



Strengthening Students' Character Through Islamic Education Practices: A Sustainable Model of Values-Based School Culture in Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine how Islamic Education practices can strengthen students' character and contribute to a sustainable values-based school culture in an Indonesian educational context. The research focuses on identifying the core activities, pedagogical interactions, and school-wide routines that shape students' moral discipline, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness as long-term foundations of character sustainability.

Method: A qualitative field-study design was employed, involving systematic observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis conducted over several weeks at a secondary school implementing structured Islamic Education-based character programs. Data were analyzed through iterative coding, thematic categorization, and cross-validation to ensure interpretive rigor.

Findings: The study found that daily religious routines such as greetings, prayer recitations, collective worship, and teacher-modeled behaviors play a consistent role in reinforcing habits of discipline, respect, empathy, and communal cooperation. Teachers' moral exemplarity, continuous supervision, corrective feedback, and structured habituation strategies were identified as central mechanisms shaping students' ethical dispositions. The findings further show that these practices collectively create a school culture that sustains prosocial behavior, cultivates ecological humility, strengthens interpersonal harmony, and nurtures long-term moral resilience.

Significance: The study contributes a conceptual and empirical model of sustainable character formation rooted in Islamic pedagogical values, offering a culturally grounded alternative to global character-education frameworks. Its insights highlight how routine religious practices, when systematically organized, serve not only as spiritual rituals but as long-term mechanisms for building ethical sustainability in schools. This research provides practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to integrate character education with culturally relevant and socially sustainable learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has gained global relevance as schools confront increasingly complex moral, social, and cultural challenges in contemporary society. Digital transformation, shifting community values, and the intensification of academic pressures have encouraged educators to develop more sustainable character-building models rather than relying solely on ritual-based approaches. In Indonesia, Islamic Education has historically provided a moral foundation for character formation, yet contemporary social changes demand a more systematic and school-wide interpretation of this role. Recent studies show that interdisciplinary Islamic Education learning can continuously shape students' moral awareness through routine interaction and reflective practices (Masdin et al., 2025). However, these practices have not always been

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conceptualized as part of a long-term sustainability framework that influences the broader school culture. For this reason, it becomes essential to reexamine how daily religious routines, teacher modeling, and school norms contribute to character that is stable and enduring. The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand the sustainability dimension of Islamic-based character formation so schools can cultivate cultures that are both normatively grounded and pedagogically transformative.

Developments in Islamic Education research further demonstrate that the integration of curriculum, cultural values, and habituation strategies plays a significant role in shaping students' ethical behavior. Studies on Islamic boarding schools highlight how institutional systems and Islamic values reinforce discipline, empathy, and social responsibility among learners (Firmansyah et al., 2025). However, public schools that incorporate Islamic Education often lack the structured and continuous habituation strategies found in boarding-school environments. This contrast creates a gap in understanding how Islamic values might be adapted to promote a sustainable school culture in diverse educational settings. Amid increasing demands to strengthen students' moral capacities, schools require models that effectively link religio-ethical values with classroom instruction and daily routines. This research therefore becomes vital in examining how Islamic Education practices function within the ecology of school culture. The present study seeks to clarify how a sustainable character formation process can emerge from Islamic pedagogical and institutional practices.

At the same time, awareness of value-based school cultures has gained renewed attention across contemporary educational studies. The integration of Islamic Education with multicultural principles, for example, has been shown to enhance tolerance, empathy, and social harmony within classroom communities (Sirojuddin et al., 2025). Additional research has demonstrated that culturally grounded character-development modules can strengthen value internalization among elementary students (Umar et al., 2025). Yet many of these studies have not positioned sustainability as a central analytical feature and often focus merely on specific programs rather than holistic character ecosystems. This research becomes important because it centers the idea of character sustainability as an outcome of consistent religious routines, teacher exemplarity, and supportive social interactions. In doing so, it responds directly to the need for a deeper understanding of how Islamic Education contributes to long-term moral resilience in schools. The study therefore addresses an underexplored dimension of character formation within Islamic educational settings.

