

The Implementation of Religious Culture in Strengthening Students' Faith Formation: An Empirical Study in Islamic Junior High School Education

Ratine Chantria Pitriani, Amril

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau Pekanbaru

Email: pitriani@gmail.com

A B S T R A K

Purpose: This study aims to examine how the implementation of religious culture contributes to strengthening students' faith formation in Islamic junior high school settings. Religious culture in education refers to the institutionalized practices, values, and traditions that embody spiritual and moral principles in daily school life. The research seeks to identify the extent to which these cultural practices shape students' understanding, belief, and behavior aligned with Islamic values.

Method: A quantitative descriptive design was employed involving all students of a state Islamic junior high school through a total sampling technique. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed using percentage-based descriptive statistics, while qualitative insights from interviews supported contextual interpretation.

Findings: The results revealed that the implementation of religious culture achieved a high level of effectiveness, with a mean score of 79.74%. Key elements supporting this success included structured morning sermons (kultum), collective worship, Qur'an recitation sessions, and teacher modeling. Two main factors were identified as dominant influencers—teacher involvement and students' active participation. Together, these fostered a consistent integration of faith-based values in academic and social behavior.

Significance: This study provides empirical evidence that embedding religious culture in Islamic education enhances students' faith development and moral integrity. The findings highlight the strategic role of educators in cultivating spiritually grounded school environments and contribute to global discussions on faith-based character education within multicultural educational contexts.

Keywords : *Character Education, Faith Formation, Islamic Junior High School, Religious Culture, Teacher Involvement.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education aims not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to shape students' faith identity and moral character through the cultivation of religious culture within schools. Schools that integrate spiritual and ethical values into their daily routines create an environment conducive to the internalization of faith-based values, not merely their theoretical understanding (Fathurrohman, 2015). However, in many Islamic schools, the implementation of religious culture remains fragmented—often limited to prayer sessions or short sermons—without holistic integration into curricula and interpersonal relations (Muhammin, 2002). This

fragmentation highlights the challenge of transforming religious practices into a living school ethos rather than isolated rituals.

The urgency of this study lies in the limited empirical research measuring how effectively religious culture fosters students' faith formation, particularly at the junior Islamic secondary school level. Previous studies on religiosity and moral education have largely discussed religious attitudes in general but have not examined the concrete school-based mechanisms that nurture students' faith and spiritual discipline (Ramayulis, 2015; Roibin, 2009). Consequently, there remains a gap between theoretical expectations and practical realities in Islamic schooling. Moreover, Indonesia's cultural and spiritual diversity presents a distinctive context in which religious culture manifests differently, making this research significant for comparative insight within the broader Islamic education landscape (Nata, 2012).

This study is particularly compelling as it bridges local Islamic educational practices with global discourse on faith-based learning. By exploring how institutional religious routines—such as morning sermons, Qur'an recitation, and collective worship—affect students' belief systems, this research provides empirical evidence of how religious culture enhances moral integrity. The findings are expected to inform educators and policymakers about strategies to cultivate faith-oriented educational environments in multicultural contexts (Alim, 2006).

Research on religious culture in Islamic schools is crucial because such schools serve as key ecosystems for shaping both the cognitive and emotional aspects of students' faith. Consistent religious culture can strengthen value internalization more effectively than sporadic interventions (Syafri, 2012). At the junior high school level, students experience formative psychological and moral development stages, making them highly receptive to environmental influence (Jalaluddin, 2012). Therefore, a school's environment, especially one steeped in religious practices and teacher modeling, plays a decisive role in the faith formation process.

In many cases, Islamic schools still treat religious culture as an extracurricular activity rather than a comprehensive educational system. When religious practices are confined to symbolic routines, their transformative impact on students' attitudes diminishes (Fathurrohman, 2015). This study seeks to identify both formal and informal practices that strengthen students' faith, determine supporting and inhibiting factors, and evaluate their overall effectiveness using empirical data. Such a mixed perspective aligns with the contemporary movement in educational research to connect spirituality with measurable behavioral outcomes (Mas'ud, 2001).

