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# Internalizing Religious Character Through Congregational Prayer In Two Indonesian Vocational Schools

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**Abstract**

*This study examined how students internalized religious character values through regular congregational prayer at SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya and SMK IT Nurul Qolbi, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative design used interviews, observation, and document review. Indicator percentages were used as supplementary descriptive evidence. The analysis identified three aspects of value internalization: communicating the meaning of prayer, learning through guided participation, and beginning to take personal responsibility for practice. Observations at both schools showed visible patterns of attendance, rule adherence, teacher role modeling, and habituation. Interviews at SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya emphasized teacher coordination and identified water and ablution facilities as constraints. At SMK IT Nurul Qolbi, interviews described students preparing for prayer with fewer reminders, prompting peers, and, in an individual account, extending the practice to the family setting. The reported scores for establishing congregational prayer discipline were 72.53% and 85.70%, respectively. The corresponding scores for religious character internalization were 84.27% and 88.03%. These descriptive scores complement the qualitative findings. The comparison clarifies how institutional routines, teacher example, and peer interaction provide opportunities for students to develop a sense of personal responsibility for religious practice*

**Keywords: value internalization, religious character, congregational prayer, school discipline, vocational education**



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## INTRODUCTION

Secondary schools are among the settings in which adolescents encounter shared expectations, explore aspects of their identity, and learn to act on values. In vocational schools, these experiences take place alongside preparation for occupational roles. Research on character education emphasizes the importance of intentional school practices and relationships in helping students connect values with conduct (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Verhoeven et al. (2019) further show that school expectations, peer interactions, and opportunities for exploration can shape how adolescents understand themselves. These perspectives situate religious character formation within everyday school life.

In Indonesia, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System identifies faith, devotion to God, and moral character among the aims of national education (Art. 3). Within Islamic education, congregational prayer gives schools a setting in which students can experience religious observance as a collective practice. The Qur'an links prayer to restraint from wrongdoing (Al-Qur'an dan terjemahannya, 2019, 29:45). For this study, religious character refers to the ways students understand and express religious values through discipline, responsibility, and concern for others. These qualities can be explored through what students do, the reasons they give for doing it, and how they respond when supervision varies.

Regular prayer creates repeated opportunities to prepare, participate, and coordinate with others. Research on habits shows how repeated action in a stable context can become associated with recurring cues (Lally et al., 2010; Wood & Neal, 2007). Research on school climate similarly identifies relationships and the institutional environment as important to students' school experiences (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). Applied to congregational prayer, these perspectives direct attention to the schedule, the conduct of teachers and peers, and access to facilities. Each can shape how readily students participate and what they learn from doing so.

The distinction between regular participation and personal endorsement is central to the analysis. Deci et al. (1994) distinguish taking in an expectation from integrating its value into one's own reasons for acting. Ryan and Deci (2020) likewise explain that students can perform the same activity for different reasons, ranging from external pressure to recognition of its personal importance. In this study, three aspects of internalization guide interpretation: the communication of a value, described as value transformation, its enactment through interaction, described as value transaction, and its uptake as a basis for personal action, described as


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transinternalization (Muhaimin et al., 1996). The framework helps distinguish evidence about a school's organization of prayer from evidence about what prayer means to students.

Teacher example may support this process by giving students a concrete way to recognize what the school expects. Sanderse (2013) argues that role modeling in character education involves helping students understand the qualities they observe and why those qualities matter. In a broader school context, Durlak et al. (2011) found that structured programs for social and emotional learning can support students' skills, attitudes, and behavior. These studies identify reasons to examine the relationship between explanation, guided practice, and reflection when a school uses a recurring activity for character education.

Studies of religious education in Indonesia give this problem a more specific context. Akhyar et al. (2024) documented how teachers at a public junior secondary school supported congregational prayer and other religious activities through regular guidance and coordination. Rosadi et al. (2025) reported associations among school culture, student discipline, and religious character in a cross-sectional study of Islamic junior secondary schools. These findings make discipline a relevant part of the inquiry. They also raise a question about how students experience the expectations and relationships through which discipline is cultivated, particularly in vocational school settings.

The two sites in this study, SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya and SMK IT Nurul Qolbi, organized congregational prayer as part of religious character education. Both settings used recurring practice and teacher involvement, while the available accounts differed in emphasis. At Tarumajaya, teacher coordination and access to water and ablution facilities were prominent concerns. At Nurul Qolbi, interview accounts described instances of students preparing for prayer with fewer reminders and prompting their peers. The shared practice and different institutional settings make it possible to examine how organizational support and personal initiative appear in each school.