The rationale for this study is grounded in the need to explain how Islamic Education functions not only as a curricular subject but also as a central mechanism shaping a school's value-based culture. In many modern school settings, Islamic Education is treated as a formal requirement rather than as a transformative moral process capable of developing long-term character sustainability. Existing research shows that teacher exemplarity, religious routines, and moral interaction patterns play meaningful roles in shaping students' ethical dispositions, yet these processes remain insufficiently conceptualized as interconnected components of sustainable school culture (Mulyani et al., 2025). Furthermore, schools frequently apply habituation practices in fragmented ways, resulting in character interventions that lack consistency or cultural depth. This study is therefore necessary to map the structural elements through which Islamic Education practices operate as a coherent system of value transmission. By articulating this system, the research aims to contribute new conceptual clarity to the field of character education and expand discussions on sustainability within value-based schooling.

Ultimately, the study provides a theoretical foundation for developing culturally relevant and institutionally grounded models of character sustainability.

Recent literature on Islamic Education demonstrates that it holds substantial potential for character formation, particularly when integrated with cultural, environmental, and collaborative learning components. For example, integrating Islamic values with environmental programs has been shown to promote discipline, moral awareness, and ecological responsibility among senior high school students (Amrullah et al., 2025). Likewise, research on religious moderation reveals that reflective and inclusive governance in Islamic educational management can strengthen students' tolerance and social justice orientation (Chotimah et al., 2020). Studies on value internalization at the elementary level emphasize that moral habituation must be conducted repeatedly and meaningfully to produce long-term behavioral impacts (Wasehudin et al., 2024). In addition, research exploring traditional Islamic boarding schools shows that localized cultural values can effectively reinforce moral reasoning and ethical sensitivity (Islamic et al., 2024). Together, these findings show that Islamic Education contributes significantly to shaping students' moral capacities, although the sustainability dimension of character formation is seldom highlighted explicitly.

Complementary literature provides deeper insights into how school culture functions as a consistent ecosystem for shaping character. Research in Islamic educational management suggests that moral habituation can help develop a strong and cohesive school culture that supports long-term character outcomes (Sulhan & Hakim, 2023). Narrative-based religious instruction has also been shown to reinforce emotional and spiritual development by connecting moral concepts to lived experience (Isik & Akbari, 2024). Meanwhile, curriculum modules grounded in religious moderation have demonstrated potential for fostering deep and critical internalization of values (Kosim et al., 2024). Studies conducted in modern Islamic boarding schools likewise note that transformative Islamic pedagogy contributes to ethical adaptability and sustained religious identity formation (Jusubaidi et al., 2024). These studies collectively affirm that Islamic Education possesses structural and cultural elements capable of supporting character sustainability when applied through a coherent and consistent school culture.

Although numerous studies discuss the role of Islamic Education in character formation, most focus on evaluating programs, curriculum implementation, or specific classroom practices rather than examining character as a sustainability process embedded in school culture. Existing research does not sufficiently explore how daily religious routines, teacher exemplarity, and social interactions function simultaneously as long-term moral mechanisms. Furthermore, many studies focus on short-term behavioral outcomes rather than understanding how these outcomes evolve into sustainable cultural patterns. The sustainability dimension of character, therefore, remains underdeveloped in current literature despite its relevance to educational reforms. In addition, the connection between Islamic pedagogical practices and value-based institutional systems has not been analyzed comprehensively. This leaves a significant gap in understanding how Islamic Education can be conceptualized as a holistic and sustainable model of character development. The present study seeks to address this gap by situating Islamic Education within the broader ecology of school culture.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Islamic Education practices function as sustainable mechanisms of character formation within school culture. The study seeks to map the relationships among religious routines, teacher exemplarity, social interactions, and the internalization of moral values among students. Its primary aim is to develop a conceptual model

