

A School Culture-Based Empowerment Model to Strengthen Religious Traditions in Madrasah

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Abstract

Purpose – School culture plays a crucial role in shaping student character; however, many educational institutions—particularly madrasahs—face challenges in maintaining religious traditions amid the pressures of globalization and shifting social values. This study aims to analyze the strategies for implementing school culture to strengthen religious traditions in madrasahs.

Design/Method – Using a qualitative approach, this study employs literature review and direct observation methods to examine how religious values can be integrated into madrasah environments.

Findings – The results suggest that religious values can be optimized through collaborative learning designs, a school environment that visualizes religious symbols and student achievements, and a team-based management system involving all stakeholders. Five strategic approaches are identified: integrating religious values into classroom instruction, habituating positive values in daily activities, implementing religiously oriented extracurricular programs, engaging students in community-based religious practices, and utilizing school facilities to sustain religious values. The study concludes with practical recommendations for madrasahs to systematically reinforce religious traditions through structured school culture models.

Keywords: school culture, religious traditions, madrasah, value degradation, educational management

Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to during the preparation of this work, and all sources used have been properly cited in the bibliography. The article has been reviewed by at least two peer reviewers, a similarity report was obtained using Turnitin, and compliance with research/publication ethics has been confirmed.

Conflicts of Interest: : The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.

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Article Type: Research Article

1. Introduction

School culture comprises foundational norms and principles that shape behaviors, traditions, routines, and symbolic practices within a school community—among principals, teachers, students, and staff alike. It reflects institutional identity, character, and public image. According to Komaruddin Hidayat, in institutional settings where cultural values are deeply internalized, newly integrated members of the school community tend to assimilate prevailing norms and practices with minimal resistance. In environments where cultural values are well-internalized, individuals who become part of the school community tend to align naturally with existing norms and practices. Nevertheless, contemporary school culture has shown signs of serious decline, marked by increasing instances of academic dishonesty during national examinations, collusion among students, plagiarism, truancy, chronic teacher absenteeism, premature dismissals, and violent practices during student orientation.

It is imperative for every educational institution to define a strategic mission that fosters a school culture characterized by intellectual rigor, engagement, equity, creativity, innovation, and systemic integration. This cultural vision is intended to produce graduates who not only demonstrate high levels of intellectual competence but also embody strong moral character, as reflected in qualities such as devotion, honesty, exemplary conduct, diligence, tolerance, and leadership capacity. A mission reflects the broader objective of developing human resources who are equipped to contribute meaningfully to scientific and technological advancement, while remaining grounded in spiritual and ethical values. In alignment with the 2006 School-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan/KTSP*), teachers are expected to be proactive, creative, competitive, inspirational, initiative-driven, autonomous, and innovative in designing and implementing curricular innovations. Moreover, schools are granted operational autonomy to formulate institutional programs under the regulatory framework of the Graduate Competency Standards (*Standar Kompetensi Lulusan/SKL*), which constitute one of the eight national education standards as stipulated in Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 23 of 2006.

Effective school administration entails the development of institutional mechanisms that promote collaboration and inclusive engagement across all components of the educational environment. Each school is encouraged to cultivate a distinctive cultural identity that embodies its core values and functions as a source of institutional cohesion and pride. An illustrative example is Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri Jatinom, which has successfully developed a school culture characterized by punctuality in instructional processes, consistent reinforcement of Islamic values, a strong orientation toward religiosity, disciplined behavior, integrity, and the implementation of impartial regulations that apply equally to principals, teachers, students, and support staff. This integrated cultural framework has enabled the institution to produce graduates who are not only academically competent and accomplished but also morally upright. Furthermore, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri Jatinom implements a structured religious development program that includes communal *Duha* and *Dhuhr* prayers, brief religious sermons (*kultum*), and a systematic internalization of core Islamic beliefs and practices—particularly those encompassing the foundational pillars of worship and tenets of faith in Islam.

A major issue that arises in the current discourse on madrasah education is the erosion of religious values, a condition that has been increasingly shaped by the pervasive influence of globalization and evolving socio-cultural dynamics. While school culture possesses strategic significance in reinforcing these values, its practical role remains largely underutilized. This condition has led to three critical problems: 1) inadequate understanding of the function of school culture within the context of religious education; 2) the absence of a structured and consistent model for integrating religious traditions into institutional practices; and (3) the urgent need for a comprehensive and applicable approach that effectively aligns religious values with the day-to-day educational activities in madrasahs.