The research gap concerns the relationship between the organization of prayer, students' participation, and the meanings students attach to their conduct. The study addresses this gap by comparing a public vocational school and an Islamic vocational school and by examining the three aspects of internalization alongside evidence of attendance, habituation, guidance, and initiative. Its contribution is to distinguish the conditions that sustain a school routine from the evidence that students have begun to take personal responsibility for it. The reported indicator percentages provide descriptive context for that comparison.



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The study aims to analyze how religious character values are internalized through congregational prayer, identify conditions that support or constrain the process, and compare the patterns reported at SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya and SMK IT Nurul Qolbi. The inquiry is relevant to schools that use shared religious practice for character education because it clarifies what attendance can show and which additional evidence is needed to understand changes in students' reasons and conduct.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Setting

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to examine congregational prayer and religious character formation in two institutional settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sites were SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya and SMK IT Nurul Qolbi, Indonesia. Both schools organized congregational prayer as part of student development. A site-by-site analysis preceded the comparison. Indicator percentages supplemented the qualitative evidence and were interpreted descriptively.

### Informants and Data Collection

Informants included school principals, teachers or staff involved in religious guidance, and students. Interviews explored how the program was organized, the role of teachers, students' experiences, and conditions that supported or constrained participation. Observation addressed attendance, readiness, rule adherence, order, consistency, responsibility, teacher example, guidance, and social interaction. Documentary materials included schedules, photographs, and records of religious programs. These materials were reviewed as evidence of program organization and implementation.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through condensation, display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2020). Findings were organized around the process of internalization, enabling and constraining conditions, and similarities and differences between the sites. The analysis compared interview accounts with observed behavior and documentary evidence when the sources addressed the same finding. The reported percentages were calculated by dividing


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attained scores by maximum scores and multiplying by 100. They are presented as descriptive scores, separately from the ordinal observation ratings.

**Trustworthiness**

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability guided the assessment of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study used source and method triangulation to examine convergence across perspectives and forms of evidence (Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004). The analysis considered what each source could establish. Program materials documented arrangements, observations showed conduct in the school setting, and interviews provided accounts of personal meaning and perceived changes. Results identify the source of each principal finding where the evidence permits.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Internalization of Religious Character Values Through Congregational Prayer

School schedules, photographs, and religious program records constituted the documentary material used to establish the organizational context of congregational prayer. They situate prayer within a recurring school program at both sites. Evidence concerning students' personal reasons for taking part comes primarily from the interview accounts.

The reported accounts describe teachers explaining prayer obligations and school expectations and providing guidance during the program. This aspect of the process was interpreted as value transformation. At Tarumajaya, interview accounts emphasized that teachers coordinated their guidance and participated in maintaining the routine.

At both sites, attendance, adherence to rules, consistency, teacher role modeling, guidance, and habituation received a score of 4, the highest reported observation rating. Order and attentiveness during prayer received a score of 3 at both sites. These observations document the settings in which students enacted school expectations through interaction with teachers and peers, corresponding to value transaction.

At Nurul Qolbi, interview accounts described some students initially responding to school rules and supervision and later preparing for prayer without always waiting for a reminder. Students were also described as reminding peers. One account extended this pattern to the family setting, where a student reminded family members when it was time to pray. The reported initiative provides the clearest examples of behavior consistent with transinternalization.


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The documentary evidence established that prayer was organized as a school routine, and observations showed participation and guidance during that routine. The interview material added accounts of students' reasons and initiative. The observation item concerning awareness received a score of 3 at both sites. Taken together, the sources document an established routine and examples of personal initiative, with the latter described more explicitly in the Nurul Qolbi interviews.

**Conditions Supporting and Constraining Internalization**

Interview evidence from Tarumajaya identified coordination among teachers as a support for maintaining the prayer program. Teachers were described as providing guidance and examples of participation alongside supervision. The accounts linked continuity of the program to the shared involvement of staff.

At both sites, teacher role modeling, guidance, social interaction, habituation, and concern for others received a score of 4 in the reported observations. These ratings identify visible aspects of the social environment in which prayer was carried out. Nurul Qolbi interview accounts added examples of students prompting one another, specifying how peer interaction could support participation.

