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Internalizing Religious School Culture to Mitigate Student Deviance: Structural Mechanisms, Moral Agency, and Scaffolding Constraints

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the structural mechanisms of internalizing school religious culture in mitigating student deviance, examine the role of moral agency and teacher scaffolding, and identify contextual constraints influencing value absorption. Utilizing a qualitative case study design grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, the research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Poncol Magetan. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, passive non-participant observation, and documentary analysis of counseling and disciplinary records. Empirical data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's interactive condensation model, with trustworthiness secured through multi-source triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that value internalization operates systematically through three foundational pillars: instructional integration, routine habituation (daily Quranic recitation and congregational Dhuha prayers), and exemplary leadership (uswah hasanah). The deployment of restorative spiritual reconciliation (guided taubat prayers) successfully transforms external compliance into intrinsic moral agency. Although the mechanism effectively eliminated severe behavioral infractions such as physical bullying, value penetration encounters scaffolding constraints, including unmonitored digital exposures, heterogeneous family backgrounds, and negative peer contagion outside school hours, which drive persistent minor infractions (chronic tardiness and unauthorized smartphone use). The study underscores the necessity of building holistic character ecosystems that align school-home environments to sustain long-term moral self-regulation

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Introduction

Education in Islamic contexts extends beyond intellectual mastery to foster a harmonious synthesis of faith, knowledge, and moral practice (akhlak). Within secondary education, early adolescents experience rapid bio-psychosocial development, heightened peer-group

susceptibility, and identity formation, making them particularly vulnerable to behavioral deviations and peer-induced delinquency (Banafsa et al., 2025; Sianturi et al., 2024). Recent empirical assessments underscore the urgency of addressing youth deviance in Indonesia; national data reveals that over half of adolescents aged 13–17 have experienced violence, with emotional aggression largely driven by peers, alongside notable rates of physical altercations and truancy (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection [KPPPA], 2024; World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). In response, educational institutions serve as vital socio-moral battlegrounds where structured environments must counteract negative peer contagion through systematic character formation (mafazah Musallamah, 2026).

School religious culture (budaya religius) has emerged as a cornerstone strategy to cultivate moral agency, discipline, and self-regulation among students. Rather than relying on rigid punitive measures, embedding Islamic values into daily routines, teacher modeling, and communal practices creates a holistic environment that reinforces positive behavioral patterns (Banafsa et al., 2025; Sahidah, 2024). However, a persistent structural gap exists between formal religious programming and true value internalisation. While schools frequently implement routine religious ceremonies, these initiatives often remain superficial, failing to translate into internalised moral reasoning or consistent self-control when students encounter peer pressure outside structured activities (Muspiroh, 2018a; Sahidah, 2024).

This dichotomy is vividly reflected at the institutional level, such as in junior high schools like SMP Negeri 1 Poncol Magetan. Official counseling logs indicate notable successes in eliminating overt physical violence and bullying, demonstrating the efficacy of supportive school climate initiatives (Beliya, 2026). Conversely, persistent low-level infractions—specifically chronic tardiness and unpermitted smartphone usage during instructional time—reveal that external compliance has not fully evolved into deep-seated self-discipline or internalized ethical commitment (Muspiroh, 2018b). This paradox highlights that the presence of a religious program does not automatically guarantee moral embodiment, pointing to a critical breakdown in how religious values are cognitive-emotionally processed and operationalized by students.

While prior scholarship has extensively documented the structural setup, routine habituation, and general outcomes of school religious programs, research predominantly treats religious culture as a static administrative intervention rather than a dynamic, multi-phased psychological process (Beliya, 2026; Muspiroh, 2018a). Few empirical studies examine how religious values undergo value recognition, appreciation, and practice amid competing external influences such as family background, digital distractions, and peer dynamics (Banafsa et al., 2025; Sianturi et al., 2024). Consequently, there is an urgent need to investigate the transformative trajectory through which formal religious mandates evolve into intrinsic moral scaffolding and self-regulatory mechanisms capable of mitigating juvenile deviance.

To address this empirical gap, this study investigates the internalisation of school religious culture in mitigating juvenile delinquency at SMP Negeri 1 Poncol Magetan. By analyzing the structural mechanics of value absorption, teacher scaffolding, guidance counseling interventions, and contextual inhibitors, this research moves beyond descriptive accounts of religious routines. Theoretically, this study advances the discourse on Islamic character education by modeling internalisation as an active, continuous socio-psychological transition rather than a passive institutional output. Practically, the findings provide educational administrators and policy makers with actionable strategies to design sustainable, contextual moral development frameworks that systematically curb adolescent behavioral deviance.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm to investigate the structural mechanisms and contextual dynamics of internalizing school religious culture (budaya religius) to mitigate adolescent delinquency

(Harrison et al., 2023). Serving as the primary human instrument, the researcher conducted fieldwork at SMP Negeri 1 Poncol Magetan, East Java, adopting a non-participant observational role to capture naturalistic behavioral patterns without disrupting routine educational operations (Nyumba et al., 2024). Purposive sampling was deployed to select key informants across institutional strata, comprising the principal as the strategic policy-maker, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Guidance Counseling (BK) teachers as pedagogical implementers, and students representing both high-adherence profiles and those with documented disciplinary records to achieve analytical contrast (Moser & Korstjens, 2023). Ethical integrity and academic neutrality were strictly maintained through overt observation protocols, formal institutional consent, and systematic reflexivity to minimize researcher bias throughout the field engagement (Kalu, 2024).

