious education is integrated into the curriculum through Islamic Studies courses, where students learn about Islamic teachings, moral values, and Quranic interpretations. Document analysis of the school's curriculum revealed that religious education is allocated four hours per week, covering theology, Quranic memorization, and ethical teachings.

Observations indicated that students begin their day with collective prayers and Quran reading sessions, reinforcing religious discipline. In the school's daily schedule, the first 15 minutes of each morning are dedicated to *tadarrus al-Quran* (group Quran recitation). Teachers supervise and correct students' recitations during this time, ensuring proper pronunciation and comprehension. Additionally, Friday prayer activities involve student-led sermons, where selected students deliver short Islamic lectures, helping them build confidence in religious expression.

Interviews with students provided further insights into their experiences. One student shared:

*"Reading the Quran daily helps me feel calmer and more focused in class. It's a good habit that I also try to continue at home."*

Another student, however, admitted that participation in religious activities was sometimes passive:

*"I join the school prayers and Quran recitation, but don't always understand their meaning. Sometimes, I follow along because everyone else is doing it."*

Teachers are crucial in reinforcing religious culture by serving as role models. Observations showed that teachers consistently used Islamic greetings (Assalamu'alaikum), encouraged ethical behavior, and reminded students to practice Islamic teachings in daily interactions. Teachers also incorporated religious lessons into non-religious subjects. For example, a science teacher was observed relating environmental conservation to Islamic teachings on stewardship (khalifah) over nature. Despite these structured programs, challenges exist in maintaining student engagement. Teachers noted that some students show enthusiasm for religious activities, while others participate merely to comply with school rules. One teacher expressed concern:

*"We need more interactive methods to engage students in religious learning. Some see it as just another school requirement rather than a personal value."*

### **Outcomes of Religious Culture Reinforcement on Student Character Development**

The study revealed positive behavioral changes among students due to religious culture reinforcement. Teachers and administrators reported that students who consistently engage in religious activities exhibit improved discipline, honesty, and respect toward peers and teachers. One teacher noted:

*"Students who actively participate in religious programs tend to be more respectful, punctual, and responsible in their studies. We see a clear difference between those who take religious values seriously and those who do not."*

Observations also supported these claims. During classroom interactions, students who regularly attended Quran recitations and prayers demonstrated better focus, more patience in discussions, and respectful communication with teachers. During break times, some students were also observed engaging in self-initiated religious discussions, such as sharing interpretations of Quranic verses or discussing ethical dilemmas from an Islamic perspective.

Students themselves acknowledged the impact of religious culture reinforcement. One student stated:

*"Since joining the school's religious programs, I feel more aware of my actions. I try to be honest and respectful, not just in school but also at home."*

However, challenges remain in ensuring these values are internalized consistently across all students. Document analysis of disciplinary records revealed that while dishonesty and disrespectful behavior had decreased over time, some students still struggled with maintaining religious discipline outside structured activities. One teacher commented:

*"We see good behavior during religious activities, but outside of that, some students still engage in negative behaviors, like inappropriate language or skipping prayers when not supervised."*

Another challenge is that some students follow religious practices only because of school regulations rather than personal conviction. A student admitted:

*"I follow the rules here, but outside school, I don't always do the same things. Maintaining these habits is hard when my friends outside school don't do them."*

These findings suggest that while religious culture reinforcement positively influences student character, its long-term impact depends on the students' willingness to internalize and practice these values beyond school settings.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Alignment of School Vision and Mission with Religious Culture Reinforcement***

The findings indicate that the school's vision and mission strongly emphasize religious character development, aligning with national education policies promoting students' moral and spiritual growth. The integration of religious values into official school policies reflects the broader framework of character education as outlined in Indonesia's National Education System Law (UU SISDIKNAS No. 20 of 2003), which mandates schools to instill religious and ethical values in students ([Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003](#)). This finding is consistent with a previous study, which argues that schools play a central role in fostering religious identity by embedding faith-based principles into their institutional goals ([Bucky Wibawa Karya Guna et al., 2024](#); [Ginting & Salim, 2024](#); [Umar et al., 2024](#)). Document analysis further confirmed this commitment, as the school's vision statement explicitly highlights the goal of producing students who excel academically while maintaining strong religious and moral integrity.

Despite the strong institutional commitment, the study found variations in how students internalize these values. While teachers and administrators expressed confidence that religious culture reinforcement was a fundamental aspect of the school environment, student engagement levels differed. Interviews revealed that some students enthusiastically participated in religious programs, while others engaged passively, merely following school regulations. It supports the previous studies' argument that religious education should go beyond formal requirements and focus on meaningful engagement that fosters intrinsic motivation in students ([Ilham et al., 2023](#); [Puspitasari et al., 2024](#); [Wahid, 2023](#)). Schools must therefore adopt strategies that encourage deeper personal reflection and voluntary participation, ensuring that religious values become an integral part of students' identities rather than mere institutional obligations ([Harmaini et al., 2025](#); [Mappasanda et al., 2025](#); [Muhsin et al., 2024](#)).