In response to the aforementioned challenges, this study delineates three interrelated objectives as the basis of its investigation. First, to undertake a conceptual examination of school culture and religious traditions as the theoretical foundation of the research. Second, to identify the practical issues associated with sustaining religious traditions

within the context of madrasah education. Third, to construct a comprehensive model for strengthening school culture as a means to reinforce religious traditions, while simultaneously formulating practical recommendations for relevant stakeholders in the madrasah environment. Accordingly, this research is intended to serve as a reference for the enhancement of religious identity in madrasahs amidst the dynamics of contemporary disruption.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative literature review and theoretical analysis of school culture models, primarily drawing on Deal and Kennedy's (2009) framework of cultural artifacts (rituals, symbols) and Short and Greer's (cited in Sudrajat, 2011) definition of school culture as "beliefs, policies, and norms." The analysis is grounded in Indonesian madrasah contexts, using policy documents (e.g., KMA No. 211/2011 on Islamic labs) and scholarly works like Syamsul Ma'arif et al. (2012) to construct the empowerment model. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the study systematically examines five key dimensions of school culture: (1) value integration in curricula, (2) habituation of religious practices, (3) extracurricular programs, (4) community engagement, and (5) infrastructure utilization, as outlined in the Ministry of Religious Affairs guidelines.

The methodology adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, comparing theoretical frameworks with documented madrasah practices to identify gaps and opportunities for strengthening religious traditions. Special attention is given to how Islamic education laboratories (as mandated by KMA No. 211/2011) function as both physical and symbolic spaces for reinforcing religious values, aligning with Haidar Putra Daulay's (2012) conceptualization of these labs as environments for experiential religious learning. This multi-layered analysis ensures the proposed model is both theoretically robust and practically applicable to contemporary madrasah contexts facing globalization pressures.

3. Result

1. School Culture

From an etymological perspective, the term *budaya* (culture), as recorded in the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), denotes “thought, intellect, and outcome.” The verb *membudayakan* (to cultivate culture) is defined as “to teach in order to instill cultural values, to educate in a manner that fosters civility, and to habituate virtuous behavior to the extent that it becomes culturally accepted (Depdiknas: pp. 169-70).

The term culture is often conceptually aligned with tradition, both in public discourse and within educational contexts. In this interpretation, tradition is defined as a set of widely shared ideas, attitudes, and habitual behaviors that are reflected in the everyday practices of members of a particular social group. According to Deal and Kennedy, as cited by Jennifer Nias, “Culture emphasizes goal-orientation (beliefs, values, purposes) as well as the action (customs, habits, ways of behaving) which is caused and sustained by normative pressure.” Culture encompasses both directional goals, such as beliefs, values, and purposes, and actions, including customs and habits, which collectively establish and reinforce normative structures. Accordingly, culture exerts a substantial influence on human behavior, as individuals inherently manifest their cultural orientation through their actions (Nias, 1996: p. 66).

Moreover, culture denotes the collective attributes of a social group rather than those of individuals alone. It constitutes the basis for the emergence of a broader social system consisting of fundamental components such as customs, values, and goals, which are subsequently applied within organizational and communal contexts. Once such a system is established, it gives rise to behavioral patterns that gradually evolve into customs or habitual practices internalized by individuals and recognized as social norms. Norms may be expressed in the form of manners, repetitive behaviors, codes of conduct, or traditional practices embedded in daily life.

According to Williams, the concept of culture can be understood through three complementary perspectives on change. First, culture is viewed as a process of developing intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic capacities at the individual, group, and

societal levels. Second, culture is defined as a repository of creative activities encompassing various forms of artistic expression and cultural products, such as films, visual art, theatrical performances, and others. In this perspective, culture is frequently associated with the domain of the arts. Third, culture is interpreted as a holistic way of life, encompassing patterns of activity, belief systems, and traditions that are sustained and developed within a given community or society. These three dimensions illustrate that culture is inherently multidimensional, encompassing aspects of personal development, creative production, and the normative systems embedded in social life. (Sutrisno & Putranto, 2005, p. 8).

