

Principal's Leadership Roles in Strengthening Religious Values Within School Culture

Iman Garish Muhammad^{1*}, Muhammad Fauzan², Zaki Ulien Nuha³, Muhammad Iqbal⁴

^{1,2,3} Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Ali bin Abi Thalib, Surabaya, Indonesia

⁴ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam As-Sunnah, Deli Serdang, Indonesia

Email: garish160@gmail.com¹, fzankyrie.13@gmail.com², zakiun@stai-ali.ac.id³, iqbalmpi08@gmail.com⁴

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Religious culture significantly influences students' character, particularly in Islamic-based schools, where the principal plays a key role in integrating religious values into school culture. This study examines how principal leadership fosters and strengthens these values. Using a qualitative approach and field study methods, data were gathered via in-depth interviews with purposively selected school principals. The interviews focused on leadership practices like the role of leadership, exemplary behavior patterns, the impact of leadership. Data analysis involved qualitative descriptive techniques, including reduction and interpretation. The findings show that principals strengthen religious culture through structured policies integrated into daily, monthly, and annual activities. Their leadership involves setting an example, cultivate worship habits, encouraging moral behavior, coordinating with staff, engaging parents, and linking religious education with extracurricular activities. These efforts enhance students' religious understanding, attitudes, and skills. The study concludes that effective principal leadership is vital for maintaining a strong religious culture. Key factors include consistent policy enforcement, exemplary conduct, ongoing supervision, and active parent participation, which collectively fortify religious values.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, Strengthening Religious, School Culture.

ABSTRAK

Budaya keagamaan sangat memengaruhi karakter siswa, khususnya di sekolah-sekolah berbasis Islam, di mana kepala sekolah memainkan peran kunci dalam mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai keagamaan ke dalam budaya sekolah. Studi ini meneliti bagaimana kepemimpinan kepala sekolah memupuk dan memperkuat nilai-nilai tersebut. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi lapangan, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan kepala sekolah yang dipilih secara purposif. Wawancara tersebut berfokus pada praktik kepemimpinan seperti peran kepemimpinan, pola perilaku teladan, dan dampak kepemimpinan. Analisis data melibatkan teknik deskriptif kualitatif, termasuk reduksi dan interpretasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memperkuat budaya keagamaan melalui kebijakan terstruktur yang terintegrasi ke dalam kegiatan harian, bulanan, dan tahunan. Kepemimpinan mereka meliputi memberi contoh, membudayakan kebiasaan beribadah, mendorong perilaku moral, berkoordinasi dengan staf, melibatkan orang tua, dan menghubungkan pendidikan agama dengan kegiatan ekstrakurikuler. Upaya-upaya ini meningkatkan pemahaman, sikap, dan keterampilan keagamaan siswa. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang efektif sangat penting untuk mempertahankan budaya keagamaan yang kuat. Faktor-faktor kunci meliputi penegakan kebijakan yang konsisten, perilaku teladan, pengawasan berkelanjutan, dan partisipasi aktif orang tua, yang secara kolektif memperkuat nilai-nilai keagamaan.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Penguatan Agama, Budaya Sekolah.

INTRODUCTION

School culture serves as a pivotal element in shaping students' character, attitudes, and moral compass.¹ Religious school culture extends beyond the implementation of religious activities; it requires the systematic integration of religious values into school management, institutional policies, daily routines, interpersonal relationships, and the overall educational environment.² A well-established religious school culture is not merely reflected in the implementation of religious activities, but also in the integration of Islamic values into institutional policies, daily routines, interpersonal relationships, and the overall educational environment.³ Such integration is particularly important in educational institutions that prioritize religious values as the foundation for nurturing holistic human development.⁴ In this context, the principal's role extends beyond administrative responsibilities to encompass strategic, instructional, and moral leadership aimed at integrating religious values into school policies, learning activities, and the daily culture of the school community.⁵ Such leadership is essential because the successful implementation of a religious school culture depends not only on structured programs but also on leaders who consistently promote and model religious values throughout the school environment. Consequently, principal leadership plays a critical role in fostering and sustaining religious values as a core component of school culture. Prior research has demonstrated that school culture significantly influences the development of students' character, discipline, and social behavior, particularly when supported by strong leadership and well-structured religious habituation programs.⁶

Many studies have highlighted the importance of school principals in developing a religiously-oriented culture. For instance, Fuadi, Wuryandini, and Muhtarom (2025) illustrate how principals can cultivate religious culture through managerial oversight, program development, teacher training, and efforts to nurture students' religious practices. Similarly,⁷ Hidayat and Dimiyati (2023) emphasize that innovative principal leadership contributes to educational quality by fostering a positive school climate and ensuring effective school culture management. Additionally,⁸ Mushthofa, Muqowin, and Dinana (2022) focus on how

¹ Usamah Azzuhri and Zaki Ulien Nuha, *Transformational Leadership Management At State Islamic Junior High School*, 7, no. 1 (2025).

