



Enhancing Students' Religious Character through Strategic Planning of Extracurricular Activities

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the role of systematic planning in religious extracurricular activities at Islamic secondary schools in Indonesia, aiming to strengthen students' religious character. In response to the challenges posed by globalization and secular cultural penetration, Islamic education must develop not only intellectual abilities but also strong moral and spiritual foundations. The study employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on one school with a robust religious extracurricular program. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that structured planning, which includes needs analysis, program design, resource allocation, and evaluation, significantly improves student participation in religious activities, such as prayers, Qur'an study, and social-religious activities, leading to better discipline, manners, and social awareness. The research highlights the importance of involving students in the planning process, enhancing their sense of ownership and leadership. The study contributes to Islamic education management by offering a conceptual model for effective religious program planning, with implications for improving character education practices in schools. Future research should explore the applicability of the proposed model across various educational settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays a central role in shaping the religious character of the younger generation, a fundamental aspect of society's social and spiritual life (Maidugu et al., 2024). Facing the challenges of globalization and the penetration of secular culture, Islamic education is crucial for producing individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess noble morals and a strong faith (Syahril, 2025). This context makes Islamic education, particularly in shaping students' religious character, highly relevant. Although many Islamic schools have implemented religious education programs, these efforts have not been

fully successful in addressing moral degradation among adolescents. Therefore, this research is crucial to identify key elements in religious character formation through extracurricular activities as a strategy to address this social challenge (Naufal, 2024; Fahrurrozi, 2025).

The phenomenon of moral decline and indiscipline among adolescents demonstrates a gap between the ideal goals of Islamic education and the reality on the ground. Indiscipline in worship, low honesty, and a lack of respect for parents and teachers are becoming increasingly pressing problems amidst the tide of modernity, negatively impacting the morals of the younger generation. This situation demonstrates a discrepancy between Islamic educational theory, which prioritizes religious character formation, and the practices occurring in Islamic schools. This suggests that the learning methods implemented are insufficiently effective in shaping students' religious character (Mukti, 2022; Naufal, 2024).

The inadequacy of classroom religious education as the sole approach to developing religious character further demonstrates the importance of extracurricular activities in student character development. Extracurricular religious activities, such as congregational prayer, Quranic study, and mosque-based community service, have shown significant results in shaping students' religious habits. However, these activities are often poorly planned and systematically integrated with broader character education goals. In many cases, these activities are sporadic and lack careful planning, thus failing to achieve their full potential in shaping students' religious character (Jakandar, 2025; Karlina, 2024).

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of extracurricular activities in supporting the development of students' religious character. Most research focuses on the outcomes of extracurricular activities, such as increased frequency of religious worship or changes in students' religious attitudes (Lahmi, 2025; Nabillah, 2024). However, attention to how these activities are systematically designed and planned remains very limited. Many studies only examine the effectiveness of existing activities without examining the underlying planning process. Yet, thorough planning is key to creating effective and sustainable extracurricular programs that shape students' religious character (Mukti, 2022; Kholidin et al., 2025).

Several studies on Islamic education management have begun to emphasize the importance of a managerial approach in planning religious extracurricular programs. Wahrudin (2025) demonstrates the importance of systematic planning stages in shaping the character of students (santri), while Fahrurrozi (2025) describes how character education based on Islamic values is integrated in madrasas. However, these studies focus more on program

implementation and integration and do not detail how the planning process for religious extracurricular activities is carried out. This gap indicates the need for more in-depth research on the planning of religious extracurricular activities in the context of Islamic education. More systematic research is needed to link planning to the religious character outcomes achieved by students (Jakandar, 2025; Fahrurrozi, 2025).

This study focuses on the process of planning religious extracurricular activities, an element often overlooked in previous Islamic education literature. By emphasizing planning as a key variable, this study offers a new, more in-depth approach to how planning can influence the outcomes of students' religious character development. This study also highlights the direct relationship between good planning practices and strengthening students' religious character, laying the groundwork for developing a more integrative and contextual planning model in Islamic education (Mukti, 2022; Jakandar, 2025).

This study aims to identify and analyze in-depth the planning process for religious extracurricular activities in Islamic secondary schools. The systematic planning process, from needs analysis and goal formulation to program evaluation, is the primary focus of this study. By answering the question of how this planning can influence the strengthening of students' religious character, this study makes an important contribution to the development of more effective educational policies. Practically, this research is expected to provide insights for principals and educators in designing more targeted extracurricular activities that impact the development of students' religious character (Naufal, 2024; Fahrurrozi, 2025).

