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Islamic Value Habituation and Religious Character Transformation: Constructing a Sustainable Practice Model in Islamic Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

While character education in Islamic primary schools is widely acknowledged, few studies critically examine how systemic habituation frameworks transform routine religious practices into internalized moral character. This study analyzes the operationalization, supporting dynamics, and structural challenges of religious character cultivation through Islamic value habituation in a public Islamic primary school (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah). Employing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through prolonged field observation, semi-structured interviews with school leaders, educators, and students, and institutional document analysis. Using interactive qualitative data analysis and rigorous triangulation, the findings reveal that religious habituation functions not merely as passive routine, but as a structured eco-systemic model integrating congregational rituals (salat jama'ah), literacy-based practices (tadarus), and contextualized moral etiquette (akhlak karimah) into daily institutional culture. This habituation successfully fosters core ethical virtues, notably faith-based discipline, moral responsibility, and integrity. Furthermore, the study identifies that while strong pedagogical leadership and conducive school cultures drive successful implementation, home-school behavioral dissonance and socio-cultural student diversity remain primary structural constraints. The study concludes that sustainable religious character transformation requires moving beyond mechanical habituation toward a synergistic, tri-center educational paradigm involving school, family, and community

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Introduction

Religious character education in primary education plays a crucial role as the foundation for shaping the moral habitus of the younger generation (Habibi et al., 2024; Subandowo et al., 2024). In the discourse of Islamic education, character formation extends beyond the cognitive transmission of knowledge (moral knowing) to center on the internalization of values manifested in spontaneous, unforced actions (moral action) (Faisal et al., 2024; Hidayat & Nur,

2025). Philosophically, this perspective is rooted in Al-Ghazali's concepts of soul purification (tazkiyatun nafs) and behavioral conditioning (al-'adah), alongside Ibn Miskawayh's definition of ethics as a state of the soul that spontaneously yields righteous deeds (khuluq). In modern educational frameworks, this conceptualization aligns with Thomas Lickona's (1991) character construction theory and B.F. Skinner's principle of continuous behavioral reinforcement. In the Indonesian context, this urgency is codified in national policies through Law No. 20 of 2003, reinforced by the Pancasila Student Profile within the Merdeka Curriculum (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2022; Suwanti et al., 2025), and underscored by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2023) in positioning madrasahs as epicenters of contextual Islamic culture (Supriyanto et al., 2024).

However, a substantial disconnect remains between normative policy ideals and empirical sociological realities. Students' religious character faces unprecedented moral degradation driven by digital distortions and cultural disruption (Firmansyah et al., 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025). Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA, 2024) recorded 20,968 cases of child violence nationally, signaling the vulnerability of moral character at the grassroots level. Furthermore, exposure to hoaxes, cyberbullying, and destructive online content progressively erodes students' devotional discipline and social empathy (Hamdani, 2021; Lestari, 2018; Maulida et al., 2024). This phenomenon underscores that cognitive-theoretical religious instruction fails to yield substantive behavioral transformation unless paired with structured and systemic religious habituation strategies (Bahri et al., 2024; Solihin & Rahmawati, 2025).

Although prior scholarship confirms that habituation-based character strengthening outperforms purely cognitive-doctrinal approaches (Setiyatna & Harun, 2023; Zulaiha & Anwar, 2024), much of the existing literature remains confined to a dichotomy of mechanical habituation. Religious routines are frequently implemented as formalistic exercises, lacking institutional organization, teacher role-modeling, and the integration of school and family cultures (Kholis & Rohman, 2024; Sa'diyah et al., 2025). Previous studies predominantly treat habituation as isolated activities rather than a holistic educational ecosystem engineered through a coherent chain of planning, implementation, and behavioral assessment (Nurhasanah et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2025). Consequently, the internalization of Islamic values remains fragile and susceptible to shifting when students encounter external environmental dynamics.

This literature constraint highlights a critical research gap regarding how a primary Islamic educational institution constructs a habituation ecosystem capable of bridging religious knowledge to engrained moral character. State Islamic Primary School (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri / MIN) 3 Magetan provides a unique and strategically valuable empirical context to investigate this dynamic. As a reputable public Islamic elementary institution operating under a full-day school system with 1,100 students and 57 educators, the school leverages extended instructional hours to build a comprehensive religious culture. Through its Morning Character Habituation program (Pembiasaan Akhlak Pagi), consolidated daily prayers (Dhuha, Dhuhur, and Ashar in congregation), Quranic literacy initiatives (Ummi method and tahfidz), classical text studies (kitab kuning), and reflective teacher gatherings (ngaji roso), MIN 3 Magetan establishes an ecological space for religious character formation.