² Wiwik Wida Farwati, "Principal Instructional Leadership in Building a Religious School Culture for Students' Character Development," *Journal of Educational Management Research* 4, no. 6 (2025): 3190–205, <https://doi.org/10.61987/jemr.v4i6.1597>.

³ Fetty Kurnia Dewi, "Principal Management in Building a Religious School Culture Based on Islamic Values," *Indonesian Journal of Research in Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2024): 76–83, <https://doi.org/10.64420/ijris.v1i2.218>.

⁴ Zaki Ulien Nuha, "Implementasi Manajemen Mutu Terpadu Dalam Mewujudkan Sekolah Unggul Di Mtsn 1 Kota Malang," Masters thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim., March 24, 2023, <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/id/eprint/42762>.

⁵ Fitri Nurindah Sari et al., "Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Mendukung Implementasi Kurikulum As-Sunnah Berbasis Penguatan Karakter Religius," *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan* 14, no. 3 Agustus (2025): 4081–90, <https://doi.org/10.58230/27454312.2813>.

⁶ Zaki Ulien Nuha et al., *Research Management as a Strategy for Strengthening the Research Culture in Islamic Higher Education*, n.d.

⁷ Shofa Fuadi et al., "Peran Kepala Sekolah sebagai Manajer dalam Implementasi Budaya Religius di Sekolah Dasar," *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* 9, no. 6 (2025): 2705–11, <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v9i6.7617>.

⁸ Syarif Hidayat and Didim Dimiyati, "Peran Kepemimpinan Inovatif Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Pendidikan Sekolah Dasar," *Epistemic: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 2, no. 2 (2023): 167–82, <https://doi.org/10.70287/epistemic.v2i2.184>.

principals play an instrumental role in shaping students' religious character by employing motivational strategies, organizing religious activities, and demonstrating model behaviors. Likewise,⁹ Asnawi, Wiyono, and Sunandar (2020) underscore that sustainable religious culture can be developed through methodical leadership strategies including the routine practice of worship, upholding religious discipline, and engaging all members of the school community.¹⁰ These findings collectively suggest that principal leadership has a profound impact on cultivating a religiously-centered school culture.

Despite these insights, several significant gaps remain in the existing research. Past studies often explore principal leadership from limited angles, such as managerial competence, singular religious programs, or specific aspects of student character development in isolation.¹¹ They also primarily focus on operationalizing structured religious activities while neglecting a more holistic exploration of how principals create systems that integrate planning, supervision, evaluation, role modeling, teacher collaboration, and parental involvement into a cohesive framework for sustaining religious culture.¹² Furthermore, attention has been disproportionately directed toward formal religious programs, leaving the integration of school culture with students' everyday behavioral internalization largely unexplored.¹³

These gaps highlight the need for further investigation. There is limited research that examines integrative leadership practices among principals in the context of strengthening religious values through a confluence of structural policies, personal example-setting, continuous supervision, consistent implementation of religious habituation programs, and collaborative partnerships between schools and families. This is particularly true for qualitative studies that delve into the practical execution of such strategies within schools. To address these research gaps, the current study provides a comprehensive analysis of how school principals promote and strengthen religious values by employing integrative leadership practices that encompass all facets of the school community.

The unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on integrative principal leadership as the driving force for embedding religious values into school culture. Unlike previous studies that usually address either religious programs or managerial roles independently, this research explores how principals simultaneously act as policy makers, role models, supervisors, evaluators, and coordinators to construct a sustainable framework for religiously-oriented school culture. Furthermore, this study highlights how collaborative

⁹ Ahmad Mushthofa et al., "Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Peserta Didik Di SMK Cendekia Madiun," *Kelola: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 9, no. 1 (2022): 72–87, <https://doi.org/10.24246/j.jk.2022.v9.i1.p72-87>.