Overall, this study provides new insights into the importance of planning religious extracurricular activities as an integral part of Islamic education management. By delving deeper into this planning process, this study contributes to the development of more effective character education models in Islamic schools. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers in designing character-strengthening strategies based on Islamic values at the national level (Lahmi, 2025; Fahrurrozi, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a single instrumental case study approach to understand the process of planning religious extracurricular activities to strengthen students' religious character at an Islamic high school in Indonesia. The case study design was chosen because it focuses on a single school as the unit of analysis, allowing the researcher to explore the complexity of the factors involved in the planning process in a real-world context. This case study provides deeper insight into the dynamics, actors,

and decisions that shape religious extracurricular planning at the Islamic high school level. This study does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to describe in detail how planning is carried out and how this process relates to the formation of students' religious character (Mukti, 2022; Jakandar, 2025).

This research was conducted at an Islamic high school in Indonesia that consistently hosts religious extracurricular activities such as congregational prayer, Quran memorization, Islamic studies, and mosque-based socio-religious programs. The research location was chosen because this school has a strong religious tradition and has developed a well-documented pattern of religious extracurricular planning. The selection of this school allowed researchers to deeply analyze how the planning of religious extracurricular activities is carried out in the context of real Islamic education. Furthermore, this school has a diverse range of stakeholders involved in the planning process, providing a comprehensive picture of the managerial dynamics in shaping students' religious character (Lahmi, 2025; Nabillah, 2024).

Data were collected through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants involved in the planning and implementation of religious extracurricular activities, including the principal, vice-principal, teacher in charge of religious programs, student administrators, and actively participating parents. Interviews were guided by an interview guide that focused on four key aspects of planning: needs analysis, program design, resource management, and evaluation. Non-participant observation was conducted during planning meetings and during the implementation of several extracurricular programs, such as Quran memorization and Islamic studies. In these observations, researchers observed the planning dynamics, role allocation, and interactions among stakeholders. In addition, document analysis was conducted on various documents related to extracurricular activities, such as annual work plans, program proposals, school policies, and evaluation reports (Jakandar, 2025; Fahrurrozi, 2025).

Data collected through interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive analysis model, which includes three main steps: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data condensation involved eliminating irrelevant information, while data presentation involved organizing relevant data into an easily understood format. The researchers coded the data inductively, highlighting relevant sections related to planning, decision-making, references to Islamic values, impacts on student character, and challenges in planning. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and themes, such as "Quran-based needs analysis," "balance of ritual, cognitive, and social

programs," and "tension between ideals and resource constraints." Grouped and organized data in a matrix format allowed researchers to compare views across participant groups and identify emerging patterns (Mukti, 2022; Kholidin et al., 2025).

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study employed several checking techniques: data source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Data source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, and parents. Method triangulation was conducted by combining three data collection techniques interviews, observation, and document analysis to validate the findings. Member checking involved confirming preliminary findings with several participants to ensure that the research results accurately reflected their views and experiences. Furthermore, discussions of the coding scheme with colleagues with expertise in Islamic education management were conducted to enhance the validity of the research results (Injotel, 2024; Naufal, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Overview of Student Planning and Participation

The planning of extracurricular religious activities at the case school underwent a significant transformation, moving from an ad hoc approach to a more systematic and documented approach. This planning process involved a special meeting held at the beginning of the semester to design activities, including objectives, schedules, responsibilities, and indicators of success. This more structured activity management was crucial to ensuring that the program aligned with the school's vision of developing students' religious character. These activities included congregational prayer, Quranic study groups, and socio-religious activities, which were integral to the development of students' spiritual and social values.

Table: 1 Changes in student religious participation indicators in one academic year

Indicators	Before structured planning (%)	After structured planning (%)
Regular congregational prayer at school	38	81
Active participation in Quranic study groups	27	64
	15	49

The data obtained demonstrates a clear pattern that structured planning is directly linked to increased student participation in religious activities. Prior to the implementation of more systematic planning, student participation in religious activities was relatively low, with only 38% participating in congregational prayer and 27% in Quranic study groups. However, after the new planning model was implemented, student participation increased sharply, reaching 81% and 64%, respectively. Similarly, socio-religious activities saw a surge in participation, from 15% to 49%. This demonstrates that a clear schedule, measurable targets, and intensive teacher support have a significant impact on fostering student commitment to religious activities at school.

Stages of Planning Religious Extracurricular Activities

In this study, the planning stages for religious extracurricular activities at the case school were divided into three main stages: (1) needs analysis, (2) program design, and (3) evaluation and adjustment. These stages are structured steps in educational management aimed at ensuring that extracurricular activities are not only implemented but also directed towards optimally developing students' religious character. This process begins with identifying students' religious needs, followed by designing relevant activities, and culminating in periodic evaluations to align the program with the desired outcome, namely strengthening students' religious character.

