

RELIGIOUS AND NATIONALIST CHARACTER FORMATION THROUGH SCHOOL CULTURE

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Abstract

This study examines how religious and nationalist character formation is cultivated through school culture at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban, an Islamic junior high school in Indonesia. Moving beyond program-based character education, this research conceptualizes character formation as a sustained cultural process embedded in daily school practices, norms, symbols, and leadership models. Using a qualitative approach and case study, the data for this study were collected from the Principal, Vice Principal, Teachers, and Students of SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban, through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations of school activities. Data were processed using content analysis, presentation, and conclusion drawing, supported by triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure credibility. Interviews were conducted with school leaders and administrators, teachers, and students, and observations were conducted. Data were analyzed using qualitative methods validated through triangulation of sources and techniques, then interpreted based on selected theories. The findings reveal that religious and nationalist values are not treated as separate domains but are integrated within a cohesive school culture shaped by routine religious practices, civic rituals, teacher role modeling, and institutional regulations. This integration fosters students' spiritual discipline, moral responsibility, and national commitment simultaneously. The study confirms the relevance of Character Education Theory and School Culture Theory in the Indonesian Islamic education context while demonstrating how local religious traditions and national identity discourses interact constructively. The research contributes to the growing discourse on religious-nationalist character formation by offering an empirically grounded model of culturally embedded character education that may inform policy and practice in Islamic schooling contexts.

Keywords

Religious Character Formation, Nationalist Character, School Culture, Character Education, Islamic Education.



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INTRODUCTION

The challenge of cultivating balanced moral and civic identities among students has become a significant concern in contemporary educational discourse. In many societies, educational institutions are increasingly expected to develop students not only in terms of academic competence but also in terms of ethical responsibility, spiritual integrity, and civic commitment (Nasoha et al., 2025). The increasing influence of globalization, digital culture, and social fragmentation has raised concerns about the weakening of national identity and moral values among younger generations. Consequently, schools are required to develop educational strategies that are capable of integrating moral, religious, and civic values in a coherent educational framework. Within this broader context, the integration of religious values and national identity has become a critical issue in countries with strong religious traditions and diverse cultural identities, including Indonesia. Educational institutions are expected to foster students who are spiritually grounded while also demonstrating a strong commitment to national values (Darlan et al., 2021; Hasan et al., 2023; Nurberlian & Yuliana, 2021; Putri & Sari, 2025; Rohman Hakim, 2022; Rohman et al., 2025; Supriyandi et al., 2025; Syahriani & Jannah, n.d., 2025). Rather than treating religiosity and nationalism as competing identities, educational scholars increasingly emphasize the importance of developing educational models that integrate both dimensions in a complementary manner. This integrative approach enables students to develop moral responsibility toward both God and society, thereby strengthening social cohesion and civic participation.

One of the most effective mechanisms for cultivating such an integrated character is the development of a school culture. School culture refers to the shared values, norms, rituals, and institutional practices that shape the daily experiences of students within educational institutions. Scholars such as Thomas Lickona argue that character education becomes effective when moral values are embedded in the routines, interactions, and collective traditions of the school environment rather than merely taught through formal instruction (Lickona, 2012). Similarly, Deal and Peterson emphasize that school culture functions as an invisible yet powerful structure that shapes students' attitudes, behaviors, and moral perspectives through continuous social interaction (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

In the Indonesian context, Islamic educational institutions play a strategic role in integrating religious devotion with civic responsibility (Azmi et al., 2025; Pratama et al., 2025). The philosophical foundation of Islamic education emphasizes the development of individuals who possess spiritual

consciousness, moral integrity, and social responsibility. These principles are closely aligned with the concept of *tarbiyah Islāmiyyah*, which aims to develop balanced individuals capable of contributing positively to society. From this perspective, the integration of religious commitment and national identity is not contradictory but mutually reinforcing within a broader ethical framework that emphasizes justice, responsibility, and collective welfare.