The documentary materials included schedules and records of religious activities. Their role in the analysis was to establish the organizational setting for repeated practice. The evidence about how teachers coordinated guidance and how students responded came from accounts of program implementation and observed behavior.

At Tarumajaya, interview accounts identified water availability and limitations in ablution facilities as barriers to carrying out the program. The accounts described efforts to add ablution points. This was the most specific infrastructure issue reported in the comparison and concerned the preparation required before prayer.

The interviews and observation ratings converged on the visibility of teacher guidance and repeated practice at both sites. The facilities issue was documented most clearly in the Tarumajaya interview accounts, while peer reminders were described most clearly at Nurul Qolbi. The comparison therefore identifies both shared supports and constraints or responses for which the available evidence is site specific.


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**Comparison of the Two Schools**

At Tarumajaya, attendance, rule adherence, independence, responsibility, and habituation received a score of 4, while readiness received a score of 3. At Nurul Qolbi, these shared indicators and readiness received a score of 4. Punctuality at Nurul Qolbi was rated 3. These ratings describe the conduct recorded at the two sites and show variation across individual indicators.

The reported score for establishing congregational prayer discipline was 72.53% at Tarumajaya and 85.70% at Nurul Qolbi. The corresponding scores on the habituation indicator were 77.67% and 87.70%. These figures summarize indicator scores and provide descriptive context for the interview and observation findings.

The reported religious character internalization scores were 84.27% at Tarumajaya and 88.03% at Nurul Qolbi. Tarumajaya recorded 84.53% for value transformation, 83.73% for value transaction, and 84.00% for transinternalization. The corresponding scores at Nurul Qolbi were 88.27%, 88.00%, and 88.53%. Religious character expressed in behavior was scored at 84.80% and 88.67%, respectively.

At Tarumajaya, the accounts emphasized the organization of prayer, teacher involvement, and the practical issue of access to ablution facilities. At Nurul Qolbi, they gave more specific examples of student initiative, peer reminders, and an instance of reported practice extending into family life. These emphases describe the content of the available accounts from each site.

Both schools documented recurring religious programs and showed observable patterns of participation and teacher guidance. The interviews gave additional detail on institutional support at Tarumajaya and on personal initiative at Nurul Qolbi. The percentages summarized the indicator scores and were higher at Nurul Qolbi on both composite measures. Table 1 brings these different forms of evidence together for the three research objectives.



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**Table 1.Summary of Findings Across the Two Vocational Schools**

| ***Research objective*** | ***SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya*** | ***SMK IT Nurul Qolbi*** | ***Evidence used in the comparison*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Explain the internalization process* | Teacher guidance and coordinated participation supported a recurring prayer routine. | Interviews described preparation with fewer reminders, peer prompts, and one account of a reminder at home. | Interviews and observations, with program documentation establishing the setting |
| *Identify enabling and constraining conditions* | Teacher coordination and role modeling supported the routine. Interviews identified water and ablution facilities as constraints. | Teacher guidance, repeated participation, and peer reminders supported the routine. | Interviews, observation ratings, schedules, and religious program records |
| *Compare patterns between schools* | Prayer discipline score 72.53%. Religious character internalization score 84.27%. | Prayer discipline score 85.70%. Religious character internalization score 88.03%. | Supplementary descriptive scores interpreted alongside interviews, observations, and documents |

**DISCUSSION**

Congregational prayer provided an organized setting for students to learn what their schools expected and to take part in a recurring religious practice. The findings indicate that students' reasons for participating could differ even when their conduct looked similar. Kelman (1958) distinguishes compliance, identification, and internalization as different processes of accepting influence. That distinction helps interpret the reports from Nurul Qolbi of students initially participating under supervision and later showing initiative. The accounts illustrate a possible shift in the meaning of participation, while the observations document the behaviors visible during the school routine.

The communication of expectations provided a starting point for this process. Schools specified when students were expected to pray and what orderly participation involved. Teachers


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could also explain why prayer mattered. The distinction is important because the same routine can be experienced as an institutional obligation or accepted as a personally meaningful responsibility. Ryan and Connell (1989) show that reasons for acting can differ in the degree to which individuals experience them as their own. For the present study, this makes what students say about their reasons relevant alongside how frequently or visibly they participate.