In this study, the researcher focuses on discussing and reflecting upon culture from the third perspective. Meanwhile, scholarly views on the concept of school culture have been established and developed for several decades. Educational sociologist Willard Waller (1932) argued that every school has a culture of its own, with a set of rituals, folkways, and a moral code that shapes behavior and relationships. Parents and students have always detected the special, hard-to-pinpoint *esprit* of schools. Heckman (1993) describes school culture as “the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals” that guide their actions. Others, like Maxwell and Thomas (1991), suggest that culture is concerned with “those aspects of life that give it meaning.”

Each school embodies a distinct cultural framework, characterized by an integrated set of values, norms, rules, and habitual practices that collectively shape behavioral patterns and social interactions within the institutional environment. In alignment with this view, Short and Greer (as cited in Sudrajat, 2011) define school culture as a configuration of beliefs, policies, norms, and routines that can be intentionally shaped, reinforced, and sustained through the leadership of school administrators and the active involvement of teachers.

School culture influences not only the activities of school members but also their motivation and overall morale. It is inseparable from the identity and functioning of the school itself. From an anthropological standpoint, Deal and Kennedy (2009) argue that school culture manifests itself in customs, rituals, symbols, stories, and language, the "artifacts" of culture. These artifacts reflect the daily habits, ceremonial practices,

symbolic representations, narratives, and linguistic expressions that form the cultural life of a school. School culture constitutes a unique institutional asset, distinct from one school to another. It becomes observable through various tangible indicators or artifacts, which may include daily school rituals, formal ceremonies, symbolic objects displayed in the school environment, and ongoing school activities. The presence of this cultural dimension can often be immediately recognized when individuals meet the school. School culture serves as a medium through which students can comprehend the significance of symbols and meanings constructed by the broader cultural traditions.

Although each school may differ in terms of its cultural orientation, particularly with respect to its vision, mission, and goals, the essential distinction lies in the form of cultural expression and the way school culture is realized in accordance with the school's specific social and cultural context. School culture generally develops into a shared set of attitudes and perspectives that are consciously internalized and enacted as natural behaviours. It is shaped by an environment that fosters mutual understanding among all components of the school community, including the principal, teachers, staff, and students, and may also extend to influencing public perception in alignment with the school's values. School culture affects not only the activities of its members but also their motivation and overall sense of purpose.

2. Characteristics of School Culture

School culture, as a distinctive attribute of an educational institution, can be observed through various measurable dimensions. Key indicators of school culture include the extent to which members of the school community, including educators, school committees, and administrative staff, exhibit a sense of responsibility and autonomy in taking initiative. School culture is also reflected in the institutional encouragement for all personnel to engage in progressive thinking, pursue innovation, and demonstrate readiness to take measured risks in advancing educational practices. The existence of a clear vision and mission, accompanied by tangible efforts toward their realization, constitutes another important marker, along with the level of collaboration and coordination across functional units within the school. The leadership of the principal also plays a crucial role, particularly in providing support, delivering clear information, and offering the necessary assistance to all staff members.

The organizational dynamics of school culture are shaped by multiple interrelated elements, including mechanisms for supervising and regulating personnel behavior, the level of institutional identification among school members, performance-based reward systems, openness to constructive criticism, and patterns of communication that operate beyond rigid hierarchical constraints. Fundamentally, school culture does not merely mirror the individual dispositions of its members but rather constitutes a holistic representation of the collective personality and character formed through the everyday interactions and practices of the school community. Each of these dimensions is interconnected and collectively contributes to the formation of a distinct identity that differentiates one school from another.

3. Elements of School Culture

According to Mulyadi (as cited in Barnawi & Arifin, 2013), the development of an exemplary school culture involves several key elements. First, the role of the school principal in clearly articulating the school's vision and mission to all members of the school community. Second, the internalization of organizational values and beliefs that form the behavioral foundation for all school members. Third, the creation of distinctive symbols that reinforce the school's unique identity, particularly within the context of madrasahs. Fourth, the establishment of a reward system that aligns with the norms and values upheld by the school. Fifth, the cultivation of strong socio-emotional relationships among students, teachers, and the broader community, grounded in a shared commitment to the school's mission. Lastly, the structuring of the school's organization in a way that supports the realization of a high-performing and values-based culture.