In the case of SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban, the formation of religious and nationalist character is intentionally embedded within the broader framework of school culture (Haq, 2023). The institution positions religious devotion and love for the homeland as its core character values, which are systematically integrated into institutional vision, curriculum design, and daily school activities (Widodo, 2023). The emphasis on these two characters is rooted in four main foundations: the idealism of the school's founder, the core values embedded in the institutional ethos of the school, the integration of character competencies into the curriculum, and the institutional branding of the school as a center for religious and nationalist character education. Besides that, the implementation of this integrative educational vision can be clearly observed in the educational practices of SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban, an Islamic junior secondary school that explicitly positions religious and nationalist character as the core foundation of its institutional identity. The school's educational philosophy emphasizes the development of students who are both spiritually committed and socially responsible citizens (Haq, 2023; Wanuri, 2023). As articulated by school leadership, the institution seeks to produce future leaders who possess strong religious faith while maintaining a deep sense of responsibility toward the nation and society.

At the institutional level, the cultivation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban is embedded within a structured system of school culture that integrates values, rituals, symbols, and educational programs (Wanuri, 2023; Widodo, 2023). The school culture is constructed through two main components: a value system and a system of cultural artifacts. The value system includes moral principles, institutional codes of conduct, and the internal guideline known as the "Buku Insan Mamba'us Sholihin," which serves as the normative foundation for student behavior. Meanwhile, cultural artifacts are manifested through school routines, symbols, collective ceremonies, and extracurricular activities that continuously reinforce the internalization of both religious and national values (Haq, 2023).

More concretely, the school operationalizes this cultural framework through a variety of daily routines and institutional programs designed to internalize both religious and national values among students. These practices include daily prayers, congregational worship, recitation of Qur'anic verses, and moral reflection sessions, which nurture students' spiritual awareness and religious discipline (Haq, 2023). At the same time, national values are cultivated through activities such as the recitation of Pancasila, flag ceremonies, singing national and regional songs, and commemorating national historical events. These activities are integrated into daily school routines and ceremonial events, ensuring that both religious and national values are consistently practiced in the everyday lives of students (Widodo, 2023).

The integration of these practices creates a holistic moral environment in which students experience religious and national values not merely as abstract concepts but as lived experiences. Through repeated participation in rituals, institutional traditions, and collective activities, students gradually internalize values such as spiritual devotion, patriotism, social responsibility, empathy, and collective solidarity. In this sense, school culture functions as a mediating mechanism that connects religious teachings with civic identity formation, enabling students to develop a balanced character that reflects both moral integrity and national commitment.

Although numerous studies have explored character education and school culture in recent years, relatively few studies have specifically examined how religious and nationalist character can be integrated through institutional culture in faith-based educational settings. For instance, research by Nurizka et al. (2020) found that the internalization of school culture can effectively strengthen students' awareness of Pancasila values through daily routines and collective practices (Nurizka et al., 2020). Similarly, Murniati & Bazla (2025) reported that national identity among secondary school students is strongly influenced by school-based cultural practices and civic learning experiences (Murniati & Bazla, 2025).

More recent studies also highlight the relationship between school culture and character development. Research by Sartika et al. (2024) demonstrates that a positive school culture significantly contributes to the development of students' soft skills, ethical awareness, and social responsibility (Sartika et al., 2024). Another study by Tohirin et al. (2025) reveals that religious character education in Islamic schools becomes more effective when supported by a consistent institutional culture and teacher role modeling (Tohirin et al., 2025). Meanwhile, a study by Chadijah et al. (2026) indicates that character education programs in Indonesian Islamic schools tend to

emphasize religious values but often lack systematic integration with civic and national identity formation (Chadijah et al., 2026).

Despite these important contributions, existing studies still present several limitations. Most previous studies tend to examine religious character education and civic education as separate domains of analysis. Furthermore, relatively limited empirical attention has been given to how school culture functions as an integrative mechanism that simultaneously cultivates both religious and nationalist character within Islamic educational institutions. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how institutional culture mediates the formation of religious–nationalist identity among students in everyday school life.

This study addresses this gap by examining how religious and nationalist character formation is cultivated through school culture at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban. By exploring the interaction between institutional values, cultural rituals, daily routines, and symbolic practices within the school environment, this research seeks to explain how educational institutions can integrate spiritual devotion and national identity within a coherent moral framework. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analytical approach that combines character education theory, school culture theory, citizenship education, and Islamic educational philosophy to explain the formation of religious–nationalist character within a single institutional context.

