



Managing Character Education in Pluralistic Schools: A Model of Internalization of Interfaith Values

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the implications of internalizing religious values in enhancing character management in a public elementary school with religious diversity. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, using observations, interviews, and documentation involving teachers, students, and school staff. Data analysis was conducted thematically to explore internalization strategies and their impacts on students' religious character development. The findings highlight that strategies like greeting others, collective prayers, and regular congregational prayers effectively instill religious values inclusively. Teachers' role modeling through activities like home visits and donations fosters empathy and solidarity across religions. Reward and punishment mechanisms enhance moral awareness and intrinsic motivation. Christian students benefit from tailored activities, such as morning prayers and memorizing Bible verses, which promote tolerance. Overall, the internalization of religious values in a multi-faith school environment contributes to students' moral, spiritual, and social development. The implications of this study for educational management emphasize the importance of integrating interfaith value internalization into character education programs. School leaders and educators should adopt inclusive strategies, such as role modeling, structured religious activities, and reward mechanisms, to foster moral, spiritual, and social development, thereby ensuring a harmonious learning environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic means of shaping children's personality and character from an early age. Elementary school serves as the initial and crucial phase in this process because it is during this period that children begin to recognize, differentiate, and internalize values that shape their moral and spiritual foundation (Rozi et al., 2025). Religious Education plays a significant role in the formation of religious character—one that reflects both vertical

relationships with God and horizontal relationships with fellow human beings. The religious values instilled through religious instruction are not merely knowledge to be acquired but are meant to serve as daily life guidance. However, in reality, many elementary education institutions have not maximized the role of religious education as an instrument of character building (Baharun et al., 2019), (Rozi et al., 2025). Numerous students still display behaviors that deviate from religious values, such as dishonesty, disrespect toward teachers, and a lack of empathy for others. This condition reflects a weak internalization of religious values, which goes beyond rote memorization and should instead touch the heart and be manifested in real actions (Islamic et al., 2024).

Religious education, in essence, is not just about delivering religious doctrines and textual theories, but about encouraging students to appreciate and practice values in their social lives. Unfortunately, many schools still treat religious education as a ritualistic activity devoid of deeper meaning. For example, students are taught how to pray and recite supplications but are not given the space to reflect on the spiritual meaning behind those acts. As a result, religious instruction tends to end merely as knowledge rather than internalized experience. This leads to a disconnect between students' understanding and their actual behavior. Such a disconnection is evident in the increasing number of negative behaviors among school-aged children, such as bullying, verbal abuse, and even intolerance toward differences (Salsabila, 2024). In schools with students from diverse religious backgrounds, building religious character becomes even more complex, requiring an interfaith approach that is inclusive rather than exclusive.

The current digital era's social reality exacerbates the situation. Although the advancement of information technology should ideally bring positive impacts, it also introduces new challenges. Students now have easier access to negative content, often imitate violent behavior from social media, and show declining respect toward parents and teachers. They also tend to be apathetic toward religious activities, perceiving them as boring and irrelevant (Amilda et al., 2023), (Ashmawi, 2024). This situation underscores the urgent need to reform religious education approaches, not only making them theoretical but also transformative. One relevant approach is the internalization strategy, where religious values are gradually, holistically, and contextually instilled. Through internalization, religious values are not only known but also deeply felt and applied in real-life actions, both at school and within the wider community.