of character sustainability grounded in Islamic pedagogical principles that can be applied across diverse school settings. The study also intends to identify key elements that enable Islamic values to operate as foundational drivers of school culture. Additionally, the research examines how value-based routines contribute to character transformation that is stable and enduring rather than temporary. This study is designed to provide both theoretical and practical contributions for strengthening character education in Indonesia. Consequently, it offers a scholarly foundation for building more sustainable, culturally grounded school cultures based on Islamic Education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative field-study design to explore how Islamic Education practices function as sustainable mechanisms for shaping students' character within the ecology of school culture. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a deep and context-sensitive interpretation of values, routines, and interactions that quantitative methods may fail to capture. The design follows a naturalistic inquiry framework in which phenomena are examined in their real-life settings rather than through controlled experimental manipulation. This approach aligns with prior studies that have examined the cultural and pedagogical dimensions of Islamic Education in authentic school environments (Assalihee et al., 2024; Succarie, 2024). The study also adopts characteristics of case-study methodology to provide a holistic understanding of the school's value-based culture. This design makes it possible to trace how daily Islamic routines, teacher exemplarity, and social dynamics interact to produce sustainable character outcomes. The use of prolonged engagement in the field further strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Humphreys et al., 2021; Lim, 2025). Overall, the selected design is consistent with the study's objective to interpret Islamic Education as a lived cultural process rather than a static curricular component.

Participants

The participants in this research consisted of school administrators, Islamic Education teachers, and students who were directly involved in routine Islamic practices and character-building activities. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the participants were those most knowledgeable and experienced with the school's Islamic Education culture. This approach is supported by existing research that emphasizes the importance of informed participants in studies related to religious and character-based educational environments (Fahmi et al., 2024; Nuryadi et al., 2025). The participating school was deliberately selected because it integrates religious routines into daily learning, making it a suitable context for examining character sustainability. All participants were informed of the study's goals, ethical procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymized identifiers to protect the privacy of all contributors. The sampling structure allowed for triangulation across perspectives, since teachers, administrators, and students experience character formation processes differently. This composition provided a balanced and multi-voiced understanding of how Islamic Education supports sustainable character development.

Instrument

Three primary instruments were used to collect data: structured observation protocols, semi-structured interview guides, and document analysis checklists. The observation instrument captured daily religious routines including prayers, greetings, teacher modeling behavior, and

value-based interactions occurring across the school environment. Observational items were designed to identify behavioral patterns that previous research has shown to contribute to value internalization and moral habituation (Han, 2024; Iqbal, 2024). The interview instrument focused on eliciting participants' perceptions regarding how Islamic Education influences their character formation and daily interactions. These interviews allowed participants to articulate how values are enacted, understood, and transmitted within the school context. The document analysis instrument examined school policies, lesson plans, value statements, and routine activity schedules that reflect the integration of Islamic values. All instruments were validated through expert consultation to ensure alignment with the study's sustainability-oriented character framework. Together, these tools allowed for comprehensive, multi-angle data collection consistent with qualitative rigor.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using a multi-stage thematic analysis approach that enabled systematic identification of recurring patterns related to sustainable character formation. The first stage involved open coding of observation notes, interview transcripts, and school documents to identify initial value-laden concepts. This was followed by axial coding, during which related themes were grouped to map connections among routines, teacher practices, and cultural structures (Chen et al., 2024; Finkelstein et al., 2021). Selective coding was then used to integrate these themes into a coherent explanatory model of sustainable character development. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison techniques were applied to ensure analytic consistency and reduce researcher bias (Lim, 2025; Oeberst & Imhoff, 2023). Triangulation across data sources strengthened the trustworthiness of findings and allowed the identification of broader cultural mechanisms within the school. Member checking with participants was conducted to verify interpretations and improve the accuracy of the emerging themes. The final stage of analysis involved linking the themes to theoretical constructs in Islamic Education and sustainability to produce a comprehensive conceptual model. This analysis plan enabled the study to generate deep, context-rich insights into how Islamic practices contribute to long-term character sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Daily Religious Routines and Character Sustainability

The findings show that daily religious routines function as consistent mechanisms supporting long-term character formation within the school culture. Students participated in structured practices such as morning greetings, short prayers, Qur'an reading, and group worship, all of which created repeated exposure to value-laden behaviors. These routines were observed to cultivate discipline, respect, and emotional awareness, especially when teachers modeled the behaviors with sincerity and consistency. The integration of routines into various parts of the school day demonstrated that Islamic values were embedded not only in formal lessons but also in the rhythm of daily student life. These routines also served as checkpoints that encouraged students to monitor their own behavior and align it with expected moral standards. Students reported that regular exposure to these activities helped them internalize core values such as humility, cooperation, and responsibility. Observational data further showed that routines encouraged a stable moral atmosphere within classrooms and common areas. As a

result, daily religious practices emerged as an important foundation for sustaining character development across the entire school environment.

