

Implementing School Culture to Foster Character Education in Early Childhood Settings

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the implementation of school culture in fostering character education at Kelompok Bermain 'Aisyiyah in Kisaran, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and children. Data were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings revealed that school culture was implemented through routine habituation, spontaneous activities, programmed activities, and teacher role modeling integrated into children's daily learning experiences. These practices contributed to the development of character values, including religiosity, discipline, independence, responsibility, social care, politeness, communication skills, and patriotism, with religious and disciplinary values emerging as the most dominant. The implementation was supported by school leadership, teacher collaboration, parental involvement, a conducive learning environment, and character-based school procedures, while inconsistent implementation and limited reinforcement at home remained challenges. The study concludes that school culture serves as an effective medium for internalizing character values and promoting positive behavior among young children through continuous habituation, social interaction, and role modeling. This study contributes empirical evidence on the role of school culture in strengthening character education practices in early childhood settings

Keywords

Character Education; Early Childhood Education; Habituation; School Culture

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education in early childhood is a fundamental aspect of human development because this period represents a critical stage for shaping moral values, social behavior, and personality. Children aged 0–6 years experience rapid cognitive, emotional, and social growth, making early interventions essential for developing positive habits and attitudes (Tahlia et al., 2024). However, the advancement of digital technology, changing family interaction patterns, and increasing exposure to external influences have created new challenges for character formation among young children (Fitrianingtyas & Jumiatmoko, 2023). The Ministry of Education has therefore emphasized the strengthening of character education as an integral component of early childhood learning through the development of religious values, discipline, responsibility, independence, and social awareness (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). In this context, the implementation of school culture is necessary as a strategic approach because character values are more effectively internalized through continuous habituation,



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daily practices, and meaningful social interactions than through direct instruction alone.

School culture plays an important role in determining the extent to which character values can be internalized by children in educational settings. A positive school culture creates an environment in which learners repeatedly experience desirable behaviors through collective prayers, greeting practices, orderly routines, cooperative activities, and teacher role modelling (Anisah, 2023; Saryanto et al., 2023). Preliminary observations conducted at Kelompok Bermain 'Aisyiyah Kisaran indicated that character education has been integrated into daily activities such as praying together, maintaining classroom cleanliness, waiting in line, helping peers, and organizing learning materials after use. These practices provide opportunities for children to experience moral values in authentic situations and gradually transform positive behaviors into daily habits. Consequently, school culture serves not only as an organizational framework but also as a practical mechanism for fostering the internalization of character values among early childhood learners.

Despite these positive efforts, several challenges remain in implementing school culture as a strategy for character education. The application of character-based routines is not always carried out consistently throughout all learning activities, and reinforcement of character values at home varies considerably among families (Cahyanto, 2023; Handoko & Sakti, 2023). In some situations, teachers tend to focus more on academic achievement than on integrating character values into every aspect of classroom practice, limiting opportunities for continuous character reinforcement (Arifin et al., 2024; Munir et al., 2023). These conditions indicate that successful character education requires collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and parents to ensure consistency between school and home environments. Therefore, investigating how school culture is implemented, the character values it promotes, and the factors that support or hinder its effectiveness is essential for developing more sustainable and contextually relevant character education practices in early childhood institutions.

Several recent studies have examined the relationship between school culture and character education in early childhood settings. Rahayu et al. (2022) found that effective school culture management contributes significantly to the development of students' discipline, responsibility, and social values through structured habituation activities. Putra & Sari (2024) reported that positive school culture strengthens character education by integrating moral values into daily routines and collaborative learning experiences. Kurniati & Kudus (2021) emphasized that consistency between school programs and parental support is essential for sustaining children's character development. Mahendra & Hartati (2024) revealed that the integration of religious values in early childhood institutions remains constrained by inconsistent implementation and limited practical reinforcement. Meanwhile, Nasution & Putri (2023) demonstrated that organizational culture in Islamic-based early childhood institutions positively influences children's moral and social behavior through teacher role modeling and institutional practices. Despite these findings, previous studies have primarily focused on curriculum implementation, leadership, or general character education programs, while empirical investigations examining school culture as a comprehensive mechanism encompassing habituation, teacher exemplification, spontaneous activities, and character-based routines in Islamic early childhood institutions remain limited. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by exploring how school culture is implemented as an integrated strategy for fostering character education at Kelompok Bermain 'Aisyiyah Kisaran and identifying the factors that support and hinder its effectiveness.