Therefore, this article aims to critically analyze the implementation of religious character education through an Islamic value habituation ecosystem at MIN 3 Magetan. Specifically, this study examines three core aspects: (1) how the operational construction of Islamic habituation is systematically designed, executed, and evaluated; (2) how this habituation transforms students' discipline, integrity, and responsibility; and (3) the supporting dynamics and structural constraints encountered during program execution. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in formulating a sustained religious habituation model for primary Islamic education that can be replicated and adapted across formal educational institutions.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to analyze the ecological operationalization of religious character education within a naturalistic educational setting (Adhabi & Anozie, 2024). The qualitative framework was selected because it enables an in-depth, inductive inquiry into complex social interactions and human behavior that cannot be captured through quantitative metrics (Hammarberg et al., 2024). Conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 3 Magetan, East Java, during the 2025/2026 academic year, this research leveraged the institution's full-day school environment as an empirical laboratory. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 18 key informants—comprising the headmaster, Islamic education teachers, primary students, and parents—to capture multi-perspective insights regarding character formation dynamics. Secondary data were drawn from institutional artifacts, including religious curriculum syllabi, student daily devotion logbooks, character assessment rubrics, and official school policies, providing contextual and historical validation for the field observations (O'Brien et al., 2024).

Data collection was executed through a prolonged, multi-method field inquiry to ensure comprehensive empirical coverage (Guest et al., 2024). Direct non-participant observations were conducted across morning character routines (Pembiasaan Akhlak Pagi), congregational prayers (Dhuha, Dhuhur, Ashar), Quranic literacy sessions, and informal social interactions within the school compound. To complement observational data, face-to-face and digitally mediated semi-structured interviews were deployed flexibly to elicit deep narrative accounts of planners' intentions, teachers' pedagogical role-modeling, and students' lived experiences (Nikitina & Fominykh, 2025). Furthermore, document analysis was integrated to examine how institutional policies translate into everyday routines and assessment systems. The researchers served as the primary instrument (key human instrument), dynamically adjusting inquiry focus based on emerging field phenomena (Tenny et al., 2024).

To guarantee scholarly rigor, data trustworthiness was established through dual-triangulation strategies encompassing technical and source triangulation (Flick, 2024). Technical triangulation compared observational field notes, interview transcripts, and policy document extracts to evaluate behavioral consistency across different data-gathering channels. Simultaneously, source triangulation cross-verified narrative accounts provided by the headmaster, educators, students, and parents regarding the planning, execution, and evaluation of religious habituation (Korstjens & Moser, 2024). Discrepancies between formal school rules and actual student practices were critically interrogated to minimize subjective bias and eliminate empirical distortions. Prolonged engagement in the field and peer debriefing sessions further reinforced the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative findings (Lincoln et al., 2025).

Data were systematically analyzed using the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Bengtsson, 2024). During data condensation, raw interview transcripts, observational notes, and document logs were iteratively coded, categorized, and filtered to isolate core thematic clusters related to habituation design, behavioral transformation, and structural barriers. The condensed data were subsequently mapped into structured narrative matrices and analytical displays to visualize interconnections among institutional planning, teacher role-modeling, and student character outcomes. Finally, provisional conclusions were drawn, continuously cross-checked against raw empirical evidence, and validated through informant feedback (member checking) to construct a robust, transferable model of sustained religious habituation in primary Islamic education (Assarroudi et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

The empirical investigation conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 3 Magetan demonstrates how institutional history, geographic positioning, and localized educational

governance converge to cultivate a robust Islamic character ecosystem. Established in 1967 under the aegis of the Pesantren Sabilil Mutaqin (PSM) Takeran foundation before transitioning into a state Islamic primary school, MIN 3 Magetan currently educates over 1,200 students across 28 classrooms and specialized laboratories. Guided by the vision of fostering students with noble character (akhlakul karimah), academic achievement, and environmental consciousness, the institution utilizes its 2,111 square meters of infrastructure to operationalize religious habituation. Recent scholarship confirms that the historical legacy and spatial environment of faith-based schools function as foundational catalysts in establishing structured moral habituation, institutional trust, and collective religious identity (Albantani et al., 2024).

