Institutional Strategies and Family Mediation in Fostering Students' Religious Character through Emergency Online Learning

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine how institutional strategies and family mediation contribute to the fostering of students' religious character within emergency online learning contexts. Departing from the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the study focuses on how primary education institutions adapt character education practices when face-to-face interaction is suspended. Rather than treating religious character formation as an individual outcome, this research frames it as a socially mediated and institutionally coordinated process involving schools, teachers, and families.

Methods: The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a field-based research design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with school leaders and classroom teachers, direct observation of online learning practices, and document analysis of instructional plans and student learning records. Triangulation of data sources was applied to ensure credibility and analytical rigor. Data analysis followed an inductive process involving data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretative synthesis to capture patterns of institutional practice and social interaction.

Findings: The findings reveal that religious character education can be sustained during emergency online learning through consistent institutional routines, symbolic religious practices integrated into digital instruction, and intensive communication between teachers and parents. Family mediation emerged as a critical factor in translating institutional values into daily student behavior. Despite technological and socio-economic constraints, collaborative governance between schools and households enabled continuity in religious character formation.

Significance: This study contributes to contemporary social and educational studies by demonstrating that character education during crisis situations is not solely dependent on instructional technology, but on adaptive institutional strategies and family-school partnerships. The findings offer transferable insights for educational administrators and policymakers seeking resilient models of value-based education in digitally mediated learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally disrupted conventional schooling systems worldwide, forcing educational institutions to rapidly shift toward emergency online learning. This sudden transition raised serious concerns not only about academic achievement but also about the sustainability of value-based education in digitally mediated environments. Religious character education, which traditionally relies on face-to-face interaction, modeling, and routine practices, became particularly vulnerable during prolonged school closures. Existing studies have shown that emergency remote learning often prioritizes cognitive outcomes while

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marginalizing affective and moral dimensions of education (Durrani & Ozawa, 2024; Wake & Mills, 2023). In primary education settings, this imbalance poses a long-term risk to students' moral and social development. Schools were compelled to redesign instructional practices without sufficient preparation, resources, or pedagogical frameworks. As a result, character education was no longer merely a pedagogical issue but an institutional and social challenge. This condition highlights the urgency of examining how educational institutions respond to character formation during crisis-driven digital learning contexts.

Beyond instructional adaptation, the pandemic has also transformed the distribution of educational responsibility between schools and families. With learning relocated to the home environment, parents assumed a more central role in supervising, mediating, and reinforcing educational values. Research indicates that family involvement significantly shapes students' behavioral and moral outcomes during online learning periods (Deng et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of parental mediation largely depends on institutional guidance, communication clarity, and consistency of school policies. In faith-based education contexts, this interdependence becomes even more pronounced due to the moral and spiritual dimensions involved. Religious character formation thus emerges as a socially mediated process rather than an exclusively school-based function. Despite this shift, empirical research rarely examines how institutional strategies and family mediation interact during emergency online learning. Consequently, investigating this relationship becomes essential for understanding resilient models of character education. This study responds to that need by situating religious character education within institutional and social coordination frameworks.

The rationale for this study lies in the growing recognition that educational resilience during crises extends beyond technological readiness. While much of the existing literature emphasizes digital platforms, instructional media, and learning management systems, fewer studies explore the governance and relational dimensions of online education. Institutional strategies, including leadership decisions, instructional routines, and communication mechanisms, play a decisive role in sustaining educational values during disruption. In religious education settings, these strategies determine whether character education remains symbolic or becomes substantively practiced. Prior research has confirmed that structured routines and value integration can preserve moral learning in non-traditional learning modes (Bulut et al., 2025; Wilson et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these studies often treat institutions as isolated actors. The present study argues that institutional effectiveness cannot be separated from family mediation processes.

Another critical rationale is the limited attention given to primary-level religious character education in emergency learning contexts. Most empirical studies focus on secondary or higher education, where learner autonomy is assumed to be higher (Basri, 2023; Cullen & Oppenheimer, 2024). In contrast, primary students require intensive guidance, modeling, and supervision to internalize character values. This dependency amplifies the role of families as co-educators during online learning. However, without institutional coordination, parental involvement may become fragmented and inconsistent. Understanding how schools structure expectations, support parents, and monitor implementation is therefore vital. This study positions religious character education as an institutional-social system rather than a curricular add-on. By doing so, it provides a rationale for analyzing character education through an administrative and social studies lens. Such framing aligns directly with the interdisciplinary orientation of contemporary social science journals.