From an educational management perspective, effective leadership in schools is crucial in supporting and integrating these religious value internalization strategies. School management must adopt inclusive, adaptive, and participatory approaches, creating an environment that fosters both

academic and character development. In schools with diverse religious populations, management plays a key role in designing and implementing curriculum and extracurricular activities that promote interfaith dialogue and the internalization of universal religious values. The leadership should facilitate training for educators to incorporate these values into their teaching practices while fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding among students. This requires a strong commitment to inclusive educational policies that support the spiritual, social, and moral growth of all students, regardless of their religious backgrounds.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the context of multi-religious elementary schools—a subject rarely explored in depth from the perspective of religious character building through interfaith approaches. SDN Krucil I in Probolinggo Regency serves as a real example of a primary school attended by students from Islamic, Christian, and Catholic backgrounds. Amid this pluralism, the school strives to instill religious values while upholding tolerance and diversity. Religious values are not confined to one religion's teachings but are conveyed through a universal approach that emphasizes human values such as honesty, care, empathy, and discipline. This constitutes a key innovation, as strategies for religious character education in interfaith contexts require inclusive, flexible, and adaptive models that can accommodate diverse beliefs.

The strategies used in the internalization process of religious values at these schools include role modeling, habituation, heartfelt advice, discipline, and reinforcement through reward and punishment systems. These approaches align with value internalization theory, which emphasizes a gradual process from knowing, understanding, accepting, to practicing. Activities at school such as congregational prayers, collective supplications, spiritual gatherings (istighotsah), and social outreach like condolence visits to bereaved students' homes are all part of instilling religious values that engage students' affective and psychomotor domains. With such approaches, students do not only understand religious teachings in textual form but also learn to apply them in real social life—including with peers of different faiths in the school environment.

Through this case study at SDN Krucil I, the research aims to explore in depth how religious value internalization is contextually implemented in a multi-religious school setting. This study also intends to show that strengthening religious character does not need to be exclusive or confined to a single religion, but can be achieved through universal values derived from each student's religious teachings. This approach fosters not only students who are observant in formal rituals but also those who possess high social sensitivity, tolerant attitudes, and the ability to live peacefully in diversity. This research is vital in

contributing to the development of a more humanistic, adaptive, and socially relevant model of religious education. Thus, religious education goes beyond theory and becomes a comprehensive and transformative character-building process, supported by effective educational management.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to gain a deep understanding of the process of internalizing religious values in the formation of students' religious character within a multi-faith school environment (Harahap, 2020). Through this method, the researcher can explore the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of the subjects in their natural social and cultural context. A case study is considered appropriate as it allows for an in-depth investigation of two research sites—namely SDN Krucil I in Probolinggo Regency—within their real and complex settings. The focus of the research is directed toward the strategies for internalizing religious values implemented in the two elementary schools and their implications for enhancing students' religious character.

This study also takes into account aspects of social interaction, students' diverse religious backgrounds, and the dynamics of the schools' religious culture. Hence, the method used not only describes religious practices in schools but also analyzes how these values are internalized and manifested by students in their everyday lives within a multi-religious environment (Abdussamad, 2021). In this qualitative study, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, directly involved in the data collection and analysis processes.

This role requires keen observational skills, sensitivity to the socio-cultural context, and a deep understanding of qualitative methodology. To support the research process, the researcher also used supplementary instruments such as interviews and observation guides, although these function only as complementary tools. The study was conducted in two public elementary schools located in Krucil Subdistrict, namely SD Negeri Krucil 1. The selection of these locations was based on three primary considerations: First, both schools have religious diversity among their student communities, which coexist harmoniously. Second, the proximity of the schools to the researcher's residence facilitated access and the intensity of observation. Third, the cultural similarities within the Krucil Village community enabled the researcher to explore data more deeply and understand the social dynamics influencing the internalization of religious values (Risnita, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strategies for the Internalization of Religious Values in Enhancing Students' Religious Character in Multi-Faith Schools

The habituation strategy implemented at SDN Krucil I serves as a concrete form of religious value internalization that touches both the affective and behavioral aspects of students. Activities such as greeting others with peace (salam), praying according to one's beliefs before lessons, and performing Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers in congregation have become daily routines that systematically instill religious values. Non-Muslim students are also given the space to pray according to their respective faiths, reflecting an inclusive practice that respects diversity. The regular istighotsah held every Friday provides a collective means of strengthening Muslim students' spirituality, without neglecting the spiritual rights of others (Aryati & Suradi, 2022), (Mahmud et al., 2023). This habituation strategy demonstrates the school's success in fostering a non-discriminatory religious environment, while also promoting universal values such as respect, orderliness, and interfaith spirituality. In addition to habituation, the role-modeling strategy implemented through the TURBA (Turun ke Bawah) activity introduces a social and empathetic dimension to religious value internalization.

