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Religious Habituation and Character Formation through Congregational Dhuhr Prayer in Strengthening Student Discipline

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Abstract:
This study examines how congregational Dhuhr prayer habituation is experienced differently by students and how a supervised school routine may support, but does not automatically establish, self-regulation. A qualitative descriptive case study was conducted in Grade VIII C at SMP Negeri 5 Ambarawa. Semi-structured interviews with an Islamic Religious Education teacher, a homeroom teacher, and five students were collected on 24 September 2026 and interpreted through thematic analysis and source comparison. The program uses class scheduling, two prayer sessions, teacher accompaniment, attendance recording, and guidance. The interviews reveal contrasting patterns: S1 and S5 reported greater time awareness and responsibility; S2 described better management of break time; S3 reported inconsistent participation; and S4 continued to rely on reminders. Limited ablution-water access, unfinished assignments, and fatigue also affected punctuality. The findings suggest that visible participation and internalized discipline are analytically distinct, with student responses shaped by both personal readiness and school conditions. The study contributes a comparative account of these differing responses within one routine. For character education, attendance monitoring is best complemented by teacher modelling, brief reflection, differentiated guidance, and adequate facilities. As the evidence derives from a single interview-based case, sustained behavioral change cannot be inferred.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Character education in school is not limited to transmitting definitions of good and bad conduct; it requires repeated experiences through which values become observable patterns of action. Indonesian education policy places character development within the broader aims of national education and has reinforced it through the national policy on Strengthening Character Education (Republic of Indonesia, 2003, 2017). Empirical studies likewise show that exemplary

conduct, habituation, school climate, and consistent adult guidance are central mechanisms through which discipline and responsibility are formed in everyday school life (Aningsih et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2023). Recent case studies further indicate that habituation becomes more effective when routines are accompanied by teacher consistency and an environment that repeatedly cues the expected behavior (Ananda et al., 2026; Mustika et al., 2026).

Religious habituation has a distinctive educational function because it combines normative meaning, ritual practice, social coordination, and temporal discipline. Research on Islamic habituation in elementary schools has found that scheduled religious routines can support the emergence of religious, disciplined, and responsible behavior when they are integrated into school culture rather than treated as isolated ceremonial activities (Febriyanti & Amrullah, 2023; Safitri et al., 2023). Quantitative evidence also indicates a positive relationship between disciplinary habits, religious habits, and students' religious character (Delviany et al., 2024). Studies of Dhuha prayer habituation and other worship routines similarly show that repetition can provide a practical setting for constructing responsibility and religious character (Andayani & Dahlan, 2022).

Congregational Dhuhr prayer is particularly relevant to discipline formation because it occurs in the middle of the school day. Students must stop academic or social activities, respond to a clear time cue, prepare for ablution, move to the prayer room, follow congregational procedures, and then return to school activities. Previous studies have linked congregational prayer routines with punctuality, obedience, responsibility, and discipline, although they also identify obstacles related to motivation, infrastructure, and supervision (Zein & Nugraha, 2022; Maulida et al., 2025). More recent studies report similar patterns: scheduled congregational prayer can strengthen religious values and disciplinary behavior when teacher modelling, monitoring, and school support are sustained (Kurahman et al., 2025; Nurfadhiilah et al., 2026; Rahmadhani & Andriani, 2026).

Nevertheless, the routine implementation of worship is not equivalent to the internalization of discipline. Attendance records, academic incentives, reminders, and reprimands may secure participation while leaving the reasons for participation unclear. Previous research demonstrates the role of supervision in initiating worship discipline, yet also notes the fragility of such habits when monitoring decreases (Saputra et al., 2026). Other studies underline the importance of teacher accompaniment and collective school support because students differ in motivation and readiness for independent action (Karima et al., 2026; Siregar et al., 2026). The need to move beyond religious knowledge toward the personal adoption of values has also been emphasized at the junior-high level (Hikayat et al., 2026). These insights point to an unresolved analytical distinction between compliance that is observable at school and discipline sustained by students' own awareness.