¹⁰ Asnawi Asnawi et al., "Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Menciptakan Budaya Religius Di Sekolah," *Jurnal Administrasi dan Manajemen Pendidikan*, June 30, 2020, 131–40, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um027v3i22020p131>.

¹¹ Mohammad Affan and Zaki Ulien Nuha, "The Islamic Regret Minimization Framework: A Decision-Making Approach Based on Maqasid al-Shari'ah," *WARAQAT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (2024): 123–34, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v9i2.860>.

¹² Zaki Ulien Nuha and Ahmad Afandi, "Islamic Boarding Schools As A Basis For Character Education In The Industrial Revolution Era 4.0," *WARAQAT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 7, no. 1 (2022): 65–74, <https://doi.org/10.51590/waraqat.v7i1.265>.

¹³ Aghna Mahirotul Ilmi and Muhamad Sholeh, "Manajemen Kepala Sekolah Dalam Mewujudkan Budaya Religius Di Sekolah Islam," *Inspirasi Manajemen Pendidikan*, May 7, 2021, 389–402.

efforts between schools and families which include monitoring systems and habitual reinforcement practices play an essential role in instilling religious values into students' daily lives.

Building on this foundation, the present study aims to investigate how school principals can effectively strengthen religious values within school culture. A qualitative approach is adopted using purposive sampling to engage informants with direct involvement in implementing religious practices within schools. Data collection methods include interviews, observations, and document analysis.¹⁴ The data will undergo systematic processes of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to derive valuable insights. The results are expected to demonstrate that successful integration of religious values within schools necessitates an overarching approach to principal leadership one that intertwines strategic planning, role modeling, continuous supervision, and shared participation among all stakeholders. This combination enables the seamless internalization of religious values into students' daily cultural practices and behaviors.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative methodology with a descriptive design to comprehensively examine the role of school leadership in fostering religious values within the fabric of school culture. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable as the research aimed to delve into participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices concerning the integration of religious principles within the school environment.¹⁵

Field research was conducted in December 2025 at an Islamic-oriented educational institution. To safeguard the institution's privacy and adhere to research ethics, the name of the school has been deliberately withheld. The investigation primarily centered on understanding how school leadership facilitates the assimilation and reinforcement of religious values through cultural practices embedded in the school's daily operations.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research objectives. Two primary informants were engaged in the study: the school principal served as the chief informant, overseeing the planning, supervision, and evaluation of religious culture initiatives; and a teacher participated as a secondary informant, actively involved in delivering religious programs and overseeing students' everyday religious behaviors. While the number of participants was intentionally limited, their pivotal roles and extensive engagement in fostering religious values made them ideal contributors to this research.

Data collection relied on structured interviews, observational studies, and document analysis. Interviews were guided by a set of predefined questions aligned with research aims, exploring topics such as the principal's leadership approach, strategies for embedding religious values, methods of oversight and evaluation, obstacles encountered, and efforts to

¹⁴ Maryono Maryono et al., "Pengembangan Modul Pembelajaran Pengantar Studi Islam: Studi pada Mahasiswa STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya," *MASALIQ* 5, no. 1 (2024): 133–46, <https://doi.org/10.58578/masaliq.v5i1.4418>.

¹⁵ Fahriana Nurrisa and Dina Hermina, *Pendekatan Kualitatif dalam Penelitian: Strategi, Tahapan, dan Analisis Data*, 02, no. 03 (2025).

enhance students' adherence to religious practices. Observations provided insights into religious activity implementation and students' everyday behaviors within the school setting. Document analysis complemented these methods by examining institutional materials like school regulations, religious event schedules, supervisory records, and other relevant documents.