Meanwhile, Hedley (as cited in Barnawi & Arifin, 2013) categorizes the elements of school culture into two major groups. The first consists of intangible components that are abstract yet foundational, including the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the school that must be collectively pursued. The second encompasses tangible components that are concrete and directly observable in the school's day-to-day practices. These two categories are complementary and equally essential in shaping a holistic school culture.

Intangible elements refer to aspects that are considered essential and must be continuously pursued by the school. These elements should be articulated conceptually in the formulation of the school's vision, mission, goals, and objectives in a more concrete and actionable manner.

Tangible elements may manifest conceptually and include the following: (1) vision, mission, goals, and objectives; (2) curriculum; (3) communication language; (4) school narratives; (5) narratives of prominent figures; (6) organizational structure; (7) rituals and ceremonies; (8) teaching and learning procedures; (9) systems of rewards and sanctions; (10) psychosocial services; and (11) patterns of interaction between the school and its surrounding environment. Based on the perspectives, it can be concluded that the most critical elements in shaping school culture are the principal's assertive leadership grounded in a clear vision and mission, the collaborative relationship between school leadership and teachers, and the cultural values that are institutionally embedded within the madrasah. Accordingly, within the school environment, there exist normative expectations that must be adhered to and implemented by all members of the school community without exception. Recognizing the school as an organization with a defined structure and a set of individuals tasked with fulfilling specific functions in response to institutional needs, school culture may thus be understood as a set of values or habitual practices that bind the components of the institution together through continuous interaction.

4. Discussion

1. Religious Traditions in Madrasahs

The term religious tradition refers to the combination of two concepts: tradition and religion. To better understand this term, it is important to first consider the meaning of tradition. In English, the word "tradition" is derived from the Latin *traditio*, which comes from *tradire*, meaning "to hand over," "to transmit," or "to betray." Tradition may also be interpreted as intellect (distinct from intelligence), and in scholarly discourse, it refers to the continuity of knowledge and research methodologies. Pranowo (2002, as cited in Nur Syam, 2007) defines tradition as something inherited or transmitted from the past to the present. Similarly, Anton Rustanto describes tradition as a pattern of behavior

commonly practiced by members of a particular society and passed down from generation to generation. Such practices are perpetuated primarily due to the inherent nature of tradition as a form of continuity, repeated consistently in accordance with the precedents set by those who came before.

After understanding the concept of tradition, the focus shifts to the meaning of religion. Religion refers to a system of belief unified by practices related to the sacred, including acts that are either permitted or prohibited within a particular doctrine, as well as rituals that unite members of a moral community, such as those found in churches, mosques, temples, and other places of worship. According to Stenbrink (2000, as cited in Nur Syam, 2007), religious tradition is a compilation or product of historical development, which involves the incorporation of new elements as well as the omission of others.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that religious tradition is a form of tradition that develops within society through the lived enactment of religious teachings.

2. Foundations and Forms of Religious Tradition

The foundations and forms of religious tradition are often difficult to change because they have become deeply embedded in the life of the community. As a result, religious traditions appear to have solidified into standardized norms within the society itself. In the context of education, religious tradition constitutes a social element that is deeply rooted in communal life and resistant to change. In rural communities in particular, religious traditions are closely intertwined with both myth and religion. Myths emerge from long-standing traditions embedded within a community, while religion is interpreted in accordance with local culture, thereby shaping and influencing those traditions.

The foundation of religious tradition originates from doctrinal teachings that are normative in nature. From a sociological perspective, tradition functions as a social institution because it serves as a normative reference system within society. This normative framework may be categorized as either secondary or primary. Secondary institutions are characterized by their rational, open, and general nature, as well as by their competitive and conflictual tendencies that emphasize legality. These include

institutions such as politics, government, the economy and market systems, legal systems, and other forms of social organization within the society concerned.

This type of institution may undergo changes in its structure, in the roles and relationships among its components, and in the norms associated with it. Secondary institutions appear to possess a flexible nature, making them more adaptable to changing situations as determined by the interests of their adherents. In contrast, primary institutions are closely tied to notions of honor, dignity, identity, and the preservation of community values. This is because such institutions serve as a fundamental and essential normative framework within human life itself. Consequently, primary institutions cannot be easily altered or replaced (Mukroni, 2025).