At SMP Negeri 5 Ambarawa, congregational Dhuhr prayer is organized by the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher with support from other teachers, a class-based schedule, two sessions adjusted to the prayer room, and attendance records. However, the interviews present variation within the same program. Some students described preparing promptly, organizing their break time, and recognizing prayer as their responsibility, while others described postponement, unfinished assignments, conversation with peers, or dependence on reminders. Constraints such as access to ablution water further complicate a simple classification of punctual students as disciplined and late students as undisciplined. This coexistence of relatively autonomous and supervision-dependent responses makes the case relevant for examining how school routines are translated into different experiences of character formation.

Existing studies have documented the implementation of religious habits, positive associations with student discipline, and the contribution of teacher supervision (Delviany et al.,

2024; Kurahman et al., 2025; Rahmadhani & Andriani, 2026). What requires closer examination is the variation in how students respond to identical routines, particularly the distinction between compliance prompted by school mechanisms and the emerging capacity to act without repeated prompting. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative interpretation of student interview accounts alongside teacher perspectives and material conditions, rather than treating regular attendance as sufficient evidence of internalization. The study therefore analyzes (1) how the Dhuhr prayer routine is organized, (2) how discipline and character are described across students with different participation patterns, and (3) how teacher guidance and school facilities may support or constrain the movement from externally monitored compliance toward personal responsibility. Its contribution is interpretive and context-specific, not a claim to measure a universal developmental sequence.

Method (منهج)

Research Design and Setting

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with a case-study design. The case comprised the congregational Dhuhr prayer routine in Grade VIII C at SMP Negeri 5 Ambarawa, where time allocation, teacher involvement, student participation, and supporting facilities interact within a common school setting. A case-study approach allows these interrelated practices and contrasting experiences to be examined in context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview data presented in this study were collected on 24 September 2026. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on participants' accounts of program implementation and perceived changes rather than on directly observed behavioral frequencies or longitudinal outcomes.

Participants and Data Collection

Seven informants were selected purposively for their involvement in the prayer routine and for the contrasts their accounts could provide. They comprised the PAI teacher who coordinates the activity, the Grade VIII C homeroom teacher, and five students whose reported participation differed. Including school personnel and students made it possible to compare institutional expectations with lived student experiences. The five student accounts were examined as contrasting cases, not as a statistically representative sample of the class. Informant codes GPAI, WK, and S1–S5 were used consistently when interpreting and presenting excerpts, and the focus of each account is outlined in Table 1.

Semi-structured interviews provided the data. The PAI teacher was asked about the daily schedule, two-session arrangement, attendance recording, supervision, guidance, supporting conditions, and obstacles. The homeroom teacher addressed student punctuality, changes in conduct, class-level reminders, and coordination with the PAI teacher. Student questions concerned when and how they prepared for prayer, responses to teacher reminders, management of break-time activities, perceived changes in responsibility or social conduct, and barriers to arriving on time. These overlapping areas of inquiry allowed statements about the same practice to be compared across roles while leaving space for differences in emphasis. The reported interview excerpts are attributed to informant codes and the interview date, enabling the reader to connect interpretations with the evidence shown.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The interview material was analyzed thematically through iterative reading, initial code assignment, comparison of codes, thematic grouping, and review against the reported accounts, following the logic of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Initial codes captured concrete expressions such as responding promptly to the prayer cue, organizing break time, needing repeated reminders, delaying to talk with peers, and waiting for ablution water. Related codes were examined within five broader analytical areas: program organization, time discipline,

religious and social responsibility, teacher support, and personal or structural constraints. For example, accounts of quicker preparation and better break-time planning were considered together under time management, whereas reliance on reminders and postponed attendance informed the interpretation of externally prompted participation. Themes were refined by checking whether contrasting statements, particularly those of S3 and S4, were represented rather than absorbed into a uniformly positive account.

Credibility was addressed through comparison of the PAI teacher's account, the homeroom teacher's account, and the five student perspectives. The teachers' descriptions of scheduling and reminders were compared with students' descriptions of punctuality, while perceived improvements were read alongside disclosures of lateness and inconsistent attendance. Agreement across roles supported interpretations of program structure and perceived changes; disagreement or qualification was retained as evidence of variation rather than treated as an error to remove. This strategy supports interpretive credibility by preserving agreement and difference within the interview material, while the evidence remains bounded by the perspectives and occasion represented.