Teachers and students together visit students' homes—especially those from underprivileged families or those who are ill—and provide assistance through voluntary donations. This activity makes no distinction based on religious background, and instead fosters empathy, solidarity, and genuine compassion. Such efforts serve not only as educational strategies but also as real-life reflections of religious values in social practice. This indicates that religious values are not limited to ritual worship but are also reflected in social care, as part of holistic religious implementation (Youvan, 2024).

The use of rewards as an internalization strategy has also proven effective in reinforcing positive values among students. Simple recognitions such as praise, public acknowledgment during flag ceremonies, or even a collective round of applause can build students' confidence and moral awareness. This strategy also provides psychological motivation that encourages students to repeat their good behavior. The implementation of rewards helps create a positive learning atmosphere and motivates students to align their actions with the religious values instilled. In the multi-faith school context, rewards are not confined to formal religious practices but are oriented toward universal values such as honesty, responsibility, and compassion (Nahar et al., 2022).

Christian students at SDN Krucil I also receive religious character formation through approaches relevant to their own faith traditions. Daily habits such as morning and closing prayers, as well as the recitation and memorization

of Bible verses, provide consistent and meaningful spiritual experiences. This strategy not only enhances personal spiritual awareness but also reinforces the understanding that every activity is an act of devotion to God. These practices cultivate humility, gratitude, and social piety. Participation in communal worship strengthens the students' sense of belonging within their faith community and fosters collective spiritual discipline.

Beyond personal spirituality, the internalization of Christian values is also expressed through emulating the character of Jesus Christ in everyday life. Students are guided to embody values such as love, patience, forgiveness, and kindness toward everyone. Social service activities—such as sharing food, fundraising for sick classmates, or helping with school cleaning—serve as practical applications of the teachings of love. This strategy ensures that the internalization of Christian values is not only individual but also social, and it aligns well with the school's emphasis on diversity and tolerance (Çobanoğlu, R., & Kumlu, 2020).

Analytically, all strategies identified in the field support Ahmad Tafsir's theory of religious value internalization, which highlights the importance of habituation, role modeling, motivation, discipline through punishment, and the cultivation of a religious environment.

The school does not merely convey religious doctrines but also builds a setting that nurtures the development of religious values through social interaction and contextual learning. With this approach, the internalization of religious values does not become exclusive to one faith, but is developed into universal moral values accessible to all students. This proves that multi-faith schools can function as strong and harmonious laboratories for religious character education amidst religious plurality.

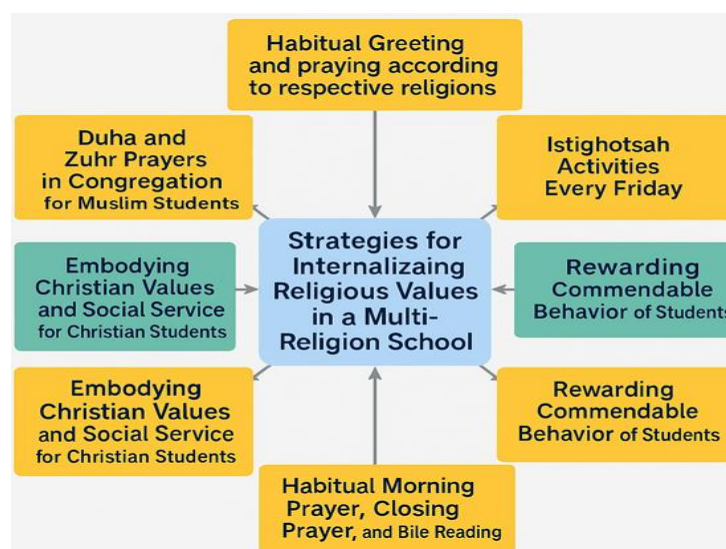


Figure 1. Strategies for the Internalization of Religious Values

Implications of the Internalization of Religious Values in Enhancing Students' Religious Character in Multi-Faith Schools