In Indonesia, character education is strongly promoted through national educational policies that emphasize the holistic development of children. The Graduate Competency Standards for Early Childhood Education outlined in Permendikdasmen No. 10 of 2025 highlight the importance of developing faith, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, independence, health, and communication skills among learners (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). These competencies are expected to be developed not only through academic instruction but also through educational environments that facilitate moral, social, and spiritual growth (Suyadi, 2021). According to Sugioyono (2022), educational processes should consider the social and cultural contexts that influence children's development, while

character education in early childhood is most effectively strengthened through habituation and exemplary practices embedded in school culture (Khadijah, 2021). Therefore, a positive and well-established school culture plays an essential role in supporting children's holistic development and reinforcing character education programs.

Aisyiyah Playgroup Kisaran–Asahan is an Islamic-based early childhood education institution that promotes character development through religious values, discipline, habituation, and exemplary behavior. The institution integrates Islamic principles into daily activities to cultivate honesty, responsibility, empathy, and social awareness among children (Nuraini, 2022). However, preliminary observations conducted on November 3, 2025, revealed that the implementation of school culture had not been fully optimized. Although the institution has established standard operating procedures to support character-based educational activities, inconsistencies in their implementation were still identified, potentially reducing the effectiveness of character development among children.

Despite the growing body of literature on character education in early childhood institutions, most previous studies have focused on curriculum implementation, learning methods, and teachers' roles in character development (Santosa & Amalia, 2022). Research specifically examining school culture as a primary mechanism for character formation remains limited, particularly in community-based Islamic early childhood institutions (Dewi, 2023). Moreover, many studies emphasize conceptual discussions of character education without providing sufficient empirical evidence regarding how school culture is implemented in everyday educational practices (Mahendra & Hartati, 2024; Sanjani, 2024). This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the practical role of school culture in shaping children's character within specific sociocultural contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of school culture as a medium for character education within a faith-based early childhood institution. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on curricular aspects or formal educational settings (Yuliani & Saputra, 2022), this research explores how Islamic values embedded within school culture are translated into children's daily behaviors through habituation, social interaction, and institutional practices. Furthermore, this study views school culture as a dynamic organizational system that influences children's moral, spiritual, and social development (Nasution & Putri, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of school culture in fostering character education at Aisyiyah Playgroup in Kisaran, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra, and to identify the factors that support and hinder its implementation. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of knowledge on school culture and character education by providing empirical evidence from an Islamic-based early childhood education context. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for school leaders, teachers, and parents in strengthening character education through sustainable habituation, role modeling, and collaborative school culture practices.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the implementation of school culture in character education at Kelompok Bermain 'Aisyiyah Kisaran, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. The research data consisted of information related to the implementation of school culture, character-building activities, character values developed, and the factors supporting and hindering their implementation. The data sources included one principal, three teachers, and twenty children selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in character education activities (Sugioyono, 2022).

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to obtain information regarding school culture programs, character-based activities, teacher role modeling, and challenges encountered during implementation.

Observations focused on children's participation in daily activities, including greeting practices, collective prayers, classroom routines, maintaining cleanliness, helping peers, and other habituation activities that reflected character values. Documentation techniques involved collecting school profiles, character-based Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), learning activity records, photographs, and other supporting documents. Data analysis employed the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2020), which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The credibility of the findings was ensured through source and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Implementation of School Culture through Routine Habituation

Table 1. Routine Habituation Activities as Forms of School Culture Implementation

School Culture Activities	Character Values Developed
Greeting and handshaking practices	Respect and politeness
Praying before and after activities	Religious values
Queuing activities	Discipline and responsibility
Maintaining classroom cleanliness	Environmental awareness and responsibility
Cooperative play and learning activities	Social care and cooperation

Table 1 shows that school culture at Aisiyiah Playgroup Kisaran is implemented through routine habituation integrated into children's daily activities. The habituation practices emphasize religious values, discipline, responsibility, politeness, environmental awareness, and social cooperation, which are continuously reinforced through structured school routines.

