



## The Islamic Leadership Style of Principals in Building a Religious School Culture in Public Senior High Schools in Jambi Province

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### Abstract:

This study examines the implementation of religious school culture and the Islamic leadership style of principals in public senior high schools in Jambi Province, Indonesia. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving principals, vice principals, teachers, and students at SMA Negeri 1 Jambi City and SMA Negeri 1 Sungai Penuh. The findings reveal that religious culture is implemented through various daily, weekly, and annual activities, including congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, Faith and Piety Development programs, Tahfiz activities, and other religious character-building initiatives. The study also found that principals demonstrate an Islamic leadership style characterized by exemplary behavior, participation, integrity, responsibility, and commitment to religious values. These leadership practices contribute significantly to strengthening students' religious awareness, discipline, and moral character while fostering a positive school environment. Despite challenges such as limited facilities, inconsistent teacher participation, and diverse student backgrounds, the implementation of religious culture has been effective in supporting character development. The study concludes that Islamic leadership plays a crucial role in establishing and sustaining a religious school culture and contributes to achieving national educational goals by developing students who are religious, ethical, and socially responsible.

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### Introduction (مقدمة)

Indonesia's national education system aims not only to develop students' intellectual abilities but also to cultivate faith, morality, responsibility, creativity, and social awareness. In the midst of rapid social change, globalization, and cultural diversity, educational institutions are expected to play a strategic role in shaping students' character and preparing them to become ethical and responsible citizens. Consequently, schools are increasingly challenged to strengthen moral and religious values alongside academic achievement (Syamsuddin, 2020; Sari, Hasbi, & Firman, 2023).

Islam provides comprehensive guidance for human life through the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These sources emphasize the development of moral character, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness. Therefore, the integration of Islamic values into educational practices is considered essential for addressing contemporary social problems, including moral decline, intolerance, violence, and other forms of deviant behavior among youth. Educational institutions are consequently required to incorporate religious values into both academic and non-academic activities (Rahman et al., 2026; Iskandar, Thalal, Sari, & Al Azhari, 2026).

One important strategy for strengthening students' character is the development of a religious school culture. Religious school culture refers to the internalization of religious values into daily school activities, traditions, norms, and interactions. Such a culture encourages students to practice religious teachings consistently and promotes harmonious relationships with God, fellow human beings, and the environment. Previous studies have demonstrated that religious culture serves as an effective instrument for character formation and moral development among students (Dewi, 2024; Maulidin, Pramana, & Munir, 2024).

Schools represent an effective environment for instilling religious values because students spend a significant portion of their time within educational institutions. Through structured activities, routines, and role modeling, schools can cultivate positive habits and moral behavior. Religious culture in schools may be reflected through collective worship, Qur'anic literacy programs, ethical communication, discipline, mutual respect, and other value-based activities. Such practices contribute to the development of a supportive learning environment that integrates spiritual and social dimensions of education (Aini, Syahril, & Yanti, 2023; Faozi, Wahyudin, & Muslim, 2025).

The success of religious culture development is highly dependent on the role of teachers and educational staff. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering knowledge but also serve as role models who shape students' attitudes, behaviors, and values. Professional, committed, and morally exemplary teachers significantly contribute to the formation of students' religious character and overall personal development. Religious values are more effectively internalized when teachers consistently demonstrate them through daily interactions and educational practices (Ilmi & Sholeh, 2021; Ruvi Anugerah, Muhajir, Hasri, & Sohiron, 2026).

School leadership also plays a decisive role in creating and sustaining a religious school culture. The principal serves as the highest leader within the school and is responsible for planning, organizing, supervising, and evaluating educational programs. Through effective leadership, principals can influence school policies, motivate teachers, and foster a shared commitment to the school's vision and values. Studies have consistently shown that leadership is one of the most influential factors in shaping school culture and promoting educational effectiveness (Hudaya, Rosyid, & Suklani, 2025; Syamsuddin, 2020).

Islamic leadership emphasizes values such as integrity, justice, responsibility, compassion, sincerity, and exemplary conduct. These leadership principles are rooted in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who serves as the ideal model for ethical leadership. Principals

who apply Islamic leadership values are expected to create a positive educational environment that promotes both academic excellence and moral development. Such leadership encourages collaboration, trust, and collective responsibility among members of the school community (Iskandar et al., 2026; Rahman et al., 2026).