The collected data underwent qualitative analysis involving three core stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion formulation. Initially, information was refined by isolating details pertinent to the study's goals. The refined data were then systematically organized to identify patterns and facilitate interpretation related to the principal's influence on strengthening religious culture. The final step involved drawing conclusions based on recurring themes validated by consistent evidence from multiple sources.¹⁶

To enhance the reliability and credibility of findings, the study incorporated source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation cross-referenced information provided by both the principal and teacher, ensuring multiple perspectives were considered. Technique triangulation compared data from interviews, observations, and document reviews to validate consistency across findings. Altogether, these triangulation methods reinforced the research's dependability, accuracy, and scientific rigor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Principal Leadership in Enhancing Religious Values Within the School Environment

Interview data indicate that the principal plays a strategic role in strengthening religious values through systematic planning and the implementation of structured religious programs. The principal explained:

"The programs are organized systematically into daily, monthly, semester, and annual activities. Daily programs include greeting students politely upon arrival, Dhuba prayer, reciting daily supplications, congregational prayers, and monitoring students' religious practices. Monthly activities include Friday charity, while semester and annual programs involve Ramadan activities, social services, and support for orphans. These programs are designed to cultivate religious values continuously through students' daily habits." (Principal, Interview)

Active involvement in planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation demonstrates that the principal serves as the central actor in maintaining the continuity of religious culture within the school. The sustainability of religious values is not solely determined by the existence of religious programs, but also by the principal's commitment to coordinating stakeholders, monitoring implementation, and ensuring that religious practices become part of students' daily habits. This condition reflects the strategic position of the principal in transforming religious values from formal policies into an institutional culture.

This planning process also reflects educational management that systematically integrates religious values into school policies, curricular activities, and students' daily

¹⁶ Marinu Waruwu, *Pendekatan Penelitian Pendidikan: Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif dan Metode Penelitian Kombinasi*, 7 (2023).

experiences, enabling religious culture to develop as an integral component of school life rather than as a series of independent programs.¹⁷ Such strategic planning requires principals to align school vision, curriculum implementation, religious culture, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous evaluation so that character formation can be achieved in a holistic and sustainable manner.¹⁸ principal's function as a manager encompasses far more than administrative oversight. Principals are seen as pioneers responsible for embedding character values by promoting and maintaining a culture of religious engagement throughout the institution. As such, their leadership significantly influences both the academic and moral development of students.¹⁹

Despite the critical nature of this role, school principals often encounter several challenges in effectively executing their duties. Among these challenges are issues related to limited transparency in appointment procedures, insufficient work motivation and discipline among staff, inadequate professional expertise, and a lack of support for implementing tasks with high efficacy. These obstacles not only hinder the leadership capabilities of principals but also exert a detrimental impact on educational quality across dimensions such as inputs, process implementation, and final outcomes. Nonetheless, these challenges can be mitigated through structured interventions such as staff meetings aimed at identifying weaknesses or errors and formulating actionable solutions.

Challenges encountered by school principals indicate that the success of strengthening religious culture is influenced not only by leadership commitment but also by organizational and human resource factors within the school environment. Limitations in professional competence, work discipline, institutional support, and stakeholder participation can reduce the effectiveness of religious programs and hinder the achievement of expected educational outcomes. Continuous evaluation and collective problem-solving are therefore essential to identify weaknesses, improve implementation strategies, and ensure the sustainability of religious culture development.

Asnawi et al. (2020), explain that systematic evaluations constitute a practical approach for addressing challenges impeding the establishment of a robust religious culture at schools. Their research demonstrated that evaluations typically begin with focused small-group meetings involving key stakeholders such as members of Quality Assurance teams, vice principals, treasurers, and committee leaders. During these sessions, deficiencies in previously implemented activities are identified and solutions proposed. Once initial recommendations are formulated, outcomes are shared with all teaching staff during broader meetings to further refine action plans based on input regarding overlooked shortcomings or alternative perspectives. This collaborative process fosters consensus while enabling schools to develop tailored solutions for overcoming obstacles related to program

¹⁷ Mokhamad Yaurizqika Hadi and Dini Siamika Tito Prayogi, "Managing Islamic School Culture to Develop Students' Religious Character," *Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 3, no. 2 (2025): 255–75, Jakarta, Indonesia, <https://doi.org/10.70376/jerp.v3i2.304>.

¹⁸ Wahyudi Widodo, "The Principal's Strategy in Strengthening Character Education Based on Islam," *Jurnal Inovatif Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2025): 27–39, <https://doi.org/10.38073/jimpi.v4i2.2498>.