Data collection integrated three complementary qualitative techniques designed to yield multi-layered empirical depth. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended protocols tailored to each informant group, audio-recorded with explicit consent, and transcribed verbatim to extract nuanced insights regarding value perception and moral agency (Moser & Korstjens, 2023). Second, direct passive observations captured daily habituation routines, congregational rituals, and peer interactions within natural school settings. Third, document analysis was executed on primary administrative artifacts—including institutional codes of conduct, counseling violation logs, and religious program schedules—to triangulate self-reported narrative data with documented behavioral trends (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023). Data collection proceeded iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring that no new conceptual dimensions regarding value transformation or behavioral resistance emerged from subsequent interactions (Harrison et al., 2023).

Empirical data were analyzed following the interactive condensation framework developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of continuous data condensation, structured data display (narrative matrices and thematic networks), and verification-driven conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2024). Data condensation involved systematic open and axial coding to abstract raw field notes into overarching themes surrounding value recognition, appreciation, and practice. To ensure rigorous trustworthiness and qualitative validity (credibility), the study implemented member checking by returning tabulated interview summaries to key informants for verification, alongside multi-tiered triangulation across data sources (comparing perspectives of administrators, teachers, and students) and methods (cross-referencing interviews, observations, and documentary records) (Kalu, 2024; Nyumba et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

Located on the slopes of Mount Lawu at an elevation of approximately 700 meters above sea level, SMP Negeri 1 Poncol Magetan operates within a unique socio-geographical environment that shapes its institutional culture. Accredited with an "A" rating, the school serves 604 students supported by 39 educators and administrative staff. Its formal vision—"Resilient in achievement based on faith and noble character"—is operationalized through structured daily routines designed to foster both academic performance and spiritual discipline. The institutional climate synthesizes a serene highland environment with rigorous behavioral guidelines, aiming to cultivate self-regulation among early adolescents navigating complex peer dynamics (Fajri & Widodo, 2024).

Field observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analyses reveal that value internalization at SMP Negeri 1 Poncol proceeds systematically through three main operational pillars: instructional integration, routine habituation, and exemplary leadership (uswah hasanah). Rather than presenting religious education as a purely theoretical domain, the institution embeds spiritual exercises into the structural rhythm of the school day. Every morning prior to instructional periods, students engage in a mandatory 15-minute Quranic

recitation (tadarus) followed by congregational Dhuha prayers in the school chapel. Furthermore, the administration employs spiritual reconciliation, such as guided repentance prayers (repentance/taubat guidance), as a restorative disciplinary mechanism for rule infractions rather than relying exclusively on punitive sanctions (Aslan & Hidayat, 2025).

In the instructional domain, educators actively weave ethical principles into standard curricula, bridging abstract doctrine with actionable moral reasoning. As articulated by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, classroom pedagogy emphasizes how faith-based principles govern daily interpersonal behavior, social etiquette, and academic integrity. This pedagogical approach reflects an intentional shift from passive information transfer to active moral scaffolding, encouraging students to evaluate their choices through an ethical lens (Kurniawan & Naim, 2024). Consequently, classroom environments function as primary spaces where moral concepts are introduced, intellectually dissected, and linked to real-world behavioral expectations.

The second pillar, routine habituation, relies on structured repetition to transition religious practices from external mandates to intrinsic habits. Daily engagement in congregational prayers, communal Quranic readings, and visible displays of religious literature across campus corridors establish a socio-religious architecture that continuously reinforces expectations. Observational data confirm high compliance levels during morning rituals, where students participate with minimal direct enforcement. Through continuous habituation, time management and personal accountability are implicitly cultivated, establishing a behavioral foundation that mitigates impulse-driven conduct and peer-induced infractions (Rohman et al., 2025).

Central to the success of these structured routines is the active presence of teachers as behavioral exemplars. Faculty members do not merely supervise morning rituals; they actively participate alongside students, demonstrating humility, punctuality, and respectful communication. Interview transcripts indicate that student perceptions of institutional fairness and moral authority are heavily influenced by educator consistency. When teachers embody the values they preach, students exhibit a greater willingness to internalize rules and mirror prosocial behavior, illustrating the power of observational learning within an organized educational ecosystem (Suriadi et al., 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, the empirical findings align with the classical Islamic construct of ta'dib—the holistic integration of knowledge, spiritual refinement, and righteous action—while intersecting with modern character education paradigms. The progression observed among students mirrors the tripartite model of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Syafi'i & Fatimah, 2025). By providing cognitive understanding through instruction, emotional resonance through reflective spiritual practices, and behavioral outlets through structured habituation, the school constructs a comprehensive scaffolding mechanism that transforms abstract religious tenets into lived moral agency.