Despite various efforts to strengthen character education, many Indonesian schools continue to face challenges related to student behavior, including violence, substance abuse, moral misconduct, and declining social responsibility. These issues indicate that formal religious instruction alone may not be sufficient. Religious values need to be integrated into the broader culture of the school through consistent leadership, policies, and educational practices. Previous studies have similarly identified the need for a more holistic approach to religious and character education within schools (Sari et al., 2023; Dewi, 2024).

Several public senior high schools in Jambi Province have implemented programs aimed at strengthening religious values, including Qur'anic literacy activities, religious extracurricular programs, and character-building initiatives. Implementation of religious school culture is often constrained by limited instructional time for religious education, varying levels of students' religious competence, limited teacher preparedness, and the diverse educational backgrounds of students and school personnel. Similar challenges have been reported in studies examining religious culture implementation in Indonesian schools (Maulidin et al., 2024; Faozi et al., 2025).

Given these challenges and opportunities, the role of principals becomes increasingly important in fostering a sustainable religious school culture. Understanding how Islamic leadership styles contribute to the development of religious values within public senior high schools is therefore essential. Although previous studies have examined religious culture and educational leadership separately, limited research has specifically explored how Islamic leadership practices shape religious school culture in public senior high schools. This study seeks to examine the Islamic leadership practices of school principals in building a religious school culture in public senior high schools across Jambi Province (Hudaya et al., 2025; Syarip, 2025).

## Method (منهج)

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences, perceptions, and leadership practices of school principals in fostering a religious school culture in public senior high schools in Jambi Province, Indonesia. The phenomenological approach was selected because it enables researchers to understand the meanings and experiences of participants regarding a particular phenomenon in its natural context. A descriptive-analytical method was also utilized to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the research findings. The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Jambi City and SMA Negeri 1 Sungai Penuh, two public senior high schools recognized for implementing religious-based educational programs. These schools were selected because they have established various religious activities as part of their educational culture. The research focused on examining how Islamic leadership practices contribute to the development of a religious school environment. Through this approach, the study sought to generate an in-depth understanding of leadership and religious culture within the school setting.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement and experience in implementing religious school culture. The research participants consisted of two principals, six vice principals, thirty teachers, and thirty students. Among these participants, the principals served as the key informants because of their central role in planning, implementing, supervising, and evaluating school programs. Teachers and vice principals provided information

regarding the implementation of religious activities and school policies, while students shared their experiences as recipients of the educational programs. The selection of multiple participant groups enabled the researcher to obtain diverse perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. This approach also contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between leadership practices and religious culture. Consequently, the data reflected the experiences of various stakeholders within the school community.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to examine daily school activities, religious practices, and interactions among school members. Interviews were used to gather detailed information regarding participants' perceptions of Islamic leadership and the implementation of religious values within the school environment. In addition, documents such as school policies, program reports, activity schedules, and institutional records were reviewed to support and validate the findings. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from different sources and data collection techniques. This process enhanced the validity and reliability of the research results.



## Discussion (مناقشة)

### Implementation of Religious Culture in Public Senior High Schools in Jambi Province

The findings indicate that religious culture has been systematically integrated into school life at SMA Negeri 1 Jambi City and SMA Negeri 1 Sungai Penuh. Religious values are embedded through structured daily, weekly, and annual programs designed to strengthen students' spiritual, moral, and social development. Such integration demonstrates that religious education is not limited to classroom instruction but is incorporated into the broader educational environment through routines, traditions, and institutional practices. These findings support previous studies which emphasize that religious culture becomes effective when religious values are institutionalized within everyday school activities and organizational practices (Dewi, 2024; Sari, Hasbi, & Firman, 2023).

Implementation strategies vary across schools according to their institutional characteristics. SMA Negeri 1 Jambi City emphasizes congregational prayers, the Faith and Piety Development Program (BIT), worship monitoring, and religious celebrations. Religious guidance is also provided for non-Muslim students according to their respective beliefs, reflecting an inclusive approach to religious culture. SMA Negeri 1 Sungai Penuh focuses on flagship programs such as Rumah Tahfiz, Jumat Beriman, congregational worship, Asmaul Husna recitation, and Mabid activities. These programs create opportunities for students to internalize religious values through both ritual practices and character-building activities. Similar findings were reported by Maulidin, Pramana, and Munir (2024), who found that religious culture develops more effectively when supported by structured and continuous school programs.