¹⁹ Fuadi et al., "Peran Kepala Sekolah sebagai Manajer dalam Implementasi Budaya Religius di Sekolah Dasar."

implementation.²⁰ implementation in Islamic schools serves as a key motivator in creating a superior school culture, focusing not only on academics but also on character development.²¹

Further insights from interviews indicate that the inculcation of religious values and culture is embedded within a school's systematic policies through various recurring programs conducted daily, monthly, semester-wise, and annually. These programs encompass practices including polite greetings when welcoming students, performing Dhuha prayers, routine daily prayers, group prayers, fundraising initiatives such as Friday charity programs, optional fasting exercises, Ramadan-focused activities, social service initiatives, and support for children experiencing orphanhood. Additionally, schools engage in monitoring student behavior on a day-to-day basis by promoting habits such as eating while seated under teacher supervision and involving all members of the school community. Collectively, these habitual practices serve as a foundation for sustaining religious culture within the educational environment. The critical role of principals also extends to continuously fostering collaboration among teachers, staff members, and parents to ensure smooth and consistent implementation of religious values across all school activities. These findings underscore that the development and reinforcement of religious character within students can be effectively achieved through intentional structuring of habitual practices and close coordination among key stakeholders within the school community.

The implementation of various religious programs demonstrates that the strengthening of religious values is pursued through a process of continuous habituation rather than through formal instruction alone. Repeated religious practices integrated into daily school activities provide students with consistent opportunities to internalize religious norms and behaviors. Such an approach allows religious values to become part of students' everyday experiences, gradually shaping their attitudes, discipline, and social conduct. Sustained coordination among principals, teachers, staff members, and parents further reinforces this process by creating a supportive environment that promotes consistency between school expectations and students' daily practices.

Maryono and Ulien Nuha (2025), emphasize that Islam is not merely a system of beliefs but a way of life that requires the practical manifestation of faith in both vertical relationships with Allah and horizontal relationships with fellow human beings. Consequently, the cultivation of religious culture through routine worship, social responsibility programs, and character-building activities serves as an important medium for translating religious teachings into observable behavior within the school community.²²

Interview data revealed the first respondent highlighted that the school prioritizes the recruitment of teachers who are prepared to adopt and embody the institution's religious ethos. It also enforces labor regulations requiring participation in religious programs. Furthermore, the principal oversees these efforts by engaging class and teacher counselors

²⁰ Asnawi et al., "Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Menciptakan Budaya Religius Di Sekolah."

²¹ Syarip, "Gaya Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kepala Sekolah: Kunci Sukses Menciptakan Islamic School Culture Yang Unggul," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 03 (2025): 335–47, <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v10i03.33057>.

²² Maryono Maryono and Zaki Ulien Nuha, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam dalam Hadis la yuqimu ar-rajulu ar-rajula," *EDUCAN: JURNAL PENDIDIKAN ISLAM* 9, no. 2 (2025): 138–56, <https://doi.org/10.21111/educan.v9i2.14876>.

to monitor compliance, while addressing any breaches of the established cultural expectations through warnings and sanctions. To extend this framework into students' personal lives, the school strengthens parental involvement by providing tools such as daily prayer monitoring books and Qur'an memorization logs, enabling parents to oversee their children's religious activities at home.

Second respondent emphasized that the school has institutionalized these efforts through the development of standard operating procedures and technical guidelines to ensure a systematic approach to implementing religious programs. These findings collectively suggest that fostering religious values in such an educational setting is not merely a symbolic or superficial effort. Instead, it is underpinned by a comprehensive system of oversight, routine practices, and collaborative engagement among the school community and family units. As a result, school leadership plays an integral role in reinforcing religious values through meticulous program planning, diligent supervision, and cultural integration involving all stakeholders within the school environment.

Systematic recruitment of teachers, the establishment of monitoring mechanisms, parental involvement, and the formulation of operational guidelines reflect an institutional commitment to strengthening religious values within the school environment. The findings demonstrate that religious culture is developed through an integrated system consisting of regulations, supervision, habituation, and stakeholder collaboration. Such a system enables religious programs to be implemented consistently and reduces dependence on individual initiatives. Continuous coordination between school leaders, teachers, and parents also contributes to extending the internalization of religious values beyond the classroom, allowing religious practices to become part of students' daily lives. These conditions indicate that the sustainability of religious culture is strongly influenced by the presence of organizational structures that support supervision, accountability, and collective participation in achieving educational goals.