Research indicates that the internalization of religious values at SDN Krucil I has a significant impact on enhancing students' religious character, including increased faith and piety, noble morals, spiritual intelligence, a sense of responsibility, and steadfastness. This internalization process is carried out through structured and consistent religious activities such as congregational prayers, *istighotsah* (communal supplication), memorization of Juz 'Amma, and collective prayers. These activities are not merely formal rituals but serve as effective media to shape a religious attitude integrated into students' daily behavior (Yusmaliana et al., 2023), (Munif, 2023).

One of the most tangible implications of this religious value internalization is the improvement in students' discipline in performing worship. Student attendance and participation in religious school activities have increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. This indicates that worship has transformed from a normative obligation into a spiritual need inherent in their personality. This obedience is also reflected in better self-control, where students demonstrate patience, emotional restraint, and greater reflection in responding to pressures and conflicts—signs of profound appreciation of faith values in their social lives.

Furthermore, the internalization of religious values leads to the enhancement of positive social attitudes. Students become more polite, honest, and respectful toward teachers and parents, with behaviors arising from deep awareness and understanding of religious values. Empathy and social responsibility begin to grow, resulting in a significant decline in bullying cases and the emergence of a culture of mutual respect among students. This shows the success of religious education not only cognitively but also in forming attitudes and concrete actions aligned with moral and social values (Amilda et al., 2023).

The success of internalization is also seen in the increased consistency or steadfastness of students in worship, especially at the elementary school age where cognitive and emotional development is still ongoing. This steadfastness indicates that religious values have been deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of students, becoming part of their daily routine carried out with awareness and sincerity without coercion (Gadais et al., 2022). Integrated spiritual activities in daily life—from morning prayers to worship at home demonstrate that religious education successfully bridges theory and practice holistically.

Moreover, the reward and punishment strategies applied in the internalization process positively influence students' intrinsic motivation to behave well and responsibly. Rewards given for discipline and active

participation in religious activities strengthen students' emotional attachment to spiritual values. Meanwhile, educational reprimands and guidance help correct deviant behaviors humanely and reflectively, rather than merely serving as deterrents. This approach successfully builds moral awareness that grows from understanding and inner values.

Positive implications are also observed among Christian students through increased diligence in worship and practicing values of love, forgiveness, and respect for others. They exhibit honesty, patience, and friendliness consistent with their religious teachings, along with a commitment to personal and social responsibility. This confirms that religious value internalization at SDN Krucil I operates inclusively and effectively, forming strong religious character across faiths. Institutionally, religious activities such as *istighotsah* and congregational prayers become integral parts of a character education ecosystem that not only shapes personal piety but also fosters a healthy and conducive learning atmosphere (Susanti et al., 2024). Strengthening consistent and directed spiritual activities requires synergy among teachers, parents, and the community to ensure religious education can produce a generation with noble character, responsibility, and resilience in facing contemporary challenges holistically.

The habituation strategy implemented at SDN Krucil I shows success in effectively internalizing religious values in students' affective and behavioral domains. Routines such as greeting with peace (*salām*), praying according to faith before lessons, and consistently performing *Dhuha* and *Dhuhr* prayers in congregation not only become daily activities but also powerful mediums in building religious character. The inclusive approach that allows non-Muslim students to pray according to their beliefs underscores the school's commitment to creating an environment that respects diversity while instilling universal values like respect and orderliness. Thus, the internalization of religious values is nondiscriminatory and touches all student groups.