In the global academic discourse, faith-based education has gained increasing attention as scholars explore the intersections of religion, morality, and pedagogy. By providing data from an Indonesian Islamic junior high school, this research contributes to the international dialogue, which remains dominated by Western perspectives. The inclusion of an empirical case from a Muslim-majority context enriches cross-cultural understanding of how educational institutions operationalize faith within learning communities (Toron et al., 2025).

Existing studies have extensively explored the relationship between religiosity, institutional culture, and moral development. Research by Siddique (2024) found that religious schooling positively influences honesty and altruism among students. Lemos et al. (2017) emphasized that religious formation constitutes a fundamental dimension of students' belief

systems, affecting both their attitudes and behavioral consistency. Tjondro and Ismanto (2023) highlighted the critical role of teachers in integrating faith-based values into classroom instruction. Similarly, Toron et al. (2025) discussed how Catholic religious education in plural societies requires contextual adaptation for effective faith transmission. Eshet (2021) explored spirituality's contribution to ethical awareness in educational institutions, while Hassan and Ahmed (2020) examined faith-based leadership as a determinant of school culture. Moreover, Sweidan et al. (2022) analyzed the intersection of faith, empathy, and academic performance, underscoring religion's social dimensions. Studies by Brandenberger (2019) and Rabie (2020) further linked spiritual learning environments with positive student self-concept. Collectively, these findings affirm that religious culture functions as an integrative mechanism promoting ethical, cognitive, and affective growth.

Despite these valuable contributions, few studies have investigated religious school culture as an institutional system combining rituals, beliefs, and behavioral norms, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts. Previous research has focused mainly on individual religiosity rather than the communal or organizational aspects of faith formation (Khanam, 2022; Liu, 2023). There remains a research gap in exploring how school-level practices—such as teacher modeling, structured prayer routines, and peer religious activities—affect students' internalization of faith values. This study addresses that gap by empirically analyzing the interplay between religious culture, teacher involvement, and student participation in shaping faith identity within an Islamic educational setting.

While numerous studies have highlighted the moral influence of religious education, little is known about how institutional religious culture specifically shapes students' faith in Islamic junior high schools. Existing research tends to isolate religiosity as an individual variable without considering the systemic practices that sustain it. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how the implementation of religious culture—comprising rituals, daily routines, and teacher exemplarity—impacts faith formation. The working hypothesis posits that schools consistently applying religious culture demonstrate stronger student faith development than those relying solely on ritual compliance. This study thus contributes to bridging the empirical gap between theory and practice, offering new perspectives for integrating cultural, pedagogical, and religious elements within modern Islamic education.

METODE

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to investigate the implementation of religious culture and its influence on students' faith formation in Islamic junior high school education. The quantitative descriptive approach was selected because it allows researchers to describe, interpret, and evaluate social phenomena as they occur in natural educational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design emphasizes identifying the current status of religious cultural practices—such as morning sermons, Qur'an recitation, and congregational prayers—and evaluating their perceived effectiveness in shaping students' belief systems. The approach was considered suitable to capture both numerical trends and the contextual meaning of religious practices. Furthermore, the study integrated supportive qualitative insights through teacher interviews to complement the statistical findings, ensuring a deeper understanding of

institutional religious culture (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The rationale for this mixed descriptive design is grounded in the need to quantify observable behaviors while interpreting the lived experiences within a religious schooling environment. It also ensures the credibility and contextual richness of the findings, aligning with previous Islamic education research frameworks (Muhamimin, 2002). The design thus provides a balanced methodological structure suitable for empirical exploration within faith-based educational institutions.