The findings revealed that school culture is implemented from the moment children arrive at school until they return home. The principal explained that character education is guided by a character-based school Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that emphasizes religious practices, discipline, and positive social behavior (WKS/01/22042026). Teachers further stated that routine, programmed, and spontaneous activities are designed to internalize character values so that learning activities focus not only on cognitive development but also on children's attitudes and behaviors (WG1/01/21042026). Routine habituation therefore functions as an essential strategy for fostering discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and social awareness among early childhood learners.

Daily activities include greeting teachers, shaking hands before entering classrooms, praying before and after learning activities, queuing orderly, maintaining classroom cleanliness, and demonstrating polite behavior toward peers and teachers. These practices are repeated consistently every day, enabling children to perform positive behaviors without requiring continuous instructions from teachers. As a result, positive values gradually become part of children's everyday habits within the school environment.

Classroom observations confirmed that teachers consistently guided children in applying positive habits throughout learning activities. During welcoming sessions, teachers encouraged children to greet others and shake hands before entering the classroom. Children participated in collective prayers, sat orderly during lessons, and collaborated with peers during play-based learning activities. Most children were able to follow these routines independently, indicating that character values had begun to be internalized through continuous practice.



Figure 1. Implementation of Character-Based Welcoming Activities at Aisiyyah Playgroup Kisaran

Documentation of school activities further demonstrated the consistent application of character-based procedures during welcoming sessions and classroom routines. The available records showed that routine habituation had become an integral component of school culture and was systematically implemented as part of children's daily educational experiences.

Overall, routine habituation constitutes a central form of school culture implementation in fostering character education at Aisiyyah Playgroup Kisaran. Through continuous and integrated daily practices, children are provided with opportunities to internalize religious, social, and moral values and apply them consistently in their interactions with teachers and peers.

Implementation of School Culture through Routine Habituation

Table 2. Religious and Disciplinary Values Developed through School Culture

School Culture Activities	Character Values Developed
Praying before and after activities	Religious values
Iqra' recitation activities	Spiritual development
Dhuha prayer practices	Religious discipline
Greeting and handshaking routines	Respect and politeness
Following classroom rules	Self-discipline and responsibility

Table 2 demonstrates that religious and disciplinary values constitute the dominant character values cultivated through school culture at Aisiyyah Playgroup Kisaran. These values are integrated into children's daily activities through structured habituation and teacher guidance.

The findings revealed that religious values, discipline, independence, responsibility, social care, politeness, and communication skills are emphasized as essential components of character education within the school environment (WKS/02/22042026). Teachers explained that these values are adjusted to children's developmental stages and implemented through continuous habituation and teacher role modeling during play-based learning activities (WG1/02/21042026). Another teacher emphasized that discipline and religious values are strengthened through consistent examples demonstrated by educators during classroom activities (WG2/03/21042026). These findings indicate that religious and disciplinary values are embedded within everyday educational experiences rather than being delivered as separate instructional content.

Daily practices include praying before and after learning activities, participating in iqra' recitation, performing Dhuha prayers, memorizing short Qur'anic chapters, greeting teachers and peers, and complying with classroom rules. Through repeated participation in these activities, children gradually

develop positive habits associated with religious commitment and self-discipline.

Classroom observations confirmed that children routinely greeted teachers upon arrival, participated in collective prayers, performed Dhuha prayers, and maintained orderly behavior during instructional activities. Teachers actively guided children during worship activities and continuously reminded them to follow classroom procedures. Most children were able to engage in these religious and disciplinary practices independently without requiring repeated instructions from teachers, indicating that these values had begun to be internalized through daily routines.



Figure 2. Religious Habituation Activities in Daily Learning

Documentation further demonstrated the implementation of religious activities, including iqra' recitation, Dhuha prayers, and teacher guidance during worship sessions. These activities formed an integral part of school culture and contributed to the development of children's religious awareness and disciplinary behavior.