Recent Scopus-indexed studies demonstrate increasing scholarly attention to character and religious education within digitally mediated learning environments. Zakharova et al., (2024) highlights that online learning challenges educators to redesign character education strategies beyond conventional classroom interactions. Benny et al., (2025) emphasize that web-based instructional media can support character building when embedded within coherent pedagogical frameworks. Nurbayan & Sanusi, (2025) further argue that teacher competence in integrating values into digital instruction significantly influences character outcomes. Maksum et al., (2025) reveal that teachers perceive religious values as foundational yet difficult to sustain without institutional support. Tohirin et al., (2025) document the practical realities teachers face when instilling religious values under constrained learning conditions. These studies collectively underscore the vulnerability of character education during digital transitions. However, they primarily focus on instructional techniques rather than institutional coordination. Consequently, the role of schools as organizational actors remains underexplored.

Other studies extend the discussion by examining governance, curriculum, and social dimensions of religious education. Adiyono & Sholeh, (2025) demonstrate that curriculum reform plays a crucial role in embedding social and moral values in Islamic education systems. Nugraha et al., (2025) identify classroom management and student perceptions as determinants of learning outcomes but do not account for family involvement. Usman et al., (2025) highlight collaborative learning as a means of value internalization, yet their focus remains within institutional boundaries. Aripin et al., (2025) stress the need for reformulating religious education to remain relevant in modern contexts. Arifin et al., (2025) discuss curriculum organization as a preventive measure against moral deviation, emphasizing institutional responsibility. Despite these contributions, limited attention is paid to how institutions coordinate with families during crisis-induced online learning. This gap suggests the need for an integrated institutional and social analysis. The present study directly builds upon and extends these findings.

Although prior studies provide valuable insights into religious character education and online learning, several critical gaps remain evident. First, existing research predominantly examines instructional strategies without adequately addressing institutional governance mechanisms. Second, family involvement is often acknowledged but rarely analyzed as an integral component of character education systems. Third, most studies focus on stable or planned online learning rather than emergency-induced digital transitions. Fourth, the interaction between institutional strategies and family mediation remains conceptually underdeveloped. Fifth, empirical evidence from primary education contexts is comparatively scarce. Sixth, few studies adopt a social-administrative perspective that aligns character education with institutional coordination. Seventh, the majority of research emphasizes outcomes rather than processes. Eighth, this study addresses these gaps by examining how institutional strategies and family mediation jointly sustain religious character education during emergency online learning.

The purpose of this study is to examine how institutional strategies and family mediation contribute to fostering students' religious character in emergency online learning contexts. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how schools organize instructional routines, communicate expectations, and coordinate with parents during crisis-driven digital learning. It also aims to analyze the role of families in translating institutional values into daily student practices. By adopting a qualitative field-based approach, the study explores lived experiences of school leaders, teachers, and parents. The research further investigates the challenges and

adaptive strategies that emerge under technological and socio-economic constraints. Rather than measuring character outcomes quantitatively, the study emphasizes process-oriented analysis. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of institutional-social dynamics. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute transferable insights for educational administrators and policymakers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to examine institutional strategies and family mediation in fostering students' religious character during emergency online learning. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture social processes, institutional practices, and meaning-making activities that emerged in crisis-driven digital education contexts. Rather than focusing on measurable outcomes, the design emphasized understanding how character education was organized, enacted, and sustained. The research was conducted as a field-based inquiry within a primary education setting implementing faith-oriented instruction. An interpretive paradigm guided the study to explore participants' lived experiences and perspectives. This approach is widely applied in social and educational research to analyze complex institutional responses (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Diehl & Golann, 2023). Data collection took place during the full implementation of emergency online learning. The design enabled alignment between institutional analysis and socially mediated educational practices.

Participants

Participants consisted of school leaders, classroom teachers, and parents who were directly involved in the implementation of emergency online learning. School leaders provided insights into institutional policies, coordination mechanisms, and strategic decision-making related to character education. Classroom teachers participated as the primary actors implementing religious routines and instructional practices in online settings. Parents were included to capture family mediation roles in supporting and reinforcing institutional values at home. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of information (Magnone & Yezierski, 2024). Inclusion criteria required active involvement throughout the online learning period. The participation of multiple actor groups enabled perspective triangulation. Such triangulation is essential for enhancing credibility in qualitative social research (Morgan, 2024).

Table 1 is placed here to provide a clear overview of participant categories and data sources before the description of instruments and analysis procedures.

Table 1. Overview of Participants and Data Sources

Participant Category	Number of Participants	Role in Emergency Online Learning	Data Sources
School leaders	1–2	Designing institutional policies, coordinating online routines, and supervising character education	Semi-structured interviews, institutional documents
Classroom teachers	3–4	Implementing religious character education in online instruction and liaising with families	Interviews, virtual class observations, lesson plans
Parents	4–6	Mediating institutional values and supervising students' daily learning activities	Interviews, communication records

| Instructional documents | – | Providing formal evidence of institutional strategies | Lesson plans, circular letters, online guidelines |
| Learning interaction records | – | Documenting enactment of religious routines in digital settings | Observation notes, virtual artifacts |

Table 1 summarizes the composition of participants and data sources used to examine institutional and family-based practices in emergency online learning. The integration of multiple actor groups and documentary evidence enabled systematic triangulation and strengthened the analytical foundation of the study.