Table 1. Informants and data focus

Code	Informant	Primary data focus
GPAI	PAI teacher	Implementation, supervision, discipline, character, supporting and inhibiting factors
WK	Grade VIII C homeroom teacher	Daily discipline, behavioral changes, character, teacher coordination
S1	Active and disciplined student	Punctuality, responsibility, facility constraints
S2	Moderately disciplined student	Time management, orderliness, facility constraints
S3	Moderately disciplined student	Inconsistent participation and congregational-prayer habits
S4	Less orderly student	Lateness, postponement, need for reminders
S5	Student representing general experience	Time awareness, religiosity, politeness, peer reminders

Result (نتائج)

Program Structure, Scheduling, and Teacher Accompaniment

The congregational Dhuhr prayer routine is implemented as a structured school activity. The PAI teacher explained that four classes are scheduled each day and that the prayer room is used in two sessions because of limited capacity. Daily organization is coordinated by the PAI teacher with support from other teachers who also participate in the prayer. The program therefore operates through planned scheduling rather than spontaneous participation.

Implementation is reinforced by communication among teachers, class-based attendance records, reminders, and moral guidance during PAI lessons. The attendance record is also associated with additional consideration in PAI assessment. This arrangement creates three layers of control: temporal organization, cross-teacher supervision, and normative reinforcement. The homeroom teacher adds regular reminders and coordination when students are repeatedly late or reluctant to participate.

> *"Each day we schedule four classes ... the prayer room is used in two sessions. The PAI teacher and teachers who join the prayer organize it."* (GPAI, interview, 24 September 2026)

Strengthening Time Discipline and Orderliness

Time awareness was the clearest reported change, although its expression differed between informants. The PAI teacher described students becoming more responsive to the prayer cue, and the homeroom teacher observed that some prepared sooner when Dhuhr time arrived. At the student level, S1 connected participation with more deliberate use of break time and responsibility for worship. S2 emphasized learning to organize other activities so that prayer was not missed. S5 described increased sensitivity to prayer time and a greater willingness to remind peers. These accounts suggest developing initiative, but they do not show that the same level of independence was reached by every student.

In contrast, S3 characterized participation as inconsistent and described feeling more comfortable performing prayer at home, while S4 acknowledged continued delays linked to talking or playing with friends and a continued need for teacher prompts. The difference is not simply between attendance and absence: S2's account emphasizes planning, S4's account emphasizes externally prompted movement, and S3's account emphasizes irregular participation. S1 and S5 described broader responsibility, although their statements remain self-reported. Comparing the five accounts therefore reveals multiple relations between the school routine and students' agency, from dependence on supervision to signs of emerging self-management.

> *"There is some change, but I am not fully disciplined yet. I remember prayer time more, but I can still be late because I am talking or playing with friends."* (S4, interview, 24 September 2026)

Responsibility, Religiosity, and Social Character

Discipline appeared in the interviews not only as punctual arrival but also as responsibility for worship and orderly conduct. The PAI teacher linked the routine with students' growing awareness that prayer is an obligation and with greater politeness toward adults. The homeroom teacher emphasized discipline, responsibility, and more orderly participation. The students' accounts differentiate these wider dimensions: S1 highlighted responsibility for prayer, S2 described the organization of school activities, and S5 connected the routine with politeness and reminders to peers. These descriptions identify related aspects of character, but they should not be read as independently observed transformations.

Accounts also differed in the extent to which religious routines were perceived to extend beyond the scheduled school activity. S5 described feeling calmer, behaving more politely toward teachers and friends, and more often encouraging peers to do good. S3 described a greater tendency to participate in congregational prayer outside school, even while reporting inconsistency in the school routine. This contrast suggests that discipline may develop unevenly across settings and dimensions. In particular, religious intention, punctual school participation, and prosocial conduct do not necessarily advance at the same pace. The interviews indicate perceived connections among these dimensions but cannot establish permanence or a direct causal effect of the program.