Table 1. Daily Islamic Routines Observed in the School

Core Value	Observable Practice	Frequency	Teacher Role
Discipline	Morning greetings, prayer before lessons, orderly routines	Daily	Modeling consistency and reinforcing behavioral expectations
Respect	Polite communication, honoring elders, classroom etiquette	Daily	Demonstrating respectful speech and correcting misconduct
Spiritual Awareness	Qur'an recitation, dhuha prayer, reflection sessions	Weekly	Leading rituals and providing spiritual encouragement
Empathy	Peer support, sharing materials, cooperative interactions	Daily	Guiding social behavior and nurturing emotional sensitivity
Responsibility	Task assignments, maintaining cleanliness, class duties	Daily	Supervising tasks and giving constructive accountability cues

The table summarizes observed Islamic routines and the moral impacts they contribute to. Each routine showed a recurring influence on discipline, respect, emotional stability, and spiritual awareness. These elements support long-term character sustainability through repeated moral reinforcement.

Teacher Exemplarity and Social Interaction Dynamics

Observations revealed that teacher exemplarity played a central role in sustaining character development through daily interactions. Teachers consistently demonstrated politeness, patience, and respectful communication, which students frequently imitated during peer interactions. Interviews indicated that students perceived their teachers as moral anchors who shaped the moral tone of the classroom environment. This finding aligns with the idea that value transmission is more effective when modeled consistently rather than merely instructed through formal lessons. Teachers' involvement in supervising routines also strengthened accountability and reinforced the significance of religious practices. Social interactions between students were significantly more positive in classrooms where teachers actively embodied Islamic values. Students frequently attributed their behavioral changes to the influence of teacher modeling, indicating strong internalization. These combined observations suggest that teacher exemplarity serves as a catalytic mechanism for sustaining moral culture in the school.

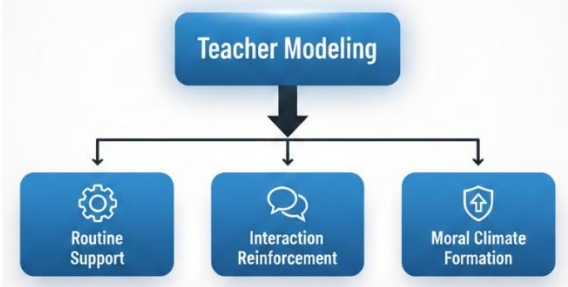


Figure 1. Conceptual Illustration of Teacher Influence

The figure illustrates how teacher modeling creates pathways that reinforce routines, shape interaction patterns, and foster a stable moral climate. These pathways contribute collectively to sustainable character development.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that daily Islamic routines play a foundational role in sustaining character development, aligning with findings from previous studies on religious habituation in school environments. Similar patterns were identified by Masdin et al. (2025), who noted that interdisciplinary Islamic practices strengthen students' discipline and religious identity. The consistency of routines in this study further echoes Firmansyah et al. (2025), who found that structured religious environments significantly impact students' behavioral stability. Moreover, the integration of daily value-based activities supports the argument of Umar et al. (2025) that character cultivation is most effective when delivered through habitual and culturally embedded practices. The observed student behaviors in this study show that sustainability of character emerges from accumulated micro-practices rather than isolated instructional moments. This finding refines conclusions by Sirojuddin et al. (2025), who highlighted the role of multicultural Islamic education but did not explicitly examine sustainability. By emphasizing the repetitive nature of daily routines, this study extends existing literature by framing Islamic practices as long-term ecological mechanisms. These findings contribute a nuanced understanding of how character sustainability evolves from structured moral exposure.