Instruments

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, observation protocols, and document analysis. Semi-structured interview guides were developed to explore institutional strategies, instructional routines, and family mediation practices. Interview questions allowed flexibility while ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Observation protocols were used to examine virtual learning interactions and the enactment of religious routines in digital classrooms. Document analysis focused on lesson plans, institutional guidelines, and communication records between schools and parents. The use of multiple instruments supported methodological triangulation (Arias Valencia, 2022; Dzwigol, 2022). All instruments were reviewed to ensure conceptual alignment and ethical appropriateness. This combination enabled a comprehensive examination of institutional-social dynamics.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic analysis procedure. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were first organized and systematically coded. Initial coding focused on institutional strategies, family mediation roles, and religious character education practices. Codes were then grouped into broader themes through iterative comparison. This process allowed patterns and relationships to emerge from the data. Thematic analysis is considered appropriate for examining social processes in qualitative research (Ayre & McCaffery, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023). Data credibility was enhanced through source triangulation and member checking. Continuous comparison between interpretations and raw data minimized analytical bias.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results indicate that religious character education during emergency online learning was sustained through coordinated institutional strategies. School leaders established structured online routines that embedded religious practices at the beginning and end of learning sessions. Teachers consistently integrated moral reminders, short reflections, and symbolic religious activities into virtual instruction. Institutional communication emphasized discipline, consistency, and value reinforcement rather than academic completion alone. Parents reported receiving clear guidance regarding daily religious routines to be practiced at home. Despite technological limitations, these routines were implemented with relative consistency. The findings demonstrate that institutional clarity reduced ambiguity in value transmission. Overall, religious character education remained operational through structured institutional governance.

Table 2. Institutional Strategies Supporting Religious Character Education

Institutional Strategy	Description	Observed Outcome
Structured online routines	Scheduled prayers and reflections during virtual classes	Continuity of religious habits
Value-integrated instruction	Moral messages embedded in lesson delivery	Increased student awareness
Parent communication	Regular guidance via messaging platforms	Consistent home implementation
Monitoring mechanisms	Teacher check-ins and reporting	Reinforced accountability

Table 2 shows that institutional strategies were not limited to instructional design but extended to communication and monitoring mechanisms. These strategies collectively supported the continuity of religious character education during emergency online learning.

Family mediation emerged as a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of institutional strategies. Parents acted as daily supervisors of students' religious practices due to the home-based learning environment. Teachers relied on parental feedback to assess the consistency of students' character-related behaviors. Parental involvement varied depending on work schedules and technological access. However, most parents acknowledged their expanded role as moral facilitators. Institutional guidance reduced parental uncertainty regarding expectations. Families who received consistent communication demonstrated higher adherence to routines. These findings highlight family mediation as an essential extension of institutional strategy.
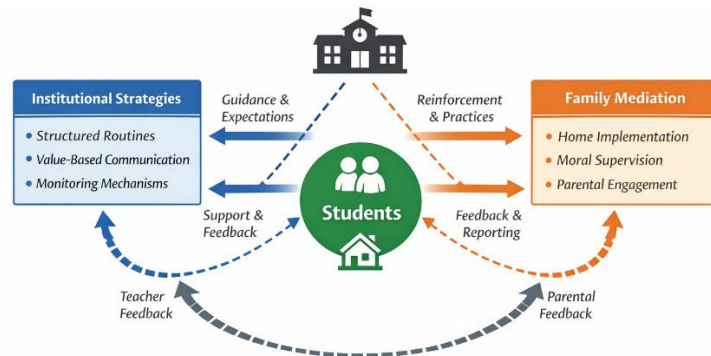
Figure 1. Model of Institutional Strategies and Family Mediation in Religious Character Education

The model illustrates institutional strategies as the central framework guiding religious character education. Institutional routines and communication flow toward families through structured guidance. Family mediation functions as an intermediary process translating institutional values into daily student practices. Feedback loops connect families and teachers to sustain consistency. The model positions students at the intersection of institutional governance and family mediation. Figure 1 conceptualizes the dynamic relationship between institutional strategies and family mediation in sustaining religious character education during emergency online learning.