From a theoretical perspective, character formation in educational settings is often explained through the framework of Character Education Theory developed by Thomas Lickona. Lickona emphasizes that effective character education involves the integration of three essential components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. According to this framework, character development cannot rely solely on moral instruction but must also involve emotional engagement and habitual practice through consistent experiences within the educational environment (Lickona, 1991, 2013, 2024). Thus, schools must provide opportunities for students to internalize values through meaningful interactions, reflective learning processes, and repeated ethical practices in daily life.

Beyond formal instruction, the cultural environment of schools plays a decisive role in shaping students' character formation. The concept of school culture highlights the system of shared norms, values, rituals, traditions, and institutional practices that shape the social and moral climate of an educational institution. Scholars such as Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson argue that school culture functions as an invisible yet powerful force that influences how members of the school

community interpret values, construct meaning, and regulate behavior (Deal & Peterson, 1990, 2016). Through shared traditions, symbolic rituals, and collective practices, school culture can transform abstract ethical values into lived experiences that gradually shape students' identities and behavioral dispositions.

Although numerous previous studies have addressed character education and school culture, gaps remain in the context of integrating religiosity and patriotism in Islamic educational institutions in rural areas. Many studies focus solely on the religious or national dimensions separately, failing to analyze the synergy between the two as a strategy for developing a young generation rooted in both religious traditions and nationalism.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the implementation of patriotic and religious character education based on school culture at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban. This study highlights the process of internalizing values, daily practices, symbolic roles, and school leadership strategies in shaping students' character-based habits.

Despite the growing body of research on character education, existing studies have often treated religious character, civic identity, and school culture as separate variables rather than examining their integrative relationship. While several studies highlight the role of religious education in moral development and others emphasize the importance of civic education in promoting national identity, relatively few empirical studies investigate how school culture simultaneously mediates the formation of both religious and nationalist character in Islamic educational institutions.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how religious and nationalist character formation is cultivated through school culture at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban. By analyzing the interaction between institutional values, cultural rituals, teacher role modeling, and daily educational practices, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how school culture functions as a mediating structure for character formation. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analytical framework that connects character education theory, school culture theory, and Islamic educational philosophy in explaining how educational institutions can simultaneously nurture spiritual commitment and civic responsibility among students.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the academic literature on character education in the Indonesian and Islamic contexts, as well as providing practical recommendations for effective school culture management in building students' national-religious identities. Thus, this research

significantly contributes to the development of character education theory and practice in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach and case study with a descriptive-analytical research type at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban that aims to explore in depth the implementation of patriotic and religious character education based on school culture. The main theories used are Character Education Theory (Lickona) and School Culture Theory (Bryk, Deal & Peterson), supported by Values Education (Halstead & Pike), Citizenship Education (Banks, Davids & Waghid), and the perspective of Islamic Education and Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah as a contextual normative basis. The independent variable in this study is school culture, the dependent variable is the implementation of patriotic and religious character education, while the intervening variables include the roles of teachers, students, and school leadership.

The location of this research was SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban, a private school located within the Mambaus Sholihin 8 Islamic Boarding School. The research subjects consisted of the principal, vice principal, teachers, and students who held structural positions and were directly involved in the teaching and learning process, aiming to shape religious and nationalist character through school culture. Informants were selected purposively, based on their experience and direct involvement in the teaching and learning process, which fosters religious and nationalist character development at the school. Data were collected from the principal, vice principal, teachers, and students of SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban, through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field notes during observations at the research site.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted to provide informants with flexibility in sharing their experiences and perspectives broadly. Observations were conducted by examining academic and non-academic activities that have an impact on the formation of religious and nationalist character. The observation process lasted for one and a half years, from February 2023 to June 2024. Documentation was obtained from the institution's history, vision, and mission, and other Principal decisions related to academic and non-academic activities that have an impact on the formation of religious and nationalist character at this institution.