Another issue observed was the discrepancy between school-based religious reinforcement and external influences. While students adhered to religious practices within the school environment, some admitted that they did not maintain these habits consistently outside school settings. This finding aligns with previous studies, who suggests that character formation is often influenced by social context and peer environment ([Muzakki & Nurdin, 2022](#); [Sudarman et al., 2025](#); [Suratin et al., 2023](#)). To address this, schools could strengthen collaboration with parents, religious leaders, and community organizations to reinforce religious values beyond the classroom ([Anisah, 2023](#); [Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024](#); [Hamid et al., 2024](#)). Providing students with opportunities to apply religious principles in real-life situations, such as community service projects and youth mentorship programs, may help bridge the gap between institutionalized religious education and sustained character development ([Aderibigbe et al., 2023](#); [Khansa et al., 2024](#); [Kholidah, 2022](#)).

### ***Methods and Experiences Used to Instill Religious Values in Students***

The study found that religious values are reinforced through structured activities, habitual practices, and teacher role modeling. The effectiveness of these approaches aligns with the previous argument that school leadership plays a crucial role in shaping student character through well-structured programs ([Hanafiah et al., 2024](#); [Wahyuni et al., 2024](#)). Daily Quran recitations, collective prayers, and student-led religious discussions provide an experiential learning environment, which is more effective than passive religious instruction. This finding also aligns with previous studies, which suggest that active participation in religious activities fosters a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to faith-based values ([Amin, 2024](#); [Peucker, 2020](#)).

However, despite the structured nature of these programs, student participation levels varied. While some students actively engaged in religious activities, others were more passive, participating simply because the school mandated it. It aligns with previous study findings, arguing that religious

programs must cater to diverse student motivations ([Sihono & Cahyo, 2024](#); [Watung et al., 2023](#)). Interactive learning methods, such as group discussions, storytelling, and role-playing religious scenarios, could enhance engagement and make religious education more meaningful for students.

Another key factor in religious reinforcement is teacher influence. Observations revealed that teachers who modeled religious behavior, such as using Islamic greetings and incorporating ethical discussions into non-religious subjects, were more effective in encouraging students to practice religious values. It supports previous study findings that teacher role modeling significantly impacts student behavior, as students are likelier to emulate behaviors they observe consistently in their environment ([Pujianti & Nugraha, 2024](#); [Sari et al., 2025](#)). Schools should therefore invest in teacher training programs that equip educators with strategies to integrate religious values across all subjects and daily interactions.

### ***Outcomes of Religious Culture Reinforcement on Student Character Development***

The study found that religious culture reinforcement positively impacted student character development, particularly in areas of discipline, honesty, and respect for others. This finding is consistent with previous studies, who argues that religious education plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral and ethical behavior ([Dewi et al., 2023](#); [Purwaningsih, 2024](#); [Tiara Ramadhani et al., 2024](#)). Observations showed that students who actively participated in religious activities exhibited greater patience, improved focus in class, and stronger interpersonal relationships, supporting previous studies' claim that religious engagement enhances social harmony and emotional well-being ([Kader, 2021](#); [McLaren et al., 2021](#)).

However, while many students improved their moral character, some struggled to maintain these behaviors outside school. Teachers noted that some students followed religious practices mainly due to school policies rather than personal conviction, making it uncertain whether these values would persist beyond their time at school. This challenge aligns with previous studies, who argues that the impact of religious education is often context-dependent, meaning that students' adherence to religious values may fluctuate depending on their external environment ([Aripin & Nana Meily Nurdiansyah, 2022](#); [Jannah et al., 2023](#); [Rukmana et al., 2024](#)).

Schools should consider expanding their religious culture reinforcement beyond structured activities and real-world applications to address this issue. Encouraging students to apply religious principles in community service projects or involving parents in reinforcing religious values at home may help bridge the gap between institutionalized religious education and long-term character development. Schools can also implement self-reflection exercises, where students assess their moral growth and set personal goals for religious practice beyond school settings.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious culture reinforcement in schools plays a significant role in shaping student character. The school's vision and mission strongly emphasize religious values reflected in structured programs such as Quran recitations, congregational prayers, and religious discussions. Teachers also play a critical role in modeling religious behavior, reinforcing these values through daily interactions. However, while many students actively engage in religious programs, others participate passively, often out of obligation rather than personal conviction. Furthermore, a gap remains between school-based religious reinforcement and students' ability to maintain these values outside the school environment. It suggests that while religious culture reinforcement positively influences student character, its long-term impact depends on fostering intrinsic motivation rather than mere adherence to school policies.

These findings have important implications for educators, policymakers, and school administrators. Schools should enhance student engagement by integrating interactive and experiential learning methods into religious education, such as group discussions, storytelling, and real-world applications of faith-based values. Additionally, teacher training programs should be strengthened to ensure educators effectively model religious behavior and integrate religious principles into various subjects. Collaboration between schools, families, and religious communities should also be reinforced to provide students with consistent moral guidance beyond school settings. Lastly, future research should consider long-term studies on the sustainability of religious culture reinforcement, examining

how these values persist into adulthood. By implementing these strategies, religious education can move beyond institutional obligation and transform students' moral and ethical character.

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