Hidayat and Dimiyati (2023) emphasize that principals are expected to demonstrate discipline and commitment as exemplary figures capable of influencing the behavior of the entire school community. Effective leadership is reflected not only in policy formulation but also in the ability to establish systems that encourage collective adherence to institutional values.²³ Fahrudin et al. (2025) further argue that educational environments built upon consistent supervision, value internalization, and stakeholder collaboration contribute to the development of learners who possess both professional competencies and strong moral character. Such an approach ensures that religious values become embedded not only in students' academic experiences but also in their everyday lives and future professional conduct.²⁴

²³ Hidayat and Dimiyati, "Peran Kepemimpinan Inovatif Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Pendidikan Sekolah Dasar."

²⁴ Ahmad Hanif Fahrudin et al., *Relasi Antara Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Kedisiplinan Kejuruan dan Penguatan Karakter Religius*, 16 (2025).

The Principal's Role as a Role Model in Establishing the Values of Integrity within the School Environment

Interview findings revealed that exemplary leadership constitutes one of the principal strategies for strengthening religious values within the school environment. The principal emphasized that role modeling begins with personal consistency in implementing the values and regulations expected from all members of the school community. As stated by the principal:

“The principal is the first person who must set an example in all school activities. For instance, if smoking is prohibited at school, the principal should be the first person who does not smoke on school grounds. Likewise, during morning duty, when teachers and students are welcomed at the school entrance, the principal should be the first person to greet and welcome them.” (Principal, Interview)

Principal's direct involvement in school activities contributes significantly to shaping the attitudes and behavior of the broader school community. The second respondent explained that the principal not only demonstrates exemplary conduct but also encourages teachers, administrative staff, and students to align their actions with institutional values. Program planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up actions are also undertaken directly by the principal to ensure that religious values are consistently embedded within school activities. These findings indicate that the principal's influence extends beyond personal behavior and encompasses strategic leadership in guiding the development of a value-based school culture.

Structured religious programs constitute an important mechanism for internalizing religious values among members of the school community. The first respondent explained that religious activities are incorporated into formal school programs through systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Collaboration among principals, teachers, foundation members, parents, and students further strengthens the effectiveness of these initiatives. Daily worship monitoring books are also utilized to support the continuity of students' religious practices outside school hours. Standard operating procedures and technical guidelines established by the school help ensure the consistency and sustainability of religious programs. Integration of Islamic Religious Education with practical religious activities, such as congregational prayer, proper ablution practices, and the cultivation of ethical behavior, further reinforces the internalization of religious values within students' daily lives.

Exemplary leadership emerges as a fundamental strategy in strengthening religious culture within the school environment. The findings indicate that students and school personnel are more likely to adopt religious values when these values are consistently demonstrated by the principal through daily actions and decision-making processes. Religious values are therefore transmitted not only through formal instruction but also through observable behaviors that become reference points for members of the school community.

Active participation by the principal in program planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation further demonstrates that religious culture requires sustained

leadership commitment. Consistency between institutional policies and leadership practices strengthens the credibility of school programs and facilitates the internalization of religious values among students. The presence of structured programs, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous supervision also suggests that the development of religious culture is supported by both personal example and organizational mechanisms working simultaneously.

Finding indicates that exemplary leadership is not merely symbolic but serves as a practical mechanism for internalizing religious values into the daily behavior of the school community. Through consistent role modelling, principals translate institutional values into observable practices that can be emulated by teachers, staff, and students.²⁵ Moreover, transformative Islamic leadership encourages school leaders to embody religious values through consistent words, actions, and interpersonal relationships. Such leadership fosters an organizational climate in which ethical behavior is learned through everyday interactions and gradually becomes part of the school's collective identity.²⁶ emphasize that Islamic Religious Education are pivotal motivators who invigorate students' enthusiasm for learning. Beyond instruction, Islamic education serves as a moral foundation by illustrating and addressing ethical challenges encountered in daily life. Given that children often assess threats based on their perception of others as trustworthy or otherwise, credible role models have a profound influence on shaping students' behavior and moral outlook.²⁷

The Impact of Principal Leadership on the Formation of Student Religious Culture

Interview findings from the teacher indicate that the principal's leadership has contributed to observable changes in students' religious attitudes and daily behavior. As stated by the teacher:

"The changes can be seen from how students consistently practice religious values at school. For example, they apply proper etiquette in eating and drinking, participate in congregational prayers, dress appropriately according to school regulations, and demonstrate respectful language and manners in their daily interactions." (Teacher, Interview)

Observable changes in student behavior constitute another important indicator of the effectiveness of religious culture development. The teacher noted that students increasingly demonstrate positive religious habits, including participation in congregational prayers, the use of respectful language, adherence to proper eating etiquette, and compliance with dress regulations reflecting the school's religious values. These behavioral transformations suggest that religious culture contributes not only to students' cognitive understanding of religious teachings but also to the development of attitudes and practical religious competencies.