The implementation model observed in both schools supports the concept of religious school culture as a system of shared values, norms, and behaviors that shape organizational life. Religious culture functions not merely as a collection of ceremonial activities but as a mechanism for cultivating ethical conduct, self-discipline, and social responsibility. Regular exposure to religious practices encourages students to develop positive habits that gradually become part of

their daily behavior. This finding is consistent with the argument of Syamsuddin (2020), who states that school culture serves as an important medium for transmitting values and shaping students' character.

The success of religious culture implementation is strongly influenced by the leadership role of school principals. Principals actively support religious programs through policy development, supervision, resource allocation, and direct participation in school activities. Their involvement creates a supportive organizational climate and strengthens the commitment of teachers and students toward achieving common educational goals. Previous studies have similarly concluded that principal leadership is a decisive factor in sustaining religious culture and promoting value-based education (Hudaya, Rosyid, & Suklani, 2025; Dewi, 2024).

Several challenges continue to affect the effectiveness of implementation. Limited prayer facilities restrict the participation of all students in congregational worship activities. Variations in teacher involvement reduce program consistency, particularly when religious activities are perceived as the responsibility of specific teachers rather than the entire school community. External influences, including digital media, globalization, and contemporary youth culture, further challenge efforts to maintain students' commitment to religious values. Similar obstacles have been identified in previous studies examining religious culture development in schools (Sari et al., 2023; Maulidin et al., 2024).

The findings demonstrate significant positive outcomes for student character development. Increased levels of discipline, responsibility, respectfulness, and participation in religious activities were observed across both schools. Programs such as Rumah Tahfiz enhanced students' Qur'anic literacy and memorization, while religious enrichment activities encouraged confidence, communication skills, and moral awareness. These findings reinforce previous research showing that religious school culture contributes positively to character education and students' moral development (Rahman et al., 2026; Iskandar, Thalal, Sari, & Al Azhari, 2026).

Sustained religious practices strengthen both the vertical relationship between students and God and the horizontal relationship among members of the school community. This dual orientation reflects the Islamic perspective that religious values should guide individual behavior as well as social interaction. Religious culture therefore serves as an important foundation for creating a harmonious and value-based educational environment that promotes both spiritual and social development (Rahman et al., 2026).

Analysis of the findings suggests that the effectiveness of religious culture depends on the synergy among leadership, institutional support, teacher commitment, and student participation. Religious programs become more meaningful when supported by consistent policies, adequate facilities, and active involvement from all stakeholders. Schools that successfully integrate these elements are more likely to create a sustainable culture that reinforces religious and moral values. This conclusion supports the findings of Syarip (2025), who emphasized that leadership commitment is a key determinant of successful Islamic school culture development.

Religious culture in public senior high schools in Jambi Province has become an effective instrument for character education. Integration of religious values into school routines, supported by Islamic leadership practices and institutional commitment, contributes significantly to the development of students who are spiritually aware, morally responsible, and socially engaged. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the strategic role of Islamic leadership in fostering sustainable religious culture and strengthening character formation among students (Hudaya et al., 2025; Iskandar et al., 2026).

## Islamic Leadership Style of Principals in Building a Religious School Culture in Public Senior High Schools in Jambi Province

The findings indicate that the leadership style practiced by principals at SMA Negeri 1 Jambi City and SMA Negeri 1 Sungai Penuh can be categorized as Islamic, participatory, and exemplary. Principals actively engage in religious activities and consistently encourage the integration of Islamic values into school life. Leadership practices extend beyond administrative functions and focus on fostering an educational environment that promotes religious awareness, moral development, and character formation. These findings support previous studies emphasizing that Islamic leadership contributes significantly to the development of a value-based school culture and strengthens institutional commitment to religious education (Iskandar, Thalal, Sari, & Al Azhari, 2026; Rahman et al., 2026).

Implementation of Islamic leadership is reflected in the principals' direct involvement in school religious programs. At SMA Negeri 1 Jambi City, the principal participates in congregational prayers, Faith and Piety Development (BIT) activities, and worship-monitoring programs while maintaining close collaboration with teachers and parents. Such involvement reinforces religious values both within and beyond the school environment. Similar findings have been reported by Dewi (2024), who argues that principal involvement is a critical factor in establishing a sustainable religious school culture.