Data analysis followed an interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing/verifying conclusions (Waruwu, 2024; Wiratraman & Putro, 2020). Data validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the credibility of the findings. This approach is expected to produce a valid and in-depth description of academic and non-academic activities that have an impact on the formation of religious and nationalist character at this institution.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

A study related to the formation of religious and nationalist character through school culture at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban, shows that the formation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban is not solely the result of formal teaching, but emerges through a culturally embedded process shaped by school routines, symbolic practices, collective rituals, and teacher role models (Haq, 2023; Wanuri, 2023). School culture functions as a mediating structure that integrates religious devotion and national commitment into a coherent moral ecology, allowing students to internalize both identities simultaneously rather than viewing them as conflicting values (Widodo, 2023). All of this can be explained in the following table:

Table 1. Religious and Nationalist Character Formation through School Culture: Evidence from an Indonesian Islamic Junior High School

No	Dimensions Culture School	Practice Culture	Mechanism Internalization	Forming Character Religious	Forming Character Nationalist
1.	Religious Ritual Culture	Prayer congregation daily Reading Al-Qur'an Warning, day of the Islamic kingdom.	Habituation and moral discipline	✓ ✓ ✓	
2.	Civil - National Ritual	Ceremony raising the flag Celebration Day National	Symbolism, citizenship, and identity, collective		✓ ✓
3.	The Role of Teachers as Examples	Behavior ethical Behavior discipline,	Learning social and moral role models	✓ ✓	

		consistency, and religious		
4.	Regulation Institutional	Rule get dressed	Internalization norm	✓
		Rule accuracy time		✓
		Routine structured.		✓
5.	Environment Symbolic	Religious slogans, symbol national, vision- mission school	Strengthening mark through visual culture	✓ ✓

Source: Interviews with the principal and management of SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban; observations; and document analysis at the educational institution, 2023

Based on the interview, observation, and documentation data, which the researcher has presented in the table above, we will summarize this research and focus on two main findings that explain how school culture plays a role in the formation of students' religious and nationalist character.

Dimensions of School Culture that Use Civic Habits and Symbolism as a Means of Internalization

The first theme shows that the formation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban is carried out through school cultural practices that emphasize collective habituation and civic symbolism. These practices are manifested in the form of daily religious rituals and civic rituals that are consistently carried out in school life (Haq, 2023). Daily religious rituals are an integral part of the school culture designed to shape students' spiritual discipline. Activities such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and commemoration of Islamic holidays are carried out collectively as part of the school routine. These practices function not only as acts of worship but also as a means of forming a religious habitus that is embedded in students' lives. Through these habits, religious values are gradually internalized and become part of students' character.

A teacher at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban explained that cultivating collective worship plays a crucial role in building students' religious character. "Every day, students are accustomed to performing congregational prayers and reciting the Quran before learning begins. With this routine, students become more disciplined and develop a stronger spiritual awareness" (Widodo, 2023). In

addition to religious rituals, the school also integrates civic practices into its culture through flag ceremonies and national day commemorations. These rituals serve as symbolic means of affirming students' national identity and strengthening their sense of belonging to the national community. Through these activities, students not only cognitively understand the value of nationalism but also experience it as a collective experience that strengthens social solidarity.

Meanwhile, the principal of SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban emphasized that the integration of religious and nationalistic values is part of the school's educational vision. "We want to shape students who are not only religious but also have a love for their country. Therefore, we integrate religious and nationalistic activities into the daily school culture" (Haq, 2023). These findings suggest that familiarizing ourselves with religious rituals and civic symbolism serves as an important mechanism in shaping students' religious and nationalistic character. Through these cultural practices, students gradually internalize spiritual values and national identity in their daily lives.

Dimensions of School Culture that Use Social Learning, Internalization of Norms, and Reinforcement of Values as a Means of Internalization

The second theme reveals that the formation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban also occurs through social learning mechanisms, the internalization of institutional norms, and the reinforcement of values through the school's symbolic environment. In this context, the role of teachers as moral role models is a crucial factor in the process of character formation for students (Wanuri, 2023).

Teachers serve not only as academic instructors but also as models of moral behavior observed and imitated by students. Teachers' consistency in religious practices, discipline at work, and ethical attitudes in interactions with students are concrete examples that influence student character development (Bilqis, 2024). This process aligns with social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals learn through observing the behavior of others in their social environment.

One student explained that the teachers' behavior was an inspiration in shaping their religious and disciplined attitudes. "The teachers here always set good examples, such as arriving on time and joining the students for congregational prayers. That makes us feel compelled to emulate their behavior" (Muhammadun, 2024). In addition to social learning, internalization of values is also carried out through a system of institutional regulations that govern student behavior in school life. Rules regarding dress code, punctuality, and daily routines serve as normative

mechanisms that shape student discipline and responsibility. By adhering to these rules, students gradually internalize the values of order, responsibility, and respect for social norms.