> *"I feel calmer, more polite to friends and teachers, more diligent in worship, and more used to reminding friends to do good."* (S5, interview, 24 September 2026)

Supporting Conditions, Obstacles, and Teacher Response

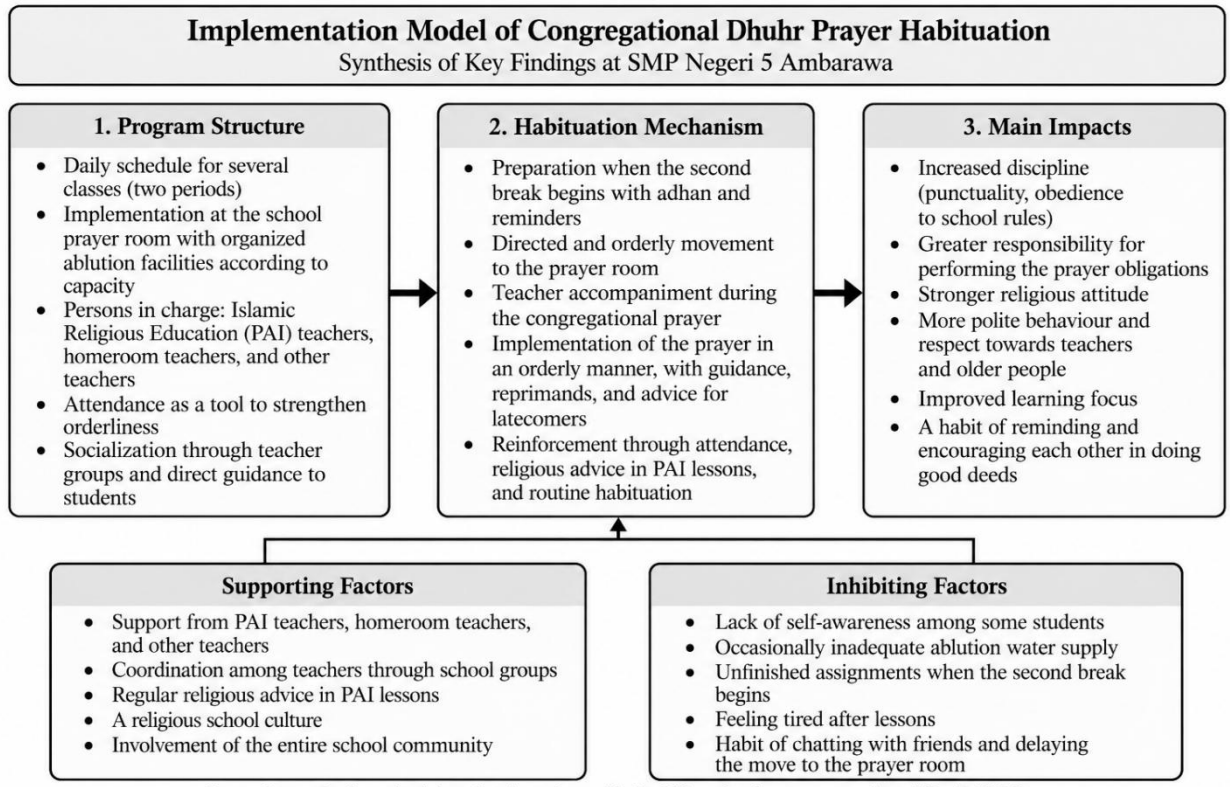
Teacher participation was consistently identified as a supporting condition. The PAI teacher coordinates the schedule and attendance, other teachers accompany the activity, and the homeroom teacher reinforces expectations when students are late. This network creates repeated prompts and relatively clear behavioral expectations. Yet the student accounts indicate different obstacles to responding to those prompts: S4 mentioned conversation and play, S3 reported inconsistent participation, and S5 referred to fatigue after lessons. S1 and S2 also identified

irregular access to ablution water and queuing, which could delay participation even when the intention to pray was present. The same outward behavior, lateness, may therefore arise from different individual and institutional circumstances.