Discussion

The findings confirm that institutional strategies play a decisive role in sustaining religious character education during emergency online learning. Consistent with Zakharova et al., (2024), structured routines helped preserve moral learning despite physical separation. The integration of religious values into online instruction aligns with the findings of Benny et al. (2025), who

emphasize pedagogical coherence in digital environments. Institutional communication functioned as a governance mechanism rather than a mere administrative tool. This supports Adiyono and Sholeh (2025), who argue that curriculum and policy alignment are critical for value-based education. The results suggest that character education is deeply institutional in nature. Without clear organizational direction, moral instruction risks fragmentation. Therefore, institutional leadership emerges as a central driver of educational resilience.

Family mediation significantly amplified the impact of institutional strategies. This finding resonates with Tohirin et al. (2025), who highlight the teacher–parent partnership in religious value transmission. Parents became co-educators responsible for reinforcing routines beyond formal instruction. The study extends Maksum et al. (2025) by demonstrating that parental mediation is most effective when guided by institutional clarity. Variations in parental involvement reflect socio-economic and occupational differences, as noted by Nugraha et al. (2025). Nevertheless, consistent communication mitigated these disparities. The interaction between institutional expectations and family practices formed a cohesive value system. This confirms that religious character education operates as a socially mediated process.

The results also contribute to discussions on emergency online learning as a social phenomenon rather than a purely technological one. Previous studies have focused primarily on instructional media and digital competence (Nurbayan & Sanusi, 2025). In contrast, this study demonstrates that technological tools are secondary to organizational coherence. Institutional routines provided symbolic stability during crisis conditions. This finding aligns with Aripin et al. (2025), who stress the importance of reformulating religious education in modern contexts. The study further supports Arifin et al. (2025) regarding institutional responsibility in moral governance. Emergency learning contexts thus demand adaptive but structured institutional responses. Character education survives not through platforms, but through coordinated social action.

From an administrative and social studies perspective, this research reframes character education as a governance issue. Usman et al. (2025) emphasize collaboration within educational institutions, yet often exclude families from analysis. This study bridges that gap by positioning families as integral actors within institutional systems. The findings also extend (Little & Green, 2022; Xu et al., 2023) notion of credibility by demonstrating how social trust enhances educational outcomes. The institutional–family synergy observed reflects resilient organizational behavior. Such resilience is crucial for managing future educational disruptions. The study thus contributes theoretically to institutional sociology in education. It also offers practical insights for policy design in crisis contexts.

Implications

The findings imply that educational institutions should prioritize governance structures that integrate families as active partners in character education. Policy frameworks must extend beyond instructional guidelines to include communication protocols and monitoring mechanisms. School leaders should design routines that are feasible within home environments. Teacher training should emphasize family engagement strategies alongside digital pedagogy. Educational administrators may use the proposed model as a framework for crisis preparedness. Faith-based institutions can adapt these strategies across cultural contexts. Policymakers should recognize character education as an institutional-social responsibility. These implications contribute to contemporary educational administration discourse.

Limitations

This study is limited by its qualitative scope and context-specific focus. The findings are derived from a single primary education setting. Participant numbers, while sufficient for depth, limit generalizability. Data relied on self-reported experiences, which may involve subjective bias. The study did not include direct student interviews due to ethical considerations. Technological variables were not analyzed in detail. Longitudinal effects of institutional strategies were beyond the study's scope. These limitations suggest caution in broad application of findings.

Suggestions

Future research should examine institutional and family mediation strategies across multiple educational contexts. Comparative studies between faith-based and non-faith-based institutions are recommended. Quantitative designs may complement qualitative findings to assess impact magnitude. Longitudinal research could explore sustainability beyond crisis periods. Including student perspectives would enrich understanding of internalization processes. Policy-oriented studies may evaluate scalability at regional or national levels. Cross-cultural analysis could enhance transferability. Such directions would strengthen the global relevance of character education research.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that religious character education can be effectively sustained during emergency online learning through the synergy of institutional strategies and family mediation. Clear organizational routines, consistent value-oriented communication, and structured guidance enabled schools to maintain moral and religious practices despite the absence of face-to-face interaction. The findings demonstrate that character education is not solely dependent on instructional delivery, but is deeply embedded in institutional governance and social coordination. Families played a pivotal role in translating institutional values into daily student behavior within home-based learning environments. The interaction between schools and families formed a resilient system that compensated for technological and contextual limitations. This study confirms that emergency online learning should be understood as a social and administrative challenge rather than a purely technological one. By framing religious character education as an institutional–social process, the research extends contemporary discussions in educational administration and social studies. Overall, the study provides a transferable model for strengthening value-based education in times of educational disruption.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Supriyanto was responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, including the formulation of the research objectives and analytical framework. He conducted the data collection through interviews, observations, and document analysis during the emergency online learning period. Supriyanto also performed the data analysis, including coding, thematic interpretation, and synthesis of findings. The manuscript was drafted and revised solely by Supriyanto to ensure coherence, academic rigor, and alignment with international journal standards. He approved the final version of the manuscript and takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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