²⁵ Topan Iskandar et al., "Islamic Leadership Management in the Development of a Religious School Culture," *Journal of General Education and Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2026): 2581–94, <https://doi.org/10.58421/gehu.v5i2.1203>.

²⁶ Eci Sriwahyuni et al., "Building a Religious and Innovative Organizational Culture: Transformative Leadership Practices of Madrasah Principals," *Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan (JKIP)* 7, no. 1 (2026): 187–97, <https://doi.org/10.55583/jkip.v7i1.1930>.

²⁷ Muhammad Iqbal and Zaki Ulien Nuha, "Strategi Guru Dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Siswa Pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam: Teachers' Strategies in Enhancing Students' Learning Motivation in Islamic Education," *Educan* 10, no. 1 (2026): 38–50, <https://doi.org/10.21111/educan.v10i1.11>.

Challenges related to parental involvement and teacher supervision remain important considerations in sustaining religious culture within the school. Interview data revealed that some parents perceive religious education primarily as Qur'anic instruction and may not fully recognize the broader objective of character and value formation. Variations in teacher commitment to supervising religious activities were also identified as obstacles affecting program implementation. School leaders respond to these challenges through parental orientation programs, the use of worship monitoring books, continuous communication with families, and supervision mechanisms designed to strengthen teacher accountability.

Positive changes in students' daily behavior illustrate that the cultivation of religious culture extends beyond formal religious activities and becomes embedded within everyday school life. Regular participation in congregational prayers, respectful communication, disciplined behavior, and adherence to religious norms demonstrate the gradual internalization of religious values among students.

Hidayah et al. (2025) emphasize that systematic and continuous religious habituation is essential for strengthening students' religious character. Through structured planning, implementation, and evaluation, religious routines become embedded in students' daily behavior and contribute to the sustainability of religious school culture.²⁸

Student behavioral transformation represents one of the most tangible indicators of successful religious culture development within schools. The findings demonstrate that religious values become more meaningful when they are translated into consistent daily practices rather than remaining limited to theoretical understanding. Continuous exposure to religious activities, combined with regular supervision and evaluation, encourages students to develop habits that reflect the values promoted by the institution.

Al Ghazi and Amrullah (2025) describe the internalization of religious values as a gradual process in which repeated participation in religious practices transforms externally guided behaviors into personally held values that shape students' daily decisions and social interactions.²⁹

Principal leadership appears to function as a determining factor in sustaining these outcomes. Effective leadership not only facilitates the implementation of religious programs but also establishes systems that support monitoring, evaluation, and stakeholder involvement. The presence of parental participation, teacher commitment, and structured supervision mechanisms strengthens the continuity of religious habituation both inside and outside the school environment.

Institutional efforts to address challenges related to parental support and teacher supervision indicate that the development of religious culture requires collaboration among multiple educational actors. Religious character formation cannot be achieved solely through classroom instruction; rather, it depends on the consistency of values reinforced across school programs, family environments, and daily social interactions. Sustained cooperation

²⁸ Ilmi Nur Hidayah et al., "Reinforcing School Culture through Religious-Based Habituation," *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, ahead of print, November 10, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v16i2.88704>.

²⁹ Pramudya Al Ghazi and Muhlasin Amrullah, "Religious Character Habituation Through School Culture in Elementary Schools: Pembentukan Karakter Religi Melalui Budaya Sekolah Di Sekolah Dasar," *Indonesian Journal of Education Methods Development* 20, no. 4 (2025): 10.21070/ijemd.v20i4.914-10.21070/ijemd.v20i4.914, <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijemd.v20i4.914>.

between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students therefore becomes essential for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of religious culture development.