Interviews with the school principal revealed that the needs analysis stage was conducted with great care. The principal explained, "We began planning by mapping students' needs, which we obtained from questionnaires, teacher observations, and discussions with parents. Our findings indicated that there were deficiencies in the habit of congregational prayer and active participation in memorizing the Quran, so these became our priorities." This statement confirms that the planning process began with an effort to identify existing problems, which served as the basis for designing a more targeted program.

A religious extracurricular coordinator teacher provided further perspective on the program design process. The teacher stated, "In planning meetings, we involve student administrators to get direct input. Students know when they have free time, so we can plan realistic activities that fit their workload." According to her, involving students in planning not only provides valuable input but also fosters a sense of responsibility and ownership for the activities they undertake. This demonstrates that planning involving various parties makes the program more relevant and acceptable to students.

Researchers observed that the planning process went well, especially in implementing the designed program. During observations of Quran memorization and congregational prayer activities, researchers noted that

students appeared more enthusiastic and disciplined in participating in clearly scheduled activities. Socio-religious activities such as community service also showed increased student participation. This demonstrates that systematic planning, which begins with a needs analysis and is followed by a realistic design, can encourage active student participation in religious activities.

Based on interviews and observations, researchers concluded that implementing clear and structured planning stages had a positive impact on student participation and engagement in religious extracurricular activities. A thorough needs analysis allows schools to understand the key issues facing students, such as indiscipline in congregational prayer and lack of motivation to memorize the Quran. By designing programs tailored to these needs, schools can significantly increase student participation. This demonstrates that the planning stage is not merely administrative, but also a strategic process that influences the strengthening of students' religious character.

Summary of Interview Themes

To deepen our understanding of how key actors interpret planning and its impact on religious character, researchers compiled a summary of themes from interviews with principals, teachers, students, and parents. This summary helps to concisely display the patterns of perspectives across actors.

Table: 2 Summary of main themes from the interview results

Informant Group	Key Planning Focuses	Perceptions of the Impact on Religious Character	Key Challenges
Principal	Aligning the school's vision and mission with extracurricular religious programs; the importance of a written planning document	Seeing improvements in religious discipline, manners, and social awareness as indicators of successful school management	Teacher time constraints, administrative demands, and consistency of implementation
Coordinating Teacher	Determining program priorities, schedules, and responsibilities; the need for clear guidance	Experiencing changes in student attitudes in class, especially in terms of discipline and respect for teachers	Work fatigue, teaching load, and varying student motivation
Student Administrators	Involvement in developing schedules and activity formats; organizing peer groups	Feeling more confident, responsible, and having a role in da'wah (Islamic outreach) in the school environment	Dealing with less enthusiastic peers, scheduling conflicts, and limited facilities
Parents	Supporting activities that	Observing changes in	Differences

strengthen religious and moral habits at home	children's prayer habits, manners, and concern for others	between home and school environments; consistency of home support
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Table 2 shows that all informant groups generally viewed planning extracurricular religious activities as important, although they highlighted different aspects. Principals interpreted it within the framework of institutional quality management, teachers viewed it as a means of managing workload and the educational process, students experienced it as a space for self-development and leadership, and parents perceived its impact on changing their children's behavior at home.

Interviews with the school principal, vice principal, and coordinators highlight the essential role of religious extracurricular planning in the overall quality management of Islamic education. The principal emphasized the importance of aligning the school's vision and mission with concrete programs, particularly focusing on enhancing worship, ethics, and social responsibility through well-documented planning. The coordinators acknowledged the balance between ideal objectives and practical limitations, such as teaching schedules and administrative workloads. Students involved in the planning process reported feeling a strong sense of ownership, which reinforced their leadership, responsibility, and teamwork skills, key components of religious character development. Parents also observed noticeable improvements in their children's religious behaviors, such as increased prayer discipline, better manners, and heightened social awareness, demonstrating the influence of the school's activities on their home environment.

The findings reveal a strong link between the quality of extracurricular planning and the strengthening of students' religious character. Well-designed programs with clear goals, consistent schedules, defined roles, and measurable success indicators facilitate the development of stable religious behaviors, such as regular prayers and deeper engagement with the Qur'an. Structured Qur'an study programs and community service activities, such as charity events and visits to orphanages, foster social empathy and reinforce the internalization of Islamic values. From the perspective of Islamic education management, planning is not merely an administrative task but a pedagogical tool that shapes the school's cultural and spiritual environment. The study aligns with other research emphasizing that successful character education depends on the consistency between policies, planning, and daily educational practices.