The symbolic environment of the school also plays a crucial role in reinforcing the internalization of values. Various religious slogans, national symbols, and the school's vision and mission displayed in public spaces serve as visual media that continually remind students of the values espoused by the educational institution. One teacher stated that these symbols are designed to create a moral atmosphere that supports the development of students' character. "Our school environment is filled with moral messages and religious values so that students are constantly reminded of the importance of good behavior and love for the nation" (Widodo, 2023). Through a combination of social learning, internalization of institutional norms, and reinforcement of values through cultural symbols, the school successfully creates an educational environment that simultaneously supports the development of students' religious and nationalistic character.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the formation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban is achieved through a structured and sustainable school culture. School culture serves as a social space that allows moral values to be taught not only conceptually but also lived out through students' daily practices. In this context, religious character is formed through religious rituals such as congregational prayer, Al-Quran recitation, and commemoration of Islamic holidays, while nationalist character is developed through civic rituals such as flag ceremonies and national day commemorations (Bilqis, 2024). The integration of these two practices demonstrates that religious and nationalist values are not positioned as separate domains, but as complementary dimensions in the formation of students' moral identity.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that the internalization of religious and nationalist values occurs not only through ritual activities but also through social interactions within the school environment. The role of teachers as moral role models, the institutional regulatory system, and the school's symbolic environment serve as social mechanisms that reinforce the process of internalizing these values (Wanuri, 2023). Thus, the formation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban does not only depend on the formal curriculum, but also on the school's cultural ecosystem that creates moral experiences for students in everyday life.

These findings reinforce the view that character education requires a conducive social environment for moral values to be effectively internalized. School culture provides a social context that allows students to directly experience religious and nationalistic values through collective practices, social symbols, and interactions with teachers and peers. In this context, religious and nationalistic character develops as a result of the ongoing social processes within school life.

These research findings strongly align with the character education theory proposed by Thomas Lickona. Lickona emphasized that character education must encompass three main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Elyunusi et al., 2022; Lickona, 1991, 2013). In the context of SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban, these three dimensions are evident in the school's cultural practices, which not only teach religious and nationalistic values cognitively but also build emotional awareness and practical applications in students' lives.

Regularly performing religious and civic rituals allows students to directly experience moral values through concrete actions. This process reinforces the moral action dimension, which is at the heart of character education. Through this familiarization, students not only understand the importance of religious and nationalistic values but also develop the habit of practicing them in their daily lives.

Furthermore, the findings of this study align with school culture theory, which emphasizes the importance of institutional culture in shaping student behavior and values. Deal and Peterson explain that school culture consists of value systems, traditions, and social practices that shape the collective identity of the school community (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Desfandi et al., 2017; Fitriah et al., 2025). In this study, school culture at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban proved to function as a medium that enabled the integration of religious and nationalistic values into students' lives.

School culture not only shapes individual behavior but also creates a collective identity that influences how students view themselves as both religious individuals and citizens. Collective rituals, institutional symbols, and school social norms serve as mechanisms that reinforce this moral identity. Thus, school culture is a key factor in the process of forming students' religious and nationalistic character.

The findings of this study can also be understood through the perspective of citizenship education and values education. Banks emphasized that citizenship education plays a crucial role in shaping citizens with moral awareness, social responsibility, and a commitment to democratic values (Banks, 2004, 2006; Hahn, 2005; Ming Yeh Lee, 2008). In this context, the citizenship rituals

conducted at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban are a means to instill national awareness and strengthen students' national identity. Meanwhile, the values education approach emphasizes that moral values must be integrated into daily school life so that they can be effectively internalized by students. Recent literature research shows that values education is more effective when these values are integrated into school culture, learning practices, and teacher role models (Anantama, 2024; Prihatina et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, Halstead and Pike explain that values education must be integrated into the daily life of the school so that these values can be effectively internalized by students (Chavez & Gibson, 2007; J. M. Halstead & Pike, 2006; M. Halstead & Pike, 2020; Haydon, 2007). The findings of this study indicate that the integration of religious and nationalistic values through school culture allows students to experience these values in a real social context, thereby strengthening the process of internalization of values.