The teachers reported responding to lateness through questions about its causes, educational reprimands, repeated advice, and, where needed, sanctions for disorderly behavior. These responses can reinforce a shared norm, but their educational interpretation depends on why a student was late. A reminder may be appropriate for habitual postponement, whereas a queue for ablution water requires an organizational response. Treating both situations identically would obscure the distinction between a student's readiness to regulate behavior and the resources available to enact that behavior. Table 2 compares student experiences, while Figures 1 and 2 synthesize the program structure and the variation in internalization.

Table 2. Comparison of student accounts of discipline internalization

Informant	Reported behavior or constraint	Interpretative reading
S1	More deliberate use of break time; responsibility for prayer; water-access difficulty	Signs of initiative alongside a facility-related barrier
S2	Improved planning of activities; sometimes constrained by ablution access	Developing time management, conditional on facilities
S3	School participation remains inconsistent; mentions praying in congregation beyond school	Religious intention and school punctuality do not fully coincide
S4	Postpones participation while talking or playing; still requires reminders	Participation remains relatively dependent on external cues
S5	Greater time awareness, politeness, and reminders to peers; mentions fatigue	Reported personal responsibility with a physical constraint



Source: Researcher's synthesis based on interviews with the PAI teacher, homeroom teacher of Grade VIII C, and five students (September 24, 2026).

Figure 1. Implementation model of congregational Dhuhr prayer habituation at SMP Negeri 5 Ambarawa

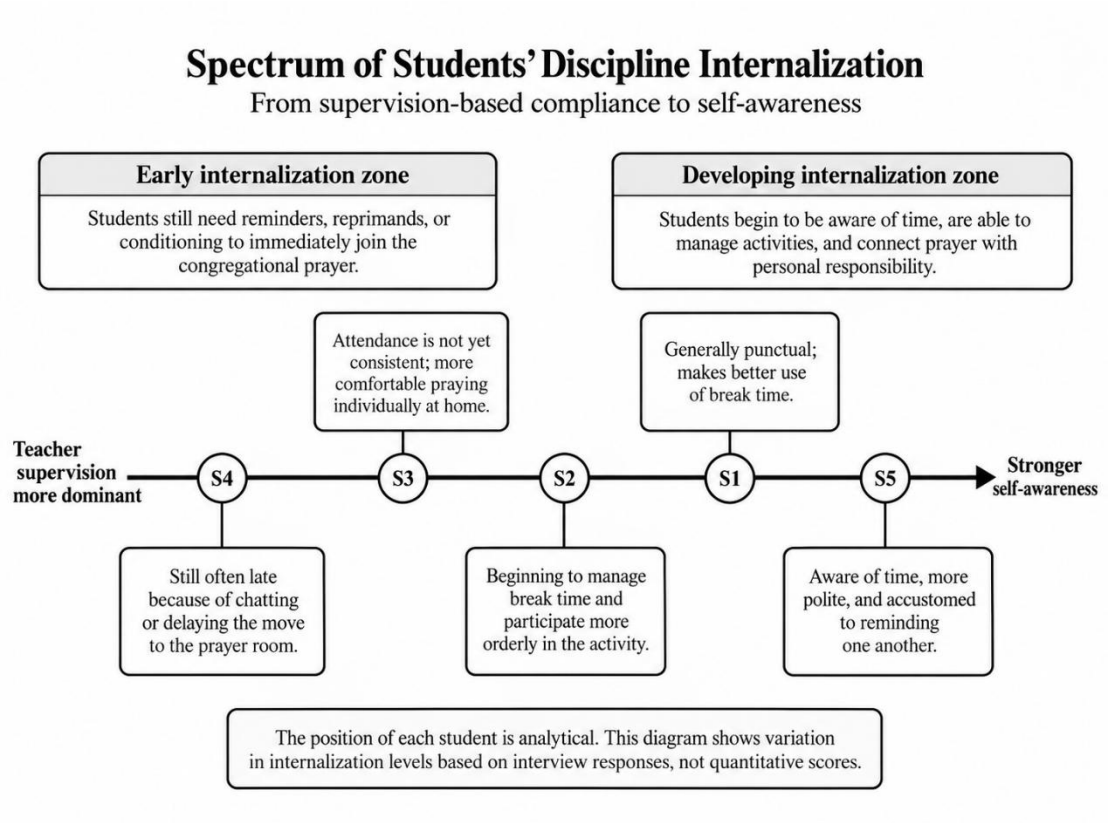


Figure 2. Spectrum of student discipline internalization from externally monitored compliance toward self-regulation