Leadership practices at SMA Negeri 1 Sungai Penuh demonstrate a comparable pattern. The principal actively greets students at the school entrance, participates in congregational worship, and provides institutional support for programs such as Rumah Tahfiz and Jumat Beriman. Financial support and administrative facilitation are also provided to ensure program continuity and effectiveness. These practices align with the findings of Maulidin, Pramana, and Munir (2024), who found that strong leadership commitment is essential for maintaining religious programs and increasing student engagement.

Characteristics of Islamic leadership observed in both schools reflect the prophetic values of *siddiq* (honesty), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (effective communication), and *fathonah* (wisdom). Principals serve as role models by demonstrating religious values through daily behavior rather than relying solely on formal regulations. Such findings are consistent with the concept of prophetic leadership, which emphasizes moral integrity, justice, and exemplary conduct as the foundation of effective educational leadership (Ruvi Anugerah, Muhajir, Hasri, & Sohiron, 2026).

The study also reveals that principals function as strategic leaders who build a shared vision and encourage collective participation among school stakeholders. Open communication, consultation, and collaboration are consistently employed to strengthen commitment toward religious programs. This leadership approach corresponds with participatory leadership theory, which highlights the importance of involving organizational members in decision-making and fostering a sense of ownership toward institutional goals (Syarip, 2025).

Islamic leadership in both schools is closely associated with the responsibility of guiding students' moral and spiritual development. Principals view religious culture as an essential component of educational success and seek to balance academic achievement with character education. Such a perspective is consistent with Islamic educational principles that position leadership as a means of promoting both intellectual growth and ethical behavior (Rahman et al., 2026).

Several challenges were identified in the implementation of Islamic leadership. Inconsistent teacher participation in religious activities reduces the effectiveness of leadership initiatives.

Student interest in religious programs also varies, with some students showing greater enthusiasm for non-religious extracurricular activities. Limited instructional time for religious education further constrains efforts to strengthen religious culture throughout the curriculum. Similar challenges have been documented in studies examining the implementation of religious culture in educational institutions (Sari, Hasbi, & Firman, 2023).

These findings suggest that successful Islamic leadership is influenced not only by the personal qualities of principals but also by organizational, structural, and cultural factors. Leadership effectiveness depends on the ability to coordinate stakeholders, motivate teachers, and create supportive institutional conditions. Continuous professional development and innovative strategies are therefore required to ensure that religious values remain relevant and meaningful within contemporary educational settings (Hudaya, Rosyid, & Suklani, 2025).

Analysis of the findings demonstrates that Islamic leadership contributes significantly to strengthening religious culture through role modeling, participatory decision-making, and institutional support. Religious values become more deeply embedded when principals actively encourage collaboration among teachers, students, and parents. This finding supports the argument that leadership serves as a key driver in shaping school culture and organizational behavior (Syamsuddin, 2020; Dewi, 2024).

The Islamic leadership style practiced by principals in public senior high schools in Jambi Province has played a substantial role in fostering a religious and character-oriented educational environment. Commitment to Islamic values, active participation in religious activities, and collaborative leadership practices have strengthened the implementation of religious culture within the school community. Greater teacher engagement, stronger curriculum integration, and improved institutional support remain necessary to maximize the impact of Islamic leadership on character development and educational quality (Hudaya et al., 2025; Iskandar et al., 2026).



## Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study concludes that the implementation of religious school culture in public senior high schools in Jambi Province has been carried out through various integrated religious programs, including congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, faith-development activities, Tahfiz programs, and character-building initiatives embedded in daily school routines. The findings demonstrate that the Islamic leadership style of school principals, characterized by exemplary behavior, participation, integrity, responsibility, and commitment to Islamic values, plays a crucial role in fostering and sustaining a religious school culture. Through active involvement, collaboration with teachers and parents, and support for religious activities, principals have successfully contributed to students' moral, spiritual, and social development. Although challenges remain, such as limited facilities, varying levels of teacher participation, and students' diverse educational backgrounds, the study reveals that Islamic leadership significantly strengthens the effectiveness of religious culture implementation and supports the achievement of national educational goals in developing students who are faithful, morally upright, and socially responsible.

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