This research makes several significant contributions to the field of Islamic education management. First, it highlights the crucial role of planning in shaping students' religious character through extracurricular activities, filling a gap in previous studies that mainly focused on the outcomes of religious activities rather than the planning process. Second, the study emphasizes the importance of student involvement in the planning process, which not only improves program effectiveness but also serves as a character-building experience, particularly in terms of responsibility, leadership, and collaboration. Lastly, by developing a conceptual model linking planning, implementation, and religious character outcomes, this research provides a theoretical foundation for further studies and practical application in other Islamic schools. This model underscores the need for planning to be seen as an integral part of the educational process, bridging the managerial and pedagogical dimensions of contemporary Islamic education.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer important insights into the role of extracurricular planning in strengthening students' religious character, aligning with some key concepts in the existing literature while also presenting new contributions. One of the central findings of this research is that structured planning significantly improves student participation in religious activities, particularly in regular prayers, Qur'an study groups, and social-religious events. This aligns with previous studies (Lahmi, 2025; Nabillah, 2024) that emphasize the importance of structured religious activities in fostering spiritual development among students. However, the novelty of this study lies in the detailed exploration of the planning process itself. While many studies have examined the outcomes of religious extracurricular activities, such as increased participation or improved attitudes toward religion, few have focused on how the planning stage itself influences these outcomes. By analyzing the planning process, this study bridges an important gap in the literature, demonstrating that effective planning is not just about organizing activities but also about shaping students' religious identities and values (Irfan et al., 2024).

The research also highlights the importance of involving students in the planning process. This finding corresponds with literature on student-centered learning and participatory decision-making, which suggests that student involvement leads to greater ownership and responsibility (Wahrudin, 2025). The study confirms that students who participate in the planning process feel a stronger sense of responsibility and leadership, which positively impacts their engagement in religious activities. In contrast to studies that primarily focus on

teacher-driven planning, this research underscores the value of student agency in fostering a more inclusive and engaging religious education environment. This participatory approach aligns with the concept of "tarbiyah," which emphasizes the holistic development of students, integrating both academic and spiritual growth (Injotel, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the field of Islamic education management by introducing a conceptual model that links the stages of planning, implementation, and religious character outcomes. This model emphasizes that the planning process is not merely an administrative task but a pedagogical tool that shapes the cultural and spiritual environment of the school (Hussein, 2025). By positioning planning as an integral part of the educational process, the research adds to existing theories on the importance of aligning educational policies with practical implementation (Mukti, 2022). The model proposed in this study provides a theoretical framework that other Islamic schools can adopt to create more effective and value-driven extracurricular programs, contributing to the broader understanding of management in Islamic education.

Practically, the findings have important implications for educational leaders and teachers. The research suggests that by developing a clear, structured, and student-inclusive planning process, schools can significantly improve student engagement in religious activities and strengthen their religious character. School administrators and coordinators should prioritize setting clear goals, developing realistic schedules, and involving students in the decision-making process to create programs that resonate with their interests and needs. This can help overcome some of the challenges identified in the study, such as time constraints and varying student motivation. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of regular evaluation to ensure that programs remain relevant and effective in promoting religious character development, suggesting that ongoing adjustments should be made based on feedback and observed outcomes.

In conclusion, this research underscores the central role of structured planning in the success of religious extracurricular programs and their contribution to religious character formation. It aligns with the existing literature on the impact of religious activities but adds a significant layer by focusing on the planning process itself, showing that it is not only the activities but the way they are planned that influences student engagement and character development. The theoretical and practical implications of this study suggest that schools should approach religious extracurricular planning as an ongoing, participatory, and reflective process, one that is aligned with both educational

goals and the broader spiritual and ethical development of students.

CONCLUSION

The key finding of this study is that systematic planning of religious extracurricular activities plays a crucial role in strengthening students' religious character in Islamic secondary schools. The research highlights that when planning is done through a structured process, including needs analysis, program design, resource allocation, and clear evaluation, religious extracurricular activities become more focused, consistent, and aligned with the school's vision for character development. This study also emphasizes the significant impact of well-organized planning on students' religious attitudes and behaviors, with improvements in participation in prayers, Qur'an study, and social-religious activities, alongside better discipline, manners, and social awareness. This confirms previous studies while adding a new dimension by showing that the quality of planning is a key determinant of these positive outcomes.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to Islamic education management, particularly in linking the planning process with the enhancement of students' religious character. It provides a conceptual model that schools can use to structure and manage religious extracurricular programs in a more value-oriented and targeted manner. However, the study has limitations, including its focus on a single school case, which may not represent all contexts. Future research could expand on this study by exploring different Islamic schools and madrasahs, using a multi-site or mixed-methods approach to assess the applicability of the proposed planning model across diverse settings. Additionally, future studies could focus on integrating Islamic values more explicitly into planning instruments, such as through extracurricular activity indicators based on maqasid sharia, to further advance the value-oriented planning paradigm in Islamic education.

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