Based on the explanation above, religious tradition can be categorized as a primary institution. This is because religious institutions encompass elements that are directly related to divinity and belief, religious acts, mystical experiences, veneration of the sacred, and faith in ultimate values. In the context of cultural practices that have become embedded as tradition, religious tradition tends to resist change, not only because it is supported by the community, but also because it contains elements regarded as noble values rooted in shared belief systems. Furthermore, religious tradition embodies deeply significant values that relate to the religion professed by the community or by individual adherents. In the context of education in Indonesia, religious traditions are so deeply rooted that they are often reflected in learning materials that incorporate religious content. In a simplified sense, religious tradition can be understood as comprising elements derived from religious teachings, in this case, Islamic teachings. Various educational institutions with a pesantren or religious foundation frequently adopt religious traditions in their curricular content, for example, by including *Yasinan* or *Tahlilan* in teaching materials or instructional content.

It is evident that education and religious tradition are deeply interconnected and inherently difficult to separate. Returning to the foundations of religious tradition, one finds that scriptural justifications (*dalil naqli*) vary widely in their interpretation. A relevant example is the practice of reciting Surah Yasin on specific occasions. This practice is supported by Islamic teachings, as Yasin is part of the Qur'an, and Muslims are strongly

encouraged to recite and reflect upon the Qur'an. This understanding finds its basis in the divine revelation contained in Surah Fatir, verses 29–30:

"Indeed, those who recite the Book of Allah, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them—secretly and publicly—can hope for a trade that will never fail. He will give them their full rewards and increase them out of His bounty. Indeed, He is All-Forgiving, Most Appreciative." (QS. Fāṭir [35]: 29–30).

3. A Model of School Culture Empowerment for the Reinforcement of Religious Traditions in Madrasahs

School culture and the development of moral and character education serve as fundamental instruments for initiating transformative change by shaping individuals at their deepest levels. Education has the potential to dismantle the accumulated ignorance of *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance), to purify it, and to replace it with values that are superior and grounded in responsibility. This aligns with the natural disposition (*fitrah*) of human beings, affirming that during the formative stages of a child's development, these values must be instilled from an early age. A child is like a seed that must be planted in a suitable nursery so it can grow properly, and it is the responsibility of parents as educators to nurture it.

Accordingly, children must be nourished with appropriate educational content and protected from harmful influences that may hinder or distort their development. To ensure the effectiveness of educational processes in schools, there must be synergy and close collaboration among parents, schools, and the broader community. The role of parents in supporting their children's education is crucial, as a child's character, behavior, and moral foundation are fundamentally shaped within the family environment (Muhamad, 2024).

A school must be able to cultivate its own culture as a form of institutional identity and as a source of pride for its community. School activities should not be limited to intramural programs but must also include extracurricular initiatives that foster students' creativity, talents, and interests. In addition, the development of a strong and sustainable school culture should be guided by the school's vision and mission, which are intended not only to enhance intellectual abilities but also to shape students'

character. This approach should consider multiple dimensions of intelligence, including intellectual intelligence, cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intelligence.

The model of school culture implemented to preserve religious traditions in madrasahs can be realized through the optimization of four principal aspects that are consistently applied in daily school life. These aspects include:

Integration of Values in the Classroom

The classroom functions as a strategic environment for integrating the core values that have been systematically formulated by the school. These values are embedded into every subject and are explicitly incorporated into both the syllabus and lesson plans (*RPP*). Their development is facilitated through several stages: (a) identifying the relationship between core competencies (*SKKD*) and the school's value framework, including indicators for value development; (b) incorporating the formulated values into the syllabus (attached); (c) translating the values outlined in the syllabus into the lesson plans (attached); (d) designing active learning processes that allow students to internalize values and express them through appropriate behavior; (e) enabling teachers to support students who face challenges in value internalization, including by modeling those values through their own conduct; and (f) evaluating the outcomes of value development in each subject through a moral character assessment report (*rapor akhlaq mulia*).

This approach is aligned with the official School Guidelines on National Culture and Character Education, which emphasize that values must be actively integrated across all subjects through classroom instruction. In this process, both teachers and students must engage meaningfully—students through active participation, and teachers through thoughtful instructional design that encourages joy in learning and moral development.