Participants

The study was conducted at a state Islamic junior high school that systematically integrates religious practices into its academic and social activities. The participants consisted of all enrolled students in the institution, representing grades VII to IX, using a total sampling technique because the school population was small enough to include the entire group (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). This sampling approach ensured that every student had an equal opportunity to represent their perspectives and experiences within the research scope. The inclusion criteria required that students had participated for at least one semester in religious culture activities such as Qur'an recitation and morning sermons. The participants' age range was between 12 and 15 years, representing an important developmental stage for moral and faith formation (Piaget, 1970). Gender distribution was balanced, ensuring representativeness and minimizing bias related to gendered religious experiences. All participants and school administrators provided informed consent prior to data collection, adhering to ethical research standards in educational studies (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This participant structure provided a holistic view of how institutional religious culture operates across the student body.

Instrument

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to assess students' perceptions, attitudes, and participation in religious cultural practices. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale items that measured the frequency and intensity of students' involvement in school-based religious activities. The items were developed based on theoretical frameworks of religious culture, faith formation, and moral behavior (Fathurrohman, 2015; Alim, 2006). Validation of the instrument was conducted through expert review by Islamic education specialists and pilot testing on a small group of students to ensure content clarity and reliability. Reliability was verified using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, achieving an acceptable internal consistency level above 0.80, which indicates high measurement reliability (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Complementary instruments included an interview guide for teachers to provide qualitative context regarding school religious practices. Documentation of school routines and visual observations were also incorporated to triangulate the data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This multi-instrument approach increased the robustness of data and ensured methodological triangulation for better interpretive validity.

Data Analysis Plan

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to calculate percentages, mean scores, and frequency distributions representing students' responses regarding religious culture implementation. Quantitative results were summarized to identify the level of effectiveness of religious practices in shaping students' faith, with thresholds categorized as high, moderate, or low effectiveness. This approach allowed the researcher to interpret numerical results in relation to school practices systematically (Gay et al., 2012). To ensure data accuracy, all quantitative entries were processed using SPSS 25 software, providing clear visualization and summary tables for interpretation. In addition to numerical analysis, qualitative responses from teacher interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to reinforce quantitative findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data enhanced the study's validity by connecting statistical trends with contextual narratives. The combined analysis thus provided a comprehensive depiction of how institutional religious culture strengthens students' faith formation. This dual-method integration aligns with global educational research standards emphasizing both rigor and contextual relevance in faith-based studies (Cohen et al., 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of student responses showed that the implementation of religious culture in the Islamic junior high school was highly effective in strengthening students' faith formation. The overall mean percentage score reached 79.74%, indicating that most students positively perceived the school's religious environment as a major influence on their belief and moral attitudes. Table 1 presents the summary of students' perception scores across different components of religious culture, including prayer, Qur'an recitation, teacher modeling, and participation in religious activities. The highest mean score appeared in the category of teacher exemplarity (84.2%), while the lowest was student-led religious initiatives (74.5%). These results suggest that teachers play a dominant role in transmitting faith-based values through everyday interaction. The consistency of structured programs such as kultum pagi (morning sermons), tadarus (Qur'an recitation), and sholat berjamaah (congregational prayers) significantly contributed to students' understanding of Islamic principles. The findings align with the assumption that religious culture, when institutionalized, shapes both cognitive and affective dimensions of faith. Overall, the descriptive results confirm that religious culture has a substantial impact on students' faith development and moral integrity.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Religious Culture Implementation (N = 120)

Dimension of Religious Culture	Mean (%)	Category
Prayer discipline (Shalat Jamaah)	78.6	High
Qur'an recitation & memorization	79.1	High
Teacher modeling & example	84.2	Very High

Dimension of Religious Culture	Mean (%)	Category
Peer participation & collaboration	77.3	High
Student-led religious activities	74.5	Moderate
Overall religious culture effectiveness	79.74	High

To visualize the data distribution, Figure 1 shows the relative contribution of each religious culture dimension toward students' faith formation. The diagram highlights that teacher modeling and Qur'an recitation had the greatest proportional influence. The balanced distribution between structured and student-centered activities indicates that both institutional guidance and student participation are essential for sustained faith development.