Furthermore, the role-modeling strategy manifested through the *TURBA* (home visit) activity enriches the social and empathetic dimension of internalization. Visiting and providing social assistance to students in need teaches values of love, solidarity, and genuine care, blurring religious boundaries in everyday actions. This reinforces that religious education is not merely formal ritual but the implementation of spiritual values applied in social life. This approach aligns with character education theory, which views moral values not only as knowledge but also as sustainable social practice.

The application of rewards in religious value internalization also has a significant positive effect on shaping students' intrinsic motivation. Simple recognitions such as praise or public appreciation boost self-confidence and strengthen moral awareness and the drive to repeat positive behavior. In a multi-

religious school context, rewards focusing on universal values—honesty, responsibility, care—allow religious value internalization to be inclusive and harmonious, bridging faith differences into a shared spirit of good conduct.

Character building approaches for Christian students through morning prayers, Bible verse memorization, and reinforcing values of love demonstrate relevant and meaningful spiritualization strategies. These activities not only deepen personal faith but also instill awareness that every activity is an act of devotion to God. The embodiment of Jesus Christ's example in daily life and social service further strengthens the socio-religious dimension of Christian students and supports the creation of an atmosphere of tolerance and inclusivity in the school environment (Naseh et al., 2022), (Wahid, A., et al, 2022).

Theoretically, the identified strategies align with Ahmad Tafsir's concept of religious value internalization, which emphasizes habituation, role modeling, motivation, punishment, and the cultivation of a religious environment as key pillars. SDN Krucil I not only transfers religious doctrines but successfully builds a social and emotional ecosystem supporting comprehensive growth of religious values. This contextual approach allows religious values to be formulated into universal moral values that are relevant and accepted by all students, without creating sectarian divides.

The real implications of this internalization are reflected in the enhanced religious character of students stronger faith and piety, disciplined worship, noble morals, spiritual intelligence, and increased responsibility. The growing obedience is not mere formality but a reflection of deep internalization that positively affects students' social lives. Patience, empathy, and emotional regulation are tangible proofs that religious education can shape individuals who are whole both spiritually and socially (Zulfa et al., 2024). Furthermore, the implementation of reward and punishment strategies strengthens moral awareness and social responsibility among students. Rewards reinforce positive motivation, while guidance and reprimands are conducted with a humane and religious approach fostering introspection and self-control. This confirms that the right pedagogical approach can make the internalization of religious values not just an obligation but a heartfelt need and commitment in students' positive and harmonious behavior.

Institutionally, activities such as istighotsah and congregational prayers fortify a religious ecosystem that supports not only personal piety but also a conducive and harmonious learning atmosphere. Synergistic collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community is a crucial factor in sustaining inclusive and adaptive religious value internalization amidst pluralistic beliefs. Thus, SDN Krucil I successfully exemplifies a multi-faith school capable of producing generations with strong religious character, tolerance, and integrity in

the face of contemporary social challenges (Miftahuddin et al., 2024), (Mahmud et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The findings at SDN Krucil I show that internalizing religious values through habituation, such as greeting others with peace, praying before lessons, and performing congregational prayers, is an effective approach to building students' religious character. This inclusive strategy allows non-Muslim students to practice their beliefs, creating a respectful environment that emphasizes universal values like respect and discipline. Role modeling through activities like TURBA (home visits) further strengthens the internalization process by teaching empathy, love, and social awareness, demonstrating that religious values are not only rituals but practical applications in social life.

Additionally, reward and punishment strategies have proven effective in motivating students to behave responsibly. Recognizing discipline and participation helps build emotional attachment to spiritual values, while educational guidance promotes moral awareness. Christian students also benefit from this inclusive approach through tailored religious practices, such as prayer and Bible verse memorization, fostering tolerance and unity. The school's religious ecosystem, supported by activities like istighotsah and congregational prayers, creates a harmonious learning environment. Through collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community, SDN Krucil I has successfully nurtured students with strong religious character, tolerance, and social responsibility in a pluralistic society.

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