Overall, religious and disciplinary values emerged as the primary character dimensions cultivated through school culture at Aisyiyah Playgroup Kisaran. Continuous habituation, teacher guidance, and structured daily activities enabled children to internalize positive behaviors and apply them consistently within the school environment.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of School Culture-Based Character Education

Table 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in School Culture-Based Character Education

School Culture Activities	Character Values Developed
Supporting factors	Teacher collaboration, principal leadership, parental support, conducive school environment, adequate facilities, and character-based school programs and SOPs
Inhibiting factors	Inconsistent implementation by teachers, limited parental involvement, unclear application of school rules, and incomplete integration of character values into all learning activities

Table 3 demonstrates that the implementation of school culture-based character education at Aisyiyah Playgroup Kisaran is influenced by both supporting and inhibiting factors. These factors determine the effectiveness and sustainability of character habituation practices within the school environment.

The findings revealed that teacher collaboration, leadership support, parental involvement, adequate facilities, and clear school programs constitute important factors supporting character education implementation. The principal emphasized that cooperation among teachers, parents, and all members of the school community, together with consistent habituation practices and supportive school

programs, contributes significantly to maintaining school culture (WKS/03/22042026). Teachers further explained that supervision from school leaders, adequate infrastructure, and clear Standard Operating Procedures facilitate the integration of character values into children's daily activities (WG1/03/21042026; WG2/04/21042026; WG3/02/21042026). These findings indicate that successful character education requires collective commitment and active participation from all stakeholders.

However, the study also identified several challenges that hinder the implementation of school culture-based character education. Teachers acknowledged that inconsistencies in applying character-based Standard Operating Procedures and limited parental support remain major obstacles (WG1/04/21042026). Other participants noted that variations in teacher commitment and the incomplete integration of character values into all classroom activities reduce the effectiveness of character habituation practices (WG2/05/21042026; WG3/03/21042026). Consequently, some children still experience difficulties in consistently applying positive behaviors both at school and at home.

Observational findings confirmed that teachers generally collaborated in guiding children during routine activities and reinforcing positive behaviors throughout the learning process. The school environment appeared orderly and conducive to character development, supported by educational facilities, worship spaces, and learning media. Nevertheless, observations also revealed that several children continued to require reminders to follow classroom rules and maintain disciplined behavior. In certain learning situations, character reinforcement was not implemented as consistently as expected, indicating the need for stronger coordination between teachers and parents.



Figure 4. Circle Time Activities as Part of Character Education Practices

Documentation further demonstrated the active involvement of teachers and children in daily habituation activities, including collective prayers, group learning, and character-based classroom routines. These activities reflected the school's commitment to fostering children's moral, social, and religious development through an integrated cultural approach. Overall, the implementation of school culture-based character education depends on the interaction between supportive institutional conditions and challenges that require continuous improvement, collaboration, and commitment from schools and families.

Discussion

Implementation of School Culture through Routine Habituation

The findings indicate that the implementation of school culture at Aisiyyah Playgroup Kisaran is carried out through routine habituation integrated into children's daily activities, including collective prayers, greeting practices, queuing, maintaining cleanliness, helping peers, following classroom rules, and organizing learning materials after use. These activities are implemented continuously from children's arrival until dismissal, demonstrating that character education is embedded within everyday learning experiences rather than delivered as a separate instructional component.

The integration of character values into daily practices reflects the principle that young children learn more effectively through concrete experiences and repeated behaviors. This finding is consistent

with the cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget, which explains that children in the preoperational stage understand concepts through symbols, imitation, and direct experiences with their environment. Consequently, routine activities such as praying together, queuing, and maintaining classroom cleanliness provide meaningful opportunities for children to internalize moral values through active participation rather than abstract explanations (Piaget, 1964; Safitri & Nurfuadi, 2025).

The findings also demonstrate the importance of social interaction in shaping children's character development. According to Lev Vygotsky, children's learning and development occur through continuous interactions with more knowledgeable individuals and their surrounding environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, teachers and the school environment function as social agents that guide children in understanding positive behaviors through daily habituation, collaborative activities, and consistent reinforcement. School culture therefore serves as a social context in which character values are practiced, negotiated, and gradually internalized by children (Chen, 2025; Ramedlon et al., 2023).