The structural implementation of religious character education at MIN 3 Magetan relies on an integrated organizational framework involving the Madrasah Development Team (Tim Pengembang Madrasah/TPM) and Grade-Level Teacher Working Groups (Kelompok Kerja Guru/KKG). Data gathered from the headmaster and key educators reveal that character programming is formulated through a multi-tiered administrative cycle during annual planning assemblies. The TPM establishes macro-level operational benchmarks, whereas the KKG operationalizes micro-level schedules integrated directly into the academic calendar. This systematic governance aligns with contemporary organizational learning theory in religious education, which posits that sustained moral transformation requires clear administrative delegation, shared institutional ownership, and strategic alignment between macro-policy and micro-classroom execution (Anwar et al., 2025).

The primary objectives of the religious habituation architecture at MIN 3 Magetan extend beyond cognitive Islamic studies to encompass four core developmental dimensions: cognitive-affective internalizations, behavioral automaticity, moral resilience against modern digital distractions, and social-ecological empathy. The headmaster emphasized that habituation aims to transform religious rituals from externally enforced duties into intrinsic spiritual necessities that form an automatic behavioral reflex. Field evidence indicates that this strategic intent is realized through structured daily routines, including Morning Character Building (Pembiasaan Akhlak Pagi), the UMMI Quranic method, mandatory Dhuha prayers, and congregational Zuhr prayers. Educational researchers emphasize that transforming moral knowledge into subconscious habituation requires high structural consistency and environmental repetition during middle childhood (Barizi et al., 2024).

To facilitate this systemic habituation, the school infrastructure is intentionally configured as an active religious learning space. The institution provides specialized facilities, including a central mosque, dedicated ablution stations, class-level Islamic reading corners, Asmaul Husna visual displays, digital audio broadcast systems for collective prayer guidance, and eco-friendly charity boxes. Field observations verified that these physical artifacts create an immersive religious atmosphere that continuously triggers positive moral actions throughout the school day. This spatial configuration exemplifies the concept of physical-environmental scaffolding, where the tangible surroundings actively prompt and reinforce spiritual practices without requiring constant verbal directives from authority figures (Bukhari & Ismail, 2024).

The operationalization of religious character building follows a strict three-phase cycle consisting of planning, execution, and evaluation. In the planning phase, classroom teachers allocate fifteen to twenty minutes at the start and end of each instructional block for religious devotions, moral reflections, and Quranic recitation. Teachers prepare standardized monitoring logbooks and visual media to track student participation in real time. Methodological literature in Islamic pedagogy confirms that pre-allocating dedicated temporal blocks for reflection significantly enhances student self-regulation and moral awareness during classroom instruction (Darmadi et al., 2025).

During the execution phase, religious habituation manifests through direct pedagogical guidance and socio-religious rituals. The Morning Character Building program engages students immediately upon arrival through the 7S cultural practice, which emphasizes smiling,

greeting, salutation, politeness, courtesy, enthusiasm, and health. Teachers stand at the main entrance gate to welcome students, providing immediate behavioral modeling and establishing an affective connection before formal instruction begins. Subsequent morning activities include collective Asmaul Husna chanting, short sermonettes, and structured Quranic memorization using the UMMI method. Contemporary empirical studies show that morning emotional grounding and positive teacher-student greetings significantly reduce behavioral anxiety and increase prosocial engagement in primary school students (Hasanah et al., 2024).

The evaluation phase utilizes a multi-source assessment model to monitor character development across both school and home environments. Educators utilize daily observation rubrics alongside student self-assessment logs to evaluate worship consistency, discipline, and peer interactions. Crucially, the evaluation framework incorporates parent involvement through home monitoring journals that record morning and evening prayers, home Quranic reading, and household social conduct. Educational evaluation research indicates that cross-setting character monitoring mechanisms prevent behavioral discrepancy, where students display compliance at school but lapse in unmonitored home settings (Hidayat et al., 2025).

The qualitative data collected from student informants indicate a significant internal transformation regarding religious compliance over time. Students reported that daily repetition transformed congregational prayer and Quranic reading from teacher-enforced tasks into enjoyable daily habits that generated personal comfort. Interview transcripts reveal that peer participation during Dhuha and Zuhr prayers fostered collective accountability, making religious practices social norms rather than isolated obligations. Sociological analyses of school cultures highlight that when religious routines become normalized among peer groups, social friction decreases and intrinsic moral motivation increases substantially (Ismail et al., 2024).