From an Islamic educational perspective, the integration of religious and nationalistic values found in this study aligns with the concept of Islamic education, which emphasizes the formation of individuals who balance spirituality and social responsibility. Islamic education aims not only to develop pious individuals but also individuals who care about society and the nation (Sholikhah et al., 2025; Sholikhah & Aziz, 2024; Sholikhah & Istiani, 2024).

This concept also aligns with the principle of *maqāṣid al-syarīah*, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining social welfare by protecting fundamental human values. The integration of religious and nationalistic values into school culture can be understood as an effort to shape a generation that not only possesses spiritual awareness but also demonstrates social responsibility toward society and the nation (Aziz & Sholikhah, 2013; Mujrimin & Aziz, 2025).

The findings of this study also align with several international studies highlighting the role of school culture in shaping student character. Research conducted by Rasidah et al. (2024) and Cahyanto (2023) shows that a consistent school culture can strengthen the internalization of religious values in Islamic education (Cahyanto & Malang, 2023; Rasidah et al., 2024). This research confirms that structured school culture practices have a significant influence on student character development. Another study conducted by Sirojuddin et al. (2025) shows that integrating religious values into character education can increase students' moral awareness in their social lives (Sirojuddin et al., 2025). This finding aligns with research at SMP Mamba'us Sholihin Tuban, which showed that familiarizing oneself with religious rituals can strengthen students' spiritual character.

However, this study also offers a novel contribution compared to previous research. While most previous studies have focused solely on religious character education or civic education, this study demonstrates that both dimensions can be harmoniously integrated through school culture. Thus, this research broadens the understanding of how educational institutions can develop character education models that integrate religiosity and nationalism.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of character education literature by demonstrating that school culture can function as an integrative mechanism linking religious and national values in the formation of student character. The conceptual model generated from this study demonstrates that the formation of religious and nationalistic character depends not only on the formal curriculum but also on social interactions and cultural practices that occur within school life.

Practically, the findings of this study offer important implications for educational administrators, particularly in the context of faith-based schools. Developing a consistent and integrated school culture can be an effective strategy for shaping students' religious character and national awareness. Thus, schools can serve as institutions that not only develop students' academic competence but also shape a generation with moral integrity and social responsibility toward the nation and society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the formation of religious and nationalist character at SMP Mambaus Sholihin Tuban occurs through an integrated and sustainable school culture mechanism, where the practice of religious rituals, civic symbolism, teacher role models, institutional regulations, and the school's symbolic environment serve as the primary medium for internalizing values. The main findings of the study indicate that students' religious character is formed through the habituation of collective spiritual practices such as congregational prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, and commemoration of Islamic holidays, while nationalist character is developed through civic rituals such as flag ceremonies and national day commemorations that foster collective identity and national awareness. These two dimensions do not operate separately, but interact with each other within the school's cultural ecosystem that shapes students' moral experiences holistically.

Theoretically, this study makes an important contribution to the development of character education literature by demonstrating that school culture can function as an integrative mechanism

that connects religious and national values in the process of student character formation. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model that demonstrates how school culture mediates the internalization of values through two main analytical themes: the dimension of school culture that utilizes ritual and civic symbolism as a means of internalization, and the dimension of school culture that utilizes social learning, norm internalization, and value reinforcement as mechanisms for the simultaneous formation of religious and nationalist character. Thus, this research broadens the perspective in character education studies, which have tended to separate religious education and civic education, by demonstrating that the two can be harmoniously integrated through school cultural practices.

Practically, the findings of this study provide important implications for the development of character education policies and practices, particularly in religious-based schools, where the consistent strengthening of school culture through collective rituals, teacher role models, and institutional regulatory systems can be an effective strategy in shaping a generation that possesses not only spiritual piety but also national awareness and social responsibility as citizens. However, this research has limitations because it was conducted in a single educational institution context, so the generalizability of the findings is still limited to school environments with similar cultural characteristics. It also uses a qualitative approach that emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena without quantitatively measuring the relationship between school cultural practices and student character development. Therefore, future research is suggested to develop comparative studies in various types of schools with different social and cultural contexts and integrate quantitative or mixed methods approaches to more systematically examine the relationship between school culture and the formation of religious and nationalist character, so as to enrich the development of an integrative character education model that is relevant to the dynamics of contemporary global society.

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