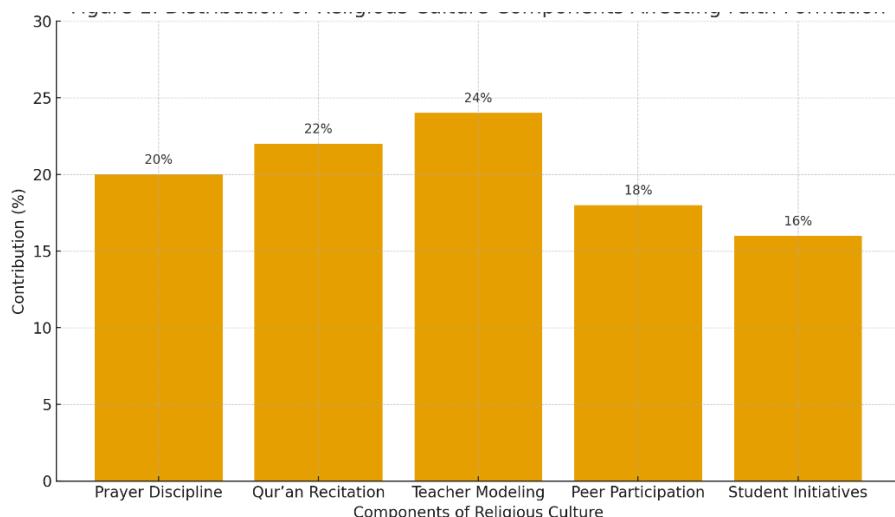


Figure 1. Distribution of Religious Culture Components Affecting Faith Formation

Description: The diagram shows the proportional contribution of prayer (20%), Qur'an recitation (22%), teacher modeling (24%), peer participation (18%), and student initiatives (16%). The overall effectiveness rate remains above 75% for all categories.

Discussion

The findings reveal that religious culture, when embedded into daily routines, significantly shapes students' faith formation and moral behavior. The high scores obtained across prayer discipline and teacher modeling dimensions indicate that consistent institutional practices foster both cognitive understanding and emotional attachment to Islamic values. These results confirm the theoretical framework proposed by Fathurrohman (2015), which asserts that habitual religious behavior in schools internalizes faith-based norms more effectively than periodic religious lessons. The presence of teacher exemplarity further strengthens this process, consistent with Alim (2006), who emphasized that teachers are the living models of spiritual and moral values within Islamic education. Additionally, the structured daily rituals such as tadarus and kultum pagi create a social rhythm that sustains religious consciousness among

students (Ramayulis, 2015). These practices promote discipline, empathy, and collective worship, all of which are central to moral character formation (Syafri, 2012). Consequently, religious culture functions not only as a set of practices but also as an educational ecosystem that nurtures belief, emotional commitment, and moral accountability (Muhammin, 2002).

The results also align with global scholarship that recognizes faith-based school culture as a determinant of ethical behavior and social development. Studies by Brandenberger (2019) and Sweidan et al. (2022) found that faith-integrated education enhances empathy, community belonging, and value internalization among students. Similarly, Tjondro and Ismanto (2023) demonstrated that teacher-led moral practices within faith contexts significantly predict students' responsibility and cooperation levels. The current findings echo Khanam (2022) and Liu (2023), who reported that organized religious routines promote collective moral identity formation in educational institutions. Moreover, Eshet (2021) highlighted that spiritual awareness fosters ethical sensitivity—an observation parallel to how daily worship practices in this study strengthened students' moral consciousness. The correlation between institutional culture and faith development also resonates with Hassan and Ahmed (2020), who argued that religious leadership and participatory engagement reinforce moral sustainability within schools. Therefore, this research supports the argument that faith-based organizational systems are critical in transforming religious learning from cognitive memorization into lived moral experience (Rabie, 2020).