The internalization process is further strengthened by systemic factors within and beyond the school campus. Institutional commitment—reflected in dedicated budget allocations, well-maintained chapel facilities, and clear administrative guidelines—provides the physical and structural backbone for daily religious activities. Furthermore, active communication channels between the school and parents via student logbooks align home environments with institutional expectations. In accordance with socio-ecological framework models, when home and school environments reinforce congruent behavioral expectations, student value retention increases significantly (Tan et al., 2024).

Despite these supportive structures, the study identified significant contextual friction that inhibits uniform value internalization across the student body. Differential levels of individual readiness, varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and exposure to unmonitored digital environments or negative peer groups outside school hours create disparities in student compliance. Counseling logs highlight that persistent minor infractions—such as chronic tardiness and unauthorized smartphone use during class—frequently stem from external

environments where institutional values are not reinforced (Umam & Zarkasyi, 2025). Moreover, instructional time constraints limit the depth to which educators can address individual behavioral struggles.

Despite these external challenges, longitudinal counseling documentation demonstrates a measurable reduction in severe behavioral deviance. Notably, no cases of physical bullying or overt aggression were recorded during the primary observation period (January–May 2026). Comparative analysis of student records indicates that consistent participation in religious routines correlates with lower rates of disciplinary referrals. By substituting unstructured downtime with meaningful communal practices, the institution curtails opportunities for anti-social peer grouping and behavioral escalation (Wibowo & Huda, 2025).

Beyond compliance metrics, qualitative data reveal meaningful transformations within students' affective domains. Teachers and counselors report that students who actively participate in spiritual reflection demonstrate greater emotional calm, improved stress management, and heightened respect toward staff and peers. The application of spiritual reconciliation (such as guided reflective prayer) following minor infractions encourages internal remorse and personal accountability rather than resentment, transforming disciplinary moments into opportunities for emotional and moral growth (Yasin et al., 2024).

Applying symbolic interactionist perspectives, the reduction in student deviance can be attributed to a shift in how students interpret school regulations. Rather than viewing rules as arbitrary external restrictions imposed by authority figures, students increasingly perceive religious routines and disciplinary codes as integral components of their personal and communal identity. This symbolic shift transforms rule adherence into a self-regulated expression of moral integrity, thereby reducing the likelihood of clandestine deviance when adult supervision is absent (Zainuddin & Arifin, 2025).

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that school religious culture operates as an effective, sustainable strategy against youth delinquency when implemented as a dynamic, multi-layered process rather than a static administrative requirement. By harmonizing institutional leadership, teacher modeling, restorative discipline, and parental engagement, SMP Negeri 1 Poncol creates an environment that fosters intrinsic moral reasoning. While external socio-digital influences remain a challenge, the school's integrated approach provides students with the internal self-regulatory mechanisms required to resist negative peer pressure and navigate early adolescence constructively (Azizah & Rahaman, 2026).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the internalization of school religious culture (budaya religius) functions as an effective, dynamic socio-moral scaffolding mechanism in mitigating adolescent deviance within public secondary education. Rather than serving as a passive administrative program, value transformation at SMP Negeri 1 Poncol Magetan unfolds through a structured triad: instructional integration, routine habituation (such as daily Dhuha prayers and Quranic recitation), and exemplary leadership (uswah hasanah). Notably, the institution's deployment of restorative spiritual reconciliation—such as guided repentance prayers (taubat) for disciplinary infractions—shifts the educational paradigm from punitive retribution toward reflective moral agency. Theoretically, this multi-layered approach harmonizes the Islamic construct of ta'dib with contemporary character education models, successfully transitioning values across the cognitive (moral knowing), affective (moral feeling), and behavioral (moral action) domains.

The efficacy of this internalisation process is contingent upon a complex interplay of systemic enablers and contextual frictions. Collective institutional commitment, robust faculty modeling, and supportive physical infrastructure create a conducive micro-environment that reinforces student self-regulation and reduces major behavioral deviance, such as physical bullying. However, the trajectory of value absorption remains non-linear due to external socio-

ecological disruptions, including heterogeneous family backgrounds, unmonitored digital exposures, and negative peer contagion outside school hours. These challenges manifest in persistent minor infractions (e.g., chronic tardiness and classroom smartphone misuse), underscoring that institutional habituation alone cannot fully neutralize external socio-environmental pressures without deep intrinsic value alignment.

Practically and policy-wise, these findings indicate that educational leaders must move beyond superficial religious routine toward holistic character ecosystems. School administrators should strengthen home-school communication channels to ensure value congruence across primary learning environments and refine guidance counseling frameworks to incorporate restorative, faith-aligned reflective practices. Methodologically, while this single-site qualitative case study provides rich contextual depth, its findings are bounded by specific socio-geographical conditions. Future research should employ longitudinal mixed-methods designs across diverse urban-rural contexts and explore the long-term sustainability of internalized moral self-regulation as students transition into late adolescence.

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