Similarly, Salim et al. (2025) emphasize that students' religious character develops through the consistent integration of religious values into everyday school culture. Their findings suggest that continuous guidance, teacher exemplification, and habitual religious practices encourage students to demonstrate discipline, responsibility, respect, and moral awareness as enduring aspects of their character.³⁰

Wahyuni and Maunah (2021) emphasize that principals play a strategic role in directing school programs and creating conditions that support the achievement of educational goals. Leadership effectiveness is reflected in the ability to mobilize teachers, staff, and students toward shared institutional objectives.³¹ Furthermore, Sari (2025) argues that inspirational leadership encourages greater commitment among teachers and strengthens the implementation of school programs.³² Fajariyah and Sholehuddin (2023) also highlight that the development of students' religious character requires leadership strategies that emphasize habituation, continuous supervision, evaluation, and collaboration between schools and families.³³



Figure 1. Principal Leadership Framework for Strengthening Religious Values in School Culture

³⁰ Muhammad Rafli Salim et al., "Aswaja-Oriented School Culture And The Formation Of Students' Religious Character," *Edureligia: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 9, no. 2 (2025): 339–59, <https://doi.org/10.33650/edureligia.v9i2.12218>.

³¹ Fitri Wahyuni and Binti Maunah, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dalam Pendidikan Islam," *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education Management* 2, no. 2 (2021): 141–62, <https://doi.org/10.21154/sajiem.v2i2.51>.

³² Nani Yulia Sari, *Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru*, 5 (2025).

³³ Aulia Nurul Fajariyah and Sholehuddin, "Strategi Kepala Sekolah dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Peserta Didik Melalui Budaya Sekolah di Sekolah Dasar," *Syntax Literate ; Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia* 8, no. 9 (2023): 5180–93, <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v8i9.13595>.

To facilitate readers' understanding of the overall findings, Figure 1 summarizes the principal dimensions of school principal leadership in strengthening religious values, including strategic leadership, role modelling, implementation strategies, student outcomes, challenges, and institutional responses. Figure 1 demonstrates that the effectiveness of principal leadership lies in its ability to integrate leadership functions, religious culture, stakeholder participation, and continuous habituation into a coherent system that supports students' religious character development.

Findings indicate that the formation of students' religious culture is reflected not only in their participation in religious activities but also in the emergence of positive behavioral changes in daily life. Consistent habituation, continuous supervision, and collaboration between schools and families contribute significantly to the internalization of religious values. These conditions demonstrate that principal leadership plays a central role in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of religious culture development within the school environment.

Beyond confirming previous studies on principal leadership and religious school culture, the present study contributes by proposing an integrative principal leadership model that links strategic planning, exemplary leadership, supervision, stakeholder collaboration, and religious habituation into a unified framework for strengthening religious values within school culture. This integrative perspective demonstrates that the effectiveness of principal leadership depends on the interaction of these interconnected dimensions rather than on isolated leadership practices.

CONCLUSION

Strengthening religious values within school culture requires integrative leadership that combines planning, organizing, supervision, evaluation, and exemplary conduct. Religious values are institutionalized through structured programs implemented continuously in daily, monthly, semester, and annual activities. Habituation, monitoring mechanisms, and collaboration among school stakeholders contribute significantly to sustaining the implementation of religious culture within the educational environment.

Internalization of religious values is reflected not only in students' understanding of religious teachings but also in observable behavioral changes, including discipline in worship, polite communication, appropriate social conduct, and adherence to religious norms practiced within the school community. Consistent supervision, role modeling, and cooperation between schools and parents support the development of these religious behaviors and encourage their continuity beyond the school setting.

An integrative leadership model emerges from the findings of this study, demonstrating that planning, role modeling, supervision, evaluation, and stakeholder collaboration function as interconnected elements in strengthening religious culture. Religious culture is therefore maintained not merely through formal programs but through a comprehensive system that enables religious values to become part of students' daily lives. This finding enriches previous studies that tended to examine managerial functions, religious programs, or character development separately.

Limitations of this study include its focus on a single educational setting and the involvement of a limited number of informants. Broader investigations involving diverse school contexts, additional participants, and comparative approaches are recommended to generate a more comprehensive understanding of principal leadership in strengthening religious culture within schools.

Future studies are recommended to address these limitations by involving a wider range of educational settings, larger and more diverse participant groups, and comparative research designs across different school contexts. Further investigation may also explore the long-term sustainability of integrative principal leadership in strengthening religious values, as well as examine the perspectives of additional stakeholders, including students, parents, and school management. Such studies are expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership practices influence the development and sustainability of religious culture in educational institutions.

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