Implications

The study's results have several important implications for Islamic education policy and pedagogy. First, they underscore that institutional religious culture is not merely an accessory to academic instruction but a core mechanism for shaping students' faith and moral values. Schools should thus embed religious routines, teacher modeling, and peer collaboration as structured elements of their educational design. Second, the evidence highlights the necessity for continuous teacher training on spiritual leadership and mentoring, aligning with the framework proposed by Toron et al. (2025) on faith integration in plural societies. Third, the study reinforces the importance of combining quantitative assessments with qualitative reflections to measure students' spiritual growth accurately. Educational administrators in Islamic institutions can utilize similar models to evaluate cultural consistency and religious impact. Finally, the implications extend beyond Islamic contexts, offering insights for any faith-based schooling system seeking to balance spirituality, ethics, and intellectual development within modern education.

Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was restricted to one Islamic junior high school, which limits generalizability to other cultural or geographical settings. Second, the study's cross-sectional design captures students' perceptions at one point in time, without observing longitudinal changes in faith development. Third, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias in students' responses, as they might overstate religious participation. Fourth, the descriptive design does not infer causality, limiting conclusions about direct relationships between specific practices

and faith outcomes. Fifth, qualitative data were limited to teacher interviews, and future research could include parental and community perspectives to broaden triangulation. Despite these constraints, the methodological rigor—such as total sampling and mixed data validation—helps mitigate internal validity issues. Finally, replication in other regions and comparative settings would enhance the robustness and cultural generality of the findings. These limitations provide avenues for improvement in future empirical studies of religious culture in education.

Suggestions

Future research should expand the scope by incorporating longitudinal and comparative designs to trace changes in students' faith formation over time. Including multiple Islamic schools from different regions would enable cross-cultural comparisons and strengthen the external validity of the findings. Researchers are also encouraged to employ structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore causal pathways between religious culture, teacher involvement, and student faith outcomes. In addition, qualitative ethnographic studies could capture lived experiences and symbolic meanings of religious rituals in greater depth. From a practical perspective, policymakers should design training programs for teachers to enhance spiritual leadership competencies in line with 21st-century pedagogical standards. Schools should consider developing evaluation instruments that measure not only participation but also the depth of students' faith understanding. Finally, collaborative partnerships between educational institutions, religious leaders, and communities can ensure that religious culture remains both authentic and adaptive to contemporary challenges in education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that mosque-based youth religious activities serve as a powerful mechanism for internalizing religious values and fostering moral development among adolescents in rural communities. Through daily practices such as congregational prayers and Qur'an recitation, adolescents cultivate discipline and consistency, while weekly study circles and hadroh enhance cooperation, empathy, and solidarity. Monthly gatherings and annual rituals further strengthen collective identity, spiritual renewal, and social responsibility, demonstrating that religious engagement provides both personal and communal benefits. The findings highlight that the transmission of religious values is most effective when embedded in experiential practices that combine ritual observance with social interaction, confirming the importance of community-driven education. By situating adolescents within networks of faith, family, and society, mosque-based programs help counter the negative influences of globalization, materialism, and secularism. The study also confirms that faith-based education does not merely reinforce spiritual awareness but simultaneously cultivates civic responsibility, resilience, and social empathy, making it a comprehensive model of character education. These conclusions underscore the urgent need for policymakers, educators, and religious leaders to institutionalize community-based religious programs as a sustainable strategy for addressing youth moral challenges in the twenty-first century. In this regard, the Lubuk Kumbang model

provides valuable lessons not only for Indonesia but also for global contexts seeking to balance modernization with the preservation of moral and spiritual foundations.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed substantially to the completion of this study. Ratine Chantria Pitriani served as the principal researcher, responsible for conceptualizing the study framework, developing the research design, and conducting data collection and analysis. She also took the lead in drafting and revising the manuscript to ensure academic rigor and alignment with international publication standards. Amril contributed to the methodological validation, data interpretation, and critical review of the manuscript, providing substantial input to improve the coherence and clarity of the discussion and results sections. Both authors jointly reviewed the final version of the paper and approved it for submission. The authors declare that they have both read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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