Furthermore, teacher role modeling emerged as a fundamental element in the implementation of school culture. Teachers demonstrate discipline, politeness, responsibility, and social care through their daily interactions with children, allowing learners to observe and imitate desirable behaviors. This finding supports the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes that children acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling processes (Bandura, 1977). When teachers consistently exhibit positive conduct, children are more likely to adopt similar attitudes and behaviors within their everyday activities.

The present findings are consistent with the study of Harahap (2021), which reported that character values in early childhood are more effectively developed through habituation and direct experiences than through verbal instruction alone. Likewise, Amelia & Ramadan (2021) found that positive school culture and the active involvement of all school members contribute significantly to the development of children's character. Raudhah et al. (2021) further emphasized that teacher consistency and exemplary behavior are essential for strengthening character internalization among young learners.

Overall, this study highlights that school culture functions not merely as a set of institutional rules but as a dynamic social environment that supports character formation through habituation, interaction, and role modeling. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the relevance of Piaget's cognitive theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, and Bandura's social learning theory in explaining character development in early childhood. Practically, the study underscores the importance of maintaining consistent cultural practices and collaborative commitment among educators to ensure that character education becomes an integral part of children's everyday experiences.

Character Values Developed through School Culture

The findings indicate that school culture at Aisyiyah Playgroup Kisaran-Asahan fosters various character values among young children, including religiosity, discipline, independence, responsibility, social care, communication skills, and patriotism. These values are cultivated through daily habituation, teacher role modeling, social interactions, and play-based learning activities integrated into children's everyday experiences. Consequently, character education becomes an inseparable component of school life rather than a separate instructional program.

Religious values emerged as the most dominant aspect of character development. Daily activities such as collective prayers, Iqra' recitation, Dhuha prayer, memorizing short surahs, and greeting teachers and peers continuously expose children to positive spiritual practices. This finding supports the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes that children acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling within their social environments (Bandura, 1977). Through repeated interactions with teachers as role models, children gradually internalize religious and moral values as part of their everyday behavior. Consistent with this finding, Harahap (2021) argued that character values in early childhood are more effectively developed through direct

experiences and habituation than through abstract explanations alone.

School culture also contributes to the development of discipline through routines such as queuing, following classroom rules, maintaining order, and respecting learning procedures. These practices enable children to understand the importance of rules and self-regulation from an early age. Continuous reinforcement and repetition encourage children to develop disciplined behavior as a natural part of their daily activities. Such findings demonstrate that habituation plays a central role in cultivating self-discipline and positive conduct within early childhood educational settings (Anwar & Qonita, 2026; Sharples, 2023).

Furthermore, independence and responsibility are developed through concrete activities, including tidying toys, organizing personal belongings, cleaning learning spaces, and completing simple tasks independently. These experiences align with the cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget, which explains that children in the preoperational stage learn more effectively through direct experiences and tangible activities than through abstract reasoning (Piaget, 1964). Therefore, everyday responsibilities within the school environment provide meaningful opportunities for children to understand the values of independence and accountability through practical engagement (Hidayanti et al., 2023).

Social care and communication skills also emerge through collaborative play, helping peers, listening respectfully, and expressing ideas appropriately during classroom interactions. This finding reflects the sociocultural perspective of Lev Vygotsky, who emphasized that children's development occurs through social interaction and cooperative activities with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Through shared experiences and guided participation, children gradually develop empathy, cooperation, and effective communication skills that support their broader social development. Similar findings were reported by Ningsih et al. (2022), who highlighted the importance of direct experiences and active participation in strengthening character education among young children.

Nevertheless, the degree of character internalization varied among children, as some still required reminders and guidance to consistently practice positive behaviors. This finding corresponds with Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which suggests that children's moral understanding evolves gradually according to their developmental stages and social experiences (Kohlberg, 1984). Consequently, continuous reinforcement from both schools and families remains essential to sustain positive character formation. Kurniati & Kudus (2021) likewise emphasized that the effectiveness of character education depends on the consistency of values practiced across educational and family environments.