Teacher exemplarity emerged as a dominant factor in shaping social interactions and sustaining character, reinforcing the findings reported by Chotimah et al. (2025) on reflective leadership in Islamic educational settings. The influence of teacher modeling found here mirrors the argument of Wasehudin et al. (2024), who stated that character development depends heavily on educators' lived values rather than verbal instruction alone. Additionally, the role of teachers in supervising routines aligns with Islamic et al. (2024), who underscored the function of cultural exemplarity in moral reinforcement. The positive peer interactions observed in this study also support the claims of Sulhan and Hakim (2023), who linked strong moral leadership with cohesive school cultures. However, the present study extends these works by showing how teacher behaviors not only influence student conduct but also stabilize the broader cultural climate of the school. The integrated model observed here highlights teacher exemplarity as both a catalyst and a regulator of sustainable value transmission. This perspective strengthens the theoretical view that character sustainability is inseparable from consistent adult modeling. These findings suggest that Islamic Education should prioritize teacher character development as a central intervention for long-term cultural impact.

Implications

The findings suggest important implications for schools seeking to build sustainable character cultures rooted in Islamic values. First, schools should design structured religious routines that operate consistently across different times of day to reinforce value internalization. Second, teacher professional development should include modules that emphasize the power of moral modeling as a catalyst for cultural sustainability. Third, policymakers should encourage schools to integrate value-based routines into broader cultural frameworks rather than treating them as isolated activities. Fourth, character education programs should adopt a long-term ecological perspective that views culture as the primary medium of moral development. Fifth, curriculum designers may use these findings to refine Islamic Education materials so that they

emphasize practice-based sustainability rather than content memorization. Sixth, school leaders should institutionalize routines that cultivate moral awareness and communal responsibility. Finally, these implications highlight the potential of Islamic Education as a culturally grounded model for global character education practices.

Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted in a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader educational contexts. Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative observations and interviews, which may introduce interpretive subjectivity despite triangulation efforts. Third, variations in teacher personality may have influenced the consistency of exemplarity across classrooms. Fourth, cultural differences between schools may affect how Islamic routines are practiced and internalized. Fifth, the study did not examine students' long-term behavioral outcomes beyond the period of field observation. Sixth, the findings may not fully capture informal peer interactions that occur outside school supervision. Seventh, the study focused on Islamic Education and may not represent the dynamics of secular or multi-religious schools. These limitations open opportunities for more comparative and longitudinal research.

Suggestions

Future research should explore character sustainability across multiple school contexts to identify broader cultural patterns. Studies may incorporate quantitative measures to complement qualitative findings and assess long-term behavioral change. Researchers should also examine variations in teacher modeling styles to determine which forms of exemplarity produce the strongest sustainability outcomes. In addition, comparative studies between Islamic schools and secular schools could deepen understanding of cultural mechanisms in value formation. Future research should also analyze how digital religious content interacts with school-based practices in shaping student character. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how daily routines influence students' moral decisions over time. Finally, researchers should investigate how families and communities contribute to sustaining the character values initiated within school cultures.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic Education practices serve as a coherent and sustainable mechanism for character formation within school culture. Daily religious routines, teacher exemplarity, and value-based interactions collectively create an environment in which moral awareness, discipline, and spiritual sensitivity are consistently reinforced. These elements operate not merely as isolated activities but as interconnected cultural structures that shape students' long-term ethical dispositions. The integration of routines and modeling confirms that sustainable character development emerges from repeated exposure to lived values rather than from instructional content alone. The evidence also suggests that Islamic pedagogical practices hold significant potential for strengthening the cultural climate of schools when implemented systematically. By highlighting the ecological nature of value transmission, this study expands current understandings of character education and positions Islamic Education as a viable framework for sustainable moral development. The conceptual model produced here provides a foundation for redesigning school cultures in ways that foreground moral stability,

communal responsibility, and spiritual growth. Overall, this research emphasizes that sustaining character is an ongoing cultural process that requires intentional routines, consistent leadership, and coherent value-based practices across the school environment.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Achmad Reza Safaqui contributed to the conceptualization of the study, the development of the theoretical framework, and the design of the research methodology. He led the data collection process, conducted the primary field observations, and coordinated interviews with teachers and students. He also carried out the initial stages of data coding, thematic categorization, and validation of the emerging analytical model. Yuanda Kusuma contributed to the refinement of the research design, reviewed the data-analysis procedures, and ensured methodological rigor throughout the study. He supported the interpretation of findings, strengthened the discussion through theoretical integration, and enhanced the clarity and coherence of the final argumentation. Both authors collaborated in drafting, revising, and finalizing the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

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