Discussion (مناقشة)

Habituation as a Mechanism for Discipline Internalization

The interviews indicate that congregational Dhuhr prayer habituation creates a recurring setting for practicing discipline through a combination of scheduling, adult accompaniment, attendance records, and religious guidance. This finding is compatible with research emphasizing repeated routines, teacher consistency, and supportive school environments (Wulandari et al., 2023; Ananda et al., 2026; Mustika et al., 2026). Studies of religious activities likewise associate sustained practice with religious values, responsibility, and orderly behavior (Safitri et al., 2023; Kurahman et al., 2025). The contribution of the present case, however, is not another general assertion that routine worship improves character. Its distinctive evidence is that one common routine was narrated in different ways by participating students. Thus, program regularity and student internalization must be considered separately.

The immediate behavioral demand is the management of a transition: students suspend ongoing academic or peer activities, prepare for ablution, move to a shared prayer space, and return to the school schedule. That sequence helps explain why S1 and S2 framed discipline in terms of break-time planning. Earlier research has linked congregational prayer to punctuality and orderly conduct (Zein & Nugraha, 2022; Maulida et al., 2025; Nurfadhiilah et al., 2026), while Delviany et al. (2024) report associations between religious habits, disciplinary habits, and religious character. The present interviews add a process-oriented interpretation: a routine offers recurring opportunities to prioritize an obligation, but whether a student uses those opportunities independently depends on both motivation and feasible access to the activity.

From External Compliance to Self-Regulation

The principal conceptual contribution is an interpretive distinction between externally elicited compliance and emerging self-regulation. External compliance refers here to participation that remains heavily dependent on attendance monitoring, reminders, or teacher direction. Emerging self-regulation refers to students' reported ability to anticipate prayer time, rearrange activities, and accept responsibility with less immediate prompting. S4's dependence on reminders and S3's inconsistent participation contrast with S2's efforts to manage break time and with S1 and S5's descriptions of responsibility and time awareness. These positions should not be treated as fixed student traits or as numerical stages. Rather, they illustrate possible differences in how a shared expectation is taken up by students at the time of interview.

The same program mechanisms can therefore have a dual function. Teacher reminders and attendance records make expectations visible and can provide an initial scaffold for students who struggle to respond to the schedule. If participation remains tied primarily to marks or the avoidance of reprimands, however, the outward act may not reveal the student's underlying reasons for praying. Saputra et al. (2026) similarly note that discipline developed under monitoring may be difficult to sustain when monitoring weakens; Chandra et al. (2026) and Siregar et al. (2026) emphasize modelling and mentoring as complements to supervision. Theoretically, the pathway proposed by this case is conditional rather than automatic: repetition makes disciplined action practicable, guidance gives it meaning, and opportunities for independent action allow responsibility to develop. Because the study uses interviews collected at one time, this pathway is an interpretation to be investigated further, not a verified longitudinal progression.

Consequently, the evaluation of a habituation program should attend to how participation occurs, not only whether students are present. Indicators worth considering include preparing without repeated reminders, planning tasks around the prayer schedule, recognizing the obligation in one's own words, and acting responsibly when direct prompting is reduced. The interviews offer illustrative evidence of these dimensions, but they do not provide numerical scores or repeated observations of them. Assessment should thus be developmental and formative: it should help teachers identify the kind of support students need rather than convert a spiritual activity into a simple attendance or disciplinary ranking.