Internalization of Positive Values in School

The internalization of positive values should begin as soon as students enter the school environment. This includes practices such as greeting and showing respect to teachers through hand-kissing (*salim*), offering greetings (*salaam*) when meeting teachers both

inside and outside the school, and greeting peers upon entering classrooms, the teachers' room, the library, and other school facilities. Students are also accustomed to reciting prayers before and after lessons. These prayers include short surahs from the Qur'an for lower-grade students, selections from devotional and doctrinal texts for daily practice, while upper-grade students are encouraged to recite the Qur'an in a measured and proper manner (*tartil*). Students are also encouraged to observe the *Duha* and *Dhuhr* prayers in congregation, following a set schedule and under the direct supervision of their teachers. These habits are further reinforced by discipline-oriented routines such as arriving on time, avoiding inappropriate behavior, and consistently obeying school rules.

Students are also trained to uphold personal and environmental cleanliness, including keeping classrooms and school grounds tidy. All students are expected to participate in picking up litter as a means of nurturing a spirit of cooperation. Other habits include washing hands before meals, fulfilling classroom duty schedules, disposing of waste in designated areas, and maintaining restroom hygiene by flushing before and after use.

Creative expression is promoted through the production of original works, such as drawings, motivational writings, poems, or rhymes that are posted on classroom bulletin boards for the entire school community to view. Reading habits are developed by encouraging students to visit the library regularly, especially during free periods. Values of tolerance are cultivated by teaching students to appreciate differences in ethnicity, race, and gender, and by encouraging them to help peers in need. Respect and courtesy are reinforced through appropriate interactions with teachers and classmates, proper attire, polite speech, and behavior aligned with the moral principles of the school. Budiningsih (as cited in Daryanto, 2015) affirms that well-formulated values can be actualized through various daily behaviors and strengthened through effective social interaction. Over time, such consistent practices may give rise to an enduring pattern of school culture.

Self-Development Activities (Extracurricular Programs)

In general, extracurricular activities aim to cultivate teamwork, discipline, unity, and to foster students' academic and non-academic achievements. These activities serve as a

vital medium for self-development, character building, and the enhancement of students' overall academic quality. Extracurricular activities are educational initiatives conducted outside the core curriculum, intended to support students' development in accordance with their individual needs, potential, talents, and interests. These programs are specifically organized by educators or qualified educational personnel who possess the necessary competencies and authority within the school. Through extracurricular activities, it is expected that students will not only enhance their skills and personal talents but also develop a stronger sense of social responsibility and achievement potential.

Home and Community-Based Aspects of Student Behavior

To assess students' daily behavior outside the school environment, two main approaches are generally applied. First, teachers observe students' conduct within the school setting, as positive behavior demonstrated at school often reflects similar conduct at home and within the broader community. When a student exhibits inappropriate behavior, the teacher provides direct and constructive feedback. If no improvement is observed, the school, through its guidance and counseling unit (*Bimbingan dan Konseling*), will establish communication with the student's parents in a respectful and cooperative manner. This dialogue aims to identify the root causes of the behavior and to develop suitable solutions in a supportive and family-like atmosphere.

Second, teachers build open communication with students. For instance, at the beginning of a class session, a teacher may ask, "Who among you did not complete the five daily prayers yesterday?" Students typically respond honestly, as the value of truthfulness has already been instilled in their character. This practice fosters a culture of trust and responsibility. When a student acknowledges a shortcoming, the teacher provides guidance to encourage improvement and to help the student avoid repeating such behavior in the future.

4. Establishment and Utilization of School Laboratories

In the implementation of Islamic religious education in schools, proper management is essential, particularly in efforts to shape students' attitudes, personalities, and practical

religious skills, in addition to their theoretical knowledge. This requires the establishment of an Islamic Religious Education Laboratory (*Laboratorium PAI*). According to Haidar Putra Daulay (2012), an Islamic Religious Education Laboratory is a dedicated room designed with a religious atmosphere that includes elements such as spiritual music, religious poetry, verses with Islamic themes, and audiovisual materials illustrating religious experiences. Students take turns attending lessons in this room according to a predetermined schedule.