Perspectives from parent informants confirm that the character habituation initiated at MIN 3 Magetan successfully transfers to the home environment. Parents observed noticeable improvements in their children's voluntary prayer initiative, respectful communication, and personal discipline without requiring constant parental prompts. Furthermore, parents noted that environmental awareness initiatives at the madrasah—such as maintaining clean study spaces and participating in greening activities—translated into better personal hygiene and domestic helpfulness. Recent developmental psychology literature underscores that authentic character education must demonstrate ecological validity, manifesting consistently across school, home, and community contexts (Mahfud et al., 2025).

The successful execution of religious habituation at MIN 3 Magetan is driven by strong institutional support, teacher commitment, and adequate physical infrastructure. Key supporting factors include strong leadership from the headmaster, active teacher role-modeling, comprehensive learning materials, and strong parent-teacher communication channels. The continuous presence of teachers during prayer and devotion routines provides students with visible examples of moral conduct. Studies on observational learning theory reinforce that teacher role-modeling is the most influential predictor of character adoption in elementary education settings (Muassomah et al., 2024).

Despite these positive outcomes, the habituation process faces several structural and environmental challenges that complicate character formation. Primary inhibiting factors include inconsistent parental supervision at home, unfiltered exposure to digital media and online gaming outside school hours, and occasional student fatigue during full-day school schedules. Teachers reported that a minority of students experience behavioral regression following extended school breaks due to unstructured home environments. Recent digital pedagogy studies confirm that unmonitored smartphone usage among young learners often conflicts with character education goals, requiring stronger digital literacy interventions (Nizam et al., 2025).

To mitigate these inhibiting factors, MIN 3 Magetan established adaptive strategic

interventions centered on home-school synergy and digital ethics education. The madrasah conducts monthly parent-teacher association meetings to align parenting strategies and monitor home journal logs. Additionally, teachers integrate digital literacy modules into Religious Education classes to teach ethical technology use and time management. Educational management literature stresses that mitigating environmental barriers in character education requires transparent, ongoing collaboration between school leaders and family units (Rahmat et al., 2024).

The synthesis of empirical findings confirms that religious character building at MIN 3 Magetan operates as a dynamic, ecologically integrated system rather than a series of isolated instructional activities. By combining formal administrative planning, spatial scaffolding, continuous teacher modeling, and cross-setting evaluation, the madrasah successfully fosters moral automaticity and social-ecological consciousness among primary students. The theoretically grounded character habituation model developed at MIN 3 Magetan provides a transferable blueprint for primary Islamic educational institutions seeking to balance traditional moral values with contemporary educational standards, bridging the gap between theoretical moral knowledge and sustained daily practice (Syahril et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the cultivation of religious character in primary Islamic education cannot rely on passive routine or cognitive-doctrinal transmission; rather, it demands an integrated, eco-systemic habituation framework. The empirical findings at MIN 3 Magetan demonstrate that when congregational rituals (ṣalāt jamāʿah), Quranic literacy (tadārus), and contextual etiquette (akhlāq karīmah) are systematically engineered through spatial scaffolding, administrative governance, and continuous teacher role-modeling, religious practice transforms from externally enforced compliance into intrinsic moral automaticity.

Furthermore, this study underscores that while strong pedagogical leadership and conducive institutional cultures drive internal success, behavioral transformation remains vulnerable to external disruptions—specifically home-school behavioral dissonance and digital cultural saturation. Therefore, sustainable religious character transformation requires moving beyond mechanical, school-centric habituation toward a synergistic tri-center educational paradigm that bridges the structural gaps between the school, the family, and the broader socio-digital environment.

Theoretically, this research extends Al-Ghazali's concept of behavioral conditioning (al-ʿādah) and Ibn Miskawayh's ethics of khuluq by contextualizing them within Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of habitus alongside modern psychological frameworks (Lickona's character construction and Skinner's behavioral reinforcement). It offers a refined theoretical model demonstrating how spatial-environmental design and structural routine act as active catalysts in internalizing religious habitus among primary school learners. Practically, the habituation architecture implemented at MIN 3 Magetan provides a replicable, policy-relevant blueprint for madrasah leaders and primary education policymakers aiming to operationalize character education under the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Pancasila Student Profile frameworks.

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