Teacher example connected the expectations of the program with what students saw adults do. The Tarumajaya accounts emphasized coordination among teachers, and observations at both sites recorded visible teacher role modeling and guidance. From Bandura's (2001) social cognitive perspective, individuals learn through interactions among personal factors, conduct, and the social environment. Teachers' participation can therefore be understood as part of the environment in which students learn how to prepare and take part. Its contribution to internalization also depends on how students interpret the example.

Repeated practice helped make the routines of preparation and participation familiar. Wood and Rünger (2016) explain how habits can develop when behavior is repeated in stable contexts. A regular prayer schedule, familiar preparation sequence, and repeated gathering provide conditions for that process. Students who prepare without an immediate reminder may be responding to familiar cues, recognizing a personal obligation, or both. The distinction is useful because habituation describes the regularity of a practice, while internalization also concerns the meaning attributed to it.

The examples of students reminding peers suggest that the organization of prayer could become a shared responsibility. Wentzel (1998) found that relationships with teachers, peers, and parents were associated with different aspects of middle school students' motivation. Although that study addressed a different educational context, it helps explain why participation may acquire a social meaning beyond teacher supervision. At Nurul Qolbi, peer reminders showed students taking a role in sustaining the activity. Those reminders can express concern for others, and they can also function as a form of social encouragement to comply.

The account of a student reminding family members about prayer is significant because it concerns conduct in a setting beyond direct school supervision. In the terms of Ryan and Connell (1989), a student's reasons for acting help distinguish the sources of regulation. The family example is compatible with a growing sense of personal responsibility, particularly if the student understood the action as worthwhile. Its evidentiary scope is an individual account. Repeated


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observations or additional perspectives would be needed to establish how consistently such conduct carried over to other settings.

The infrastructure issue at Tarumajaya shows how material arrangements can shape the opportunity to participate. Access to water and sufficient ablution points affects students' ability to prepare in time. The reported effort to add ablution points was a response to that organizational constraint. The case therefore separates two questions that matter for program evaluation. One is whether the school makes participation practically possible, and the other is whether students give the practice personal meaning. Improvements in facilities can support the first condition and make room for teachers and students to work on the second.

The score comparison offers a descriptive perspective on the relationship between the routine and the reported internalization indicators. Nurul Qolbi recorded higher percentages on both composites, with a larger difference on prayer discipline than on religious character internalization. The two composites summarize different indicators. The available instrument description supports reporting the percentages as supplementary summaries, while the qualitative evidence gives the clearest account of how participation and initiative were expressed. The observed awareness rating of 3 at both schools further illustrates the value of considering individual indicators alongside the composite figures.

Across both settings, the findings support an interpretation of value transformation, value transaction, and transinternalization as linked aspects of a process. Explanation gave students a language for understanding expectations, and repeated guided participation provided experience of those expectations. In several accounts, initiative and concern for others were visible in how students prepared or prompted peers. Kelman (1958) and Wood and Rünger (2016) help clarify the distinction between regular behavior and a value endorsed by the individual. The available evidence traces elements of this process within the two schools and supports cautious interpretation of the degree of personal uptake.

The academic contribution of this study is to distinguish three kinds of evidence in research on religious character education: evidence that a school organizes a practice, evidence that students regularly participate, and evidence that students take personal responsibility for it. By comparing a public vocational school and an Islamic vocational school, the study shows how teacher coordination, recurring practice, peer involvement, and students' reasons can be examined within the same analysis. This distinction provides a basis for studying congregational


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prayer as a setting for character education while making the evidentiary requirements for claims about internalization explicit.

## CONCLUSION

At SMK Negeri 1 Tarumajaya and SMK IT Nurul Qolbi, regular congregational prayer provided a setting for communicating religious values, practicing them with teachers and peers, and developing personal initiative. Interviews and observations identified teacher guidance, role modeling, and habituation at both schools. The Tarumajaya accounts emphasized teacher coordination and constraints related to water and ablution facilities. The Nurul Qolbi accounts provided specific examples of students preparing with fewer reminders and encouraging peers. The comparison suggests that the educational significance of the routine lies in how it connects visible participation with students' understanding of and responsibility for religious practice.

The study was limited to two schools, and the supplementary percentages describe indicator scores within those settings. The available evidence was stronger for routines and selected examples of initiative than for sustained changes in motivation across settings. Schools can strengthen the program through adequate ablution facilities, consistent teacher example, and opportunities for students to reflect on their reasons for participating. Future studies could follow students over time and compare accounts from students, teachers, and families to examine how religious responsibility develops within and beyond school.

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