The laboratory can also be understood as a facility equipped with tools and materials based on scientific methods to conduct research, instructional activities, testing, and the production of materials related to Islamic education. Ulin Nuha (2013) emphasizes that the objectives of an Islamic Religious Education Laboratory are twofold: first, to support the learning process of Islamic education by cultivating students' faith through the provision, enrichment, and development of knowledge, appreciation, practice, and habitual engagement with Islamic teachings; and second, to provide teaching aids and laboratory facilities that strengthen *aqidah*, foster noble character, broaden religious knowledge, and encourage consistency in worship.

The Islamic Religious Education Laboratory must be managed effectively to facilitate meaningful learning experiences for students, including attitude habituation, practicing religious teachings, mastery of Islamic studies through multimedia, and other interactive methods that help students achieve both academic and non-academic goals. Proper management, in line with government regulations, significantly contributes to improving the quality of Islamic religious education in schools. Thus, establishing and managing an Islamic Religious Education Laboratory is a strategic step toward enhancing the effectiveness of *PAI* (Pendidikan Agama Islam) learning.

The *PAI* laboratory is required to meet standardized criteria as stipulated in the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs (KMA) No. 211 of 2011 concerning Guidelines for the Development of National Standards for Islamic Religious Education in Schools. This decree is based on Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards (SNP), which outlines the framework for planning, implementation, and supervision of education to ensure a quality national education system. The SNP serves

as a minimum benchmark for guaranteeing the quality of education, aiming to enlighten the nation and develop a dignified national character. Furthermore, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 mandates that religious education and institutions are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which ensures the quality of religious instruction in schools.

In response to these requirements, KMA No. 211 of 2011 specifies that every school must provide adequate infrastructure for a *PAI* laboratory. This facility should function as a hub for students to seek digital information about Islam, practice religious skills, and engage in both curricular and extracurricular activities that support Islamic education. The laboratory should be a dedicated room or building with a minimum size of 56 square meters (8 × 7 m), soundproofing, carpeted flooring, and a minimum electrical capacity of 900 watts. It must also include essential facilities such as educational furniture, instructional tools, learning media, Islamic-themed artistic materials, and other supporting resources.

The management of *PAI* laboratory facilities is the responsibility of the Islamic Religious Education teacher (GPAI), who may be supported by additional personnel appointed by school leadership. The GPAI is accountable to the principal for the maintenance and proper use of the laboratory. Schools must also ensure annual budget allocations and assign maintenance staff to keep the laboratory operational.

The laboratory serves multiple functions: (1) supporting instructional activities in Islamic religious education; (2) acting as a visual medium for conceptualizing Islamic teachings; (3) facilitating practical learning of worship and rituals; (4) serving as a model for simulating religious practices; and (5) providing a platform for developing *da'wah*-related content. Its existence is expected to significantly enhance the learning outcomes of Islamic religious education. If student performance in *PAI* is found to be suboptimal, the challenges observed can serve as a reflection for improving the laboratory's role in supporting broader educational goals.

Concluding Remarks

This study demonstrates that a well-structured school culture model is crucial in addressing the challenges of preserving religious traditions in madrasahs amidst the pressures of globalization. By integrating religious values into every aspect of the educational process, from classroom instruction to extracurricular activities and community engagement, schools can create a holistic environment that strengthens both academic and spiritual development. The research emphasizes the importance of aligning institutional practices with Islamic pedagogical principles, ensuring that moral and religious values are not only taught but also lived as part of daily school life. The establishment and effective management of Islamic education laboratories serve as a vital component of this effort, offering practical and experiential avenues for students to internalize their faith. Ultimately, the proposed empowerment model provides a replicable framework for madrasahs to preserve their religious identity while maintaining high educational standards, thereby bridging the gap between tradition and the demands of contemporary education.

Recommendations

This study proposes three actionable recommendations for madrasahs: First, all schools should systematically develop their unique cultural identity by institutionalizing religious values through daily practices like congregational prayers (*Duha/Dhuhr*) and value-based classroom routines. Second, madrasah administrators must prioritize collaborative management systems, engaging teachers, parents, and community leaders in jointly reinforcing religious traditions both in-school (e.g., optimizing Islamic education laboratories per KMA No. 211/2011) and through community programs. Third, continuous evaluation mechanisms should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of culture-based interventions, particularly in addressing globalization challenges, with regular sharing of best practices among madrasah networks to ensure sustainable improvement.

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