Theoretically, these findings demonstrate that school culture provides an integrated framework for character development by combining habituation, social interaction, concrete experiences, and role modeling within everyday educational practices. Practically, the study highlights the importance of maintaining collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and parents to ensure that character values cultivated at school are consistently reinforced at home. Such continuity is crucial for promoting sustainable moral, social, and emotional development among young children.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of School Culture-Based Character Education

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of school culture-based character education at Aisiyiah Playgroup Kisaran–Asahan is influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include principal leadership, collaboration among teachers, parental involvement, a conducive school environment, adequate facilities and infrastructure, character-based Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and school programs that promote character formation. Conversely, inhibiting factors consist of teachers' inconsistency in implementing character-based SOPs, limited parental support, and the incomplete integration of character values into all learning activities.

School leadership emerged as an essential factor in sustaining character education practices. The

principal plays a strategic role in formulating policies, supervising school programs, and ensuring that character-based routines are implemented consistently. From the perspective of educational leadership theory, school leaders function as instructional leaders who create positive organizational cultures and learning environments that support students' holistic development (Munna, 2022; Shaked, 2020). Similar findings were reported by Rahayu et al. (2022), who found that effective school leadership strengthens character education through organizational culture and teacher role modeling. Therefore, principal commitment becomes a critical foundation for maintaining sustainable character habituation within early childhood institutions.

Teachers also serve as key agents in implementing school culture-based character education. Beyond delivering instructional content, teachers act as role models whose behaviors are continuously observed and imitated by children. This finding aligns with the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes that children acquire attitudes and behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). Consistent teacher practices, collaborative relationships among educators, and positive reinforcement enable children to internalize discipline, responsibility, social care, and communication skills more effectively. Supporting this perspective, Duya et al. (2025) highlighted that teacher consistency and exemplary conduct are fundamental to successful character development in early childhood settings.

Parental involvement likewise contributes significantly to the effectiveness of character education. Character values introduced at school become more sustainable when reinforced within family environments. This finding can be interpreted through the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner, which explains that children's development is shaped by interactions among multiple environmental systems, particularly families and schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When similar values and behavioral expectations are practiced across these contexts, children experience greater consistency in moral and social learning. Kurniati & Kudus (2021) similarly emphasized that collaboration between schools and families strengthens children's character formation through continuous habituation and parental guidance.

A supportive school environment and adequate facilities also facilitate the implementation of school culture. Safe, religious, and socially interactive environments provide meaningful opportunities for children to practice discipline, cooperation, and responsibility in their daily experiences. This perspective is consistent with the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that children's learning and development occur through social interaction within supportive environments (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, positive school climates function as important contexts for the internalization of character values.

Despite these strengths, several challenges remain. Inconsistencies in implementing character-based SOPs, insufficient parental reinforcement at home, and the limited integration of character values into all classroom activities reduce the effectiveness of school culture initiatives. Children who encounter different expectations between school and family environments may experience difficulties in consistently applying positive behaviors. These findings indicate that character education requires sustained commitment, repeated habituation, and collaborative support from all stakeholders to ensure the successful internalization of moral values.

Theoretically, this study confirms that school culture-based character education is shaped by leadership, social interaction, family participation, and environmental support operating within interconnected educational systems. Practically, the findings suggest that schools should strengthen principal supervision, enhance teacher consistency in implementing character-based SOPs, improve partnerships with parents, and integrate character values into all learning activities to promote sustainable and holistic character development among young children.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that school culture constitutes an essential mechanism for fostering character education at Aisyiyah Playgroup in Kisaran, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. The integration of routine habituation, teacher role modeling, and positive social interactions enables character values to become an integral part of children's everyday experiences. The effectiveness of this process depends on the collective involvement of school leaders, teachers, parents, and supportive educational environments that consistently reinforce shared values and behavioral expectations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of school culture as a dynamic framework for character internalization within Islamic-based early childhood education settings. Practically, the findings provide insights for educators, school leaders, and families in designing sustainable character education programs grounded in daily practices, collaboration, and positive role modeling. Future efforts to strengthen school-family partnerships are essential to ensure that character values are continuously nurtured and maintained both within and beyond the school environment.

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