Teacher Modelling and the School Ecology of Religious Character

Teacher modelling operates at the interface between institutional rules and students' everyday decisions. In this case the PAI teacher coordinated the program, other teachers accompanied the congregation, and the homeroom teacher reinforced expectations beyond the prayer space. These roles potentially make the routine more coherent across classrooms. The finding is compatible with research describing teachers as models and mentors in religious character education (Primandini & Sunarso, 2025) and school-level collaboration as important for religious culture (Agustina et al., 2025; Purnawan et al., 2026). Direct adult example has also been highlighted in studies of Dhuha prayer habituation (Andayani & Dahlan, 2022). Nonetheless, modelling is more than the visible presence of adults: its educational value depends on whether teachers connect the requirement to reasons students can understand and eventually apply independently.

The school environment also shapes whether expected discipline can actually be practiced. Insufficient ablution water, the limited capacity of the prayer room, the timing of unfinished assignments, and fatigue can interfere with punctual attendance even for willing students. This accords with studies emphasizing supervision and organized school culture (Rahmadhani & Andriani, 2026) as well as environmental support for worship discipline (Karima et al., 2026). An analytically important implication is that a delay has more than one possible explanation: it may

express postponement, an institutional bottleneck, or an interaction of the two. Teacher supervision is most educationally useful when it helps distinguish these circumstances. Otherwise, sanctions risk interpreting a practical obstacle as a failure of character and may weaken the fairness of the habituation program.

Differentiated Internalization and Program Improvement

The varied student accounts suggest that guidance should be differentiated without assigning permanent labels. Students such as S1 and S5, who report greater time awareness or responsibility, can be encouraged to sustain those behaviors without constant prompting; S2's attention to break-time planning can be reinforced through specific feedback. S3's inconsistency invites a discussion of the relationship between personal worship commitments and school participation rather than an assumption of indifference. S4's admitted postponement suggests the usefulness of clear preparatory cues and short reflective conversations. Such responses can be paired with practical attention to students who encounter ablution queues or fatigue. These are context-informed recommendations, not interventions whose effectiveness was tested in this study.

Four program implications follow from the analysis. First, a predictable schedule should be maintained so students have a stable opportunity to practice the required transition. Second, teachers should combine attendance monitoring with consistent example and brief discussions that connect punctuality to responsibility, respect for others, and purposeful use of time. Third, responses to lateness should distinguish avoidable postponement from facility or timetable constraints, with individual guidance adjusted accordingly. Fourth, the school should improve ablution-water reliability and coordinate learning activities with the prayer sessions. These recommendations link institutional support with student agency, consistent with arguments that religious value formation requires more than repeated practice alone (Hikayat et al., 2026). Their implementation would require subsequent evaluation rather than an assumption of guaranteed effectiveness.

This interpretation has clear limits. The case covers one class, seven informants, and interview material collected on one date. It does not include direct structured observations, a longitudinal attendance series, or follow-up accounts that could confirm whether reported changes persist when supervision is withdrawn. As a result, the findings describe perceived experiences and plausible mechanisms; they cannot determine causal effects or rank individual students on a validated self-regulation scale. Future research could examine the same students across time and triangulate interviews with observations, attendance patterns, facility assessments, and family perspectives to test whether the proposed transition is sustained across contexts.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

Congregational Dhuhr prayer habituation in Grade VIII C at SMP Negeri 5 Ambarawa was described as an organized activity supported by class scheduling, two sessions, teacher accompaniment, attendance recording, reminders, and guidance. Interviews indicate perceived gains in time awareness, responsibility for worship, orderliness, and, for some students, politeness and peer reminders. Yet these accounts differ: some students describe taking initiative, while others continue to postpone participation or depend on external cues. Access to ablution water, unfinished tasks, and fatigue also affect punctuality. The study therefore distinguishes visible compliance from emerging self-regulation and shows why discipline must be interpreted in relation to school conditions as well as student choices. Its contribution is a comparative, interview-based explanation of variation within a shared routine, not proof of lasting behavioral change. For practice, school monitoring should be accompanied by consistent teacher example, brief reflection, differentiated guidance, and reliable facilities. A more meaningful assessment of

character formation would consider students' developing initiative and reasons for acting, rather than attendance alone.

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