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Managing the Integration of Spiritual Values for Character Formation: A Multi-Site Case Study in Indonesian Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how spiritual values are systematically integrated to strengthen students' character formation through school management processes in elementary education. Employing a qualitative multi-site case study design, the research was conducted at SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1 in Cianjur Regency, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that effective character development is strongly influenced by managerial and leadership practices rather than by religious instruction alone. Strategic planning, collaborative organization, consistent habituation through daily spiritual and social activities, and continuous behavioral evaluation enabled values such as discipline, responsibility, empathy, and respect to be embedded into everyday school life. Despite challenges related to limited time, varying teacher readiness, and difficulties in assessing character outcomes, adaptive leadership and stakeholder collaboration supported program sustainability. The study concludes that spirituality-based character education is most effective when managed as a structured and school-wide process. This research contributes to educational management literature by positioning spiritual value integration as a strategic mechanism for fostering sustainable character development in elementary schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central priority in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in response to increasing moral and social challenges faced by young learners [1], [2]. Schools are expected not only to develop students' cognitive competencies but also to cultivate ethical behavior, empathy, responsibility, and integrity [3], [4]. However, many education systems continue to experience a gap between formal instruction

and students' actual moral conduct, as evidenced by rising cases of intolerance, violence, dishonesty, and declining social awareness among children. These conditions indicate that character formation cannot rely solely on theoretical moral teaching but requires deeper internalization supported by consistent school practices and systematic management [5].

Spiritual values constitute a fundamental foundation for character education because they shape students' inner awareness, moral sensitivity, and sense of responsibility toward others [6]. Values such as honesty, discipline, compassion, and respect are not merely behavioral norms but are rooted in spiritual consciousness that guides everyday decision-making. Scholars argue that character development becomes more meaningful when moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action are integrated holistically [7]–[9]. Thus, education that incorporates spiritual dimensions is more likely to foster sustainable ethical behavior rather than superficial compliance.

Despite the recognized importance of spiritual values, their implementation in schools often remains fragmented and incidental. In many cases, spiritual education is reduced to ritual or ceremonial activities without being embedded in broader school culture and management systems. Previous studies emphasize the role of teacher role-modeling and school–family collaboration in strengthening character education [10]–[13]. However, limited attention has been given to the managerial processes that ensure continuity, coordination, and sustainability of spiritual value integration. Without systematic planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation, character programs risk becoming temporary initiatives rather than institutionalized practices [14].

From a management perspective, effective character education requires structured organizational processes. Terry's management framework highlights that successful programs depend on the coherent application of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (P-O-A-C) functions [15], [16]. These managerial functions enable schools to allocate resources, coordinate stakeholders, supervise implementation, and continuously refine strategies. When spiritual values are managed systematically rather than informally, they are more likely to be internalized into students' daily behaviors and school culture. Therefore, examining character education through a management lens provides a more comprehensive understanding of how spiritual values can be effectively institutionalized in primary education.

This issue is particularly relevant in elementary schools, where students' moral foundations and habits are still being formed. SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1 in Cianjur Regency represent two schools that actively implement spirituality-based character education but adopt different managerial emphases. SDN Nanggala 1 prioritizes structured religious rituals such as routine congregational prayers and Qur'anic recitation, while SDN Ciranjang 1 emphasizes contextual social–spiritual practices such as charity, cooperation (gotong royong), and community engagement. These contrasting approaches provide valuable contexts for understanding how different management strategies influence character formation outcomes.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to analyze and compare the management processes of integrating spiritual values into character formation across the two schools. Specifically, this research examines how planning, organizing, implementation, and

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1737

evaluation are conducted to support students' moral development. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative multi-site perspective and its integration of management theory with character education frameworks, positioning spiritual value integration not merely as a pedagogical practice but as a systematically managed school-wide process. By providing contextual evidence from primary schools, this study contributes to the development of sustainable and adaptable models of spiritually grounded character education.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multi-site case study design to explore how spiritual values are integrated and managed to strengthen students' character formation in elementary schools. A qualitative methodology was selected because it enables researchers to understand educational and social phenomena holistically within their natural contexts and to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices in depth [17], [18]. The multi-site case study design was considered appropriate as it allows comparative analysis across different school settings, thereby providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of how management processes operate under varying institutional conditions [19], [20].

The research was conducted at two public elementary schools in Cianjur Regency, Indonesia: SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1. These schools were purposively selected because both actively implement spirituality-based character education programs, but apply different managerial approaches. SDN Nanggala 1 emphasizes structured religious routines, such as congregational prayers and Qur'anic recitation, while SDN Ciranjang 1 prioritizes contextual social-spiritual practices, including charity, cooperation, and community service. The variation between these sites provided contrasting cases that supported a comparative interpretation of management practices.

Participants consisted of school principals, classroom teachers, religious education teachers, students, and selected parents who were directly involved in character education activities. Principals served as key informants due to their strategic role in policy formulation and program coordination. Teachers provided insights into daily instructional practices, while students and parents contributed perspectives on behavioral changes and program experiences. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance and level of involvement in the integration of spiritual values.

Data were collected through methodological triangulation, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' views on planning strategies, implementation processes, challenges, and outcomes of spiritual value integration. Participant observations were carried out during school routines such as religious activities, classroom interactions, and character-based programs to examine how spiritual values were practiced in everyday contexts. Document analysis involved reviewing school work plans, character education programs, lesson plans, activity schedules, and evaluation reports to verify the consistency between planning and implementation [21]–[23].

In qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument (human instrument), directly interacting with participants and interpreting the collected data [24].

1738

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Supporting instruments, including interview guides, observation checklists, and document review protocols, were developed to ensure systematic and focused data collection.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through source and method triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking with participants to validate interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the research settings (thick description). Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through an audit trail, systematic documentation of procedures, and peer review to minimize researcher bias[22].

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved coding, categorizing, and organizing information related to management functions and character education practices. The data were then presented in narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic comparisons to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn iteratively and continuously verified throughout the research process. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously to allow adaptive refinement of emerging themes [25].

Through this methodological approach, the study aimed to generate comprehensive and contextually grounded insights into how spiritual values can be systematically managed to strengthen character formation in elementary education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Planning of Spiritual Values Integration for Character Formation

The findings indicate that the planning stage served as the foundational step in integrating spiritual values into character education at SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1. In both schools, character formation was not treated as an incidental or spontaneous process but was intentionally embedded within school programs, instructional plans, and daily routines. Principals and teachers demonstrated awareness that sustainable moral development requires systematic preparation, clear objectives, and structured strategies. Consequently, spiritual values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and respect were formally incorporated into school planning documents and learning designs.

Interview data reveal that planning began with identifying priority character values aligned with the schools' visions and missions. Principals and teachers collaboratively discussed which spiritual values were most relevant to students' needs and local contexts. One principal explained:

“Character education cannot run without planning. At the beginning of each semester, we determine which spiritual values we want to emphasize and how to integrate them into daily school activities.” (Interview, Principal, SDN Nanggala 1)

This statement suggests that planning was both deliberate and goal-oriented. Rather than implementing isolated moral messages, the schools established clear targets and strategies for character development.

Observational findings further confirmed that planning involved structured coordination among stakeholders. The researcher observed regular meetings between

principals, classroom teachers, and religious education teachers to design activity schedules and assign responsibilities. These meetings addressed the integration of spiritual practices such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, charity programs, and social service activities into the academic calendar. Such coordination ensured that spiritual activities were consistently implemented rather than conducted sporadically.

Document analysis provided additional evidence of systematic planning. School work plans, annual programs, and lesson plans explicitly included objectives related to character and spiritual development. For example, both schools documented weekly religious routines, character-building projects, and value-based learning activities. These documents demonstrate that spiritual education was formally institutionalized within the school system rather than left to individual teacher discretion.

Teachers also emphasized that clear planning helped them align instructional practices with character goals. One teacher noted:

“Because everything is scheduled and written in the program, we know exactly when to conduct religious activities or character projects. It helps us stay consistent.”

(Interview, Teacher, SDN Ciranjang 1)

This finding indicates that structured planning enhanced clarity and accountability among teachers. When expectations were defined in advance, implementation became more organized and sustainable.

Although both schools shared similar planning mechanisms, contextual differences were observed. SDN Nanggala 1 focused more on structured religious routines as the core of its character strategy, while SDN Ciranjang 1 emphasized integrating spiritual values into social and community-based activities. Despite these differences, both approaches reflected intentional and strategic preparation based on local needs and resources. A summary of the planning practices is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Planning Practices for Spiritual Values Integration

Planning Aspect	SDN Nanggala 1	SDN Ciranjang 1	Data Sources
Priority values	Discipline, obedience, religiosity	Empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility	Interviews
Program design	Scheduled religious routines	Social–spiritual projects	Documents
Stakeholder involvement	Principal and teachers' meetings	Collaborative planning sessions	Observation
Scheduling	Daily and weekly activities	Integrated project calendar	Documents
Planning approach	Structured and ritual-based	Contextual and community-based	Interviews

Overall, these findings demonstrate that systematic and participatory planning played a critical role in establishing a strong foundation for spiritual value integration. By embedding character goals into formal programs and coordinating responsibilities among stakeholders, both schools ensured that spiritual education was implemented consistently and sustainably. This suggests that effective character formation begins not merely with moral instruction but with strategic managerial planning that guides all subsequent activities.

3.2. Organizing Roles and Collaborative Structures for Spiritual Values Integration

Following the planning stage, organizing became a critical managerial function that translated spiritual value integration into coordinated actions among school members. The findings indicate that both SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1 systematically arranged human resources, responsibilities, and institutional mechanisms to ensure that character formation was not dependent on individual teachers alone but became a shared responsibility across the school community. Through structured delegation and collaboration, spiritual values were reinforced consistently in both academic and non-academic activities.

Interview data reveal that principals emphasized collective responsibility in managing character education. Rather than assigning spiritual development exclusively to religious education teachers, both schools distributed tasks among classroom teachers, school staff, and even parents. One principal stated:

“Character building cannot be handled by one teacher only. All teachers must be involved because students observe everyone’s behavior. Therefore, we share responsibilities and work together.” (Interview, Principal, SDN Ciranjang 1)

This statement highlights the shift from an individual-centered approach to a collaborative organizational model. Character education was treated as an institutional commitment rather than a subject-specific task.

Observational findings further confirmed that both schools established functional coordination structures. The researcher observed regular teacher meetings, working groups, and informal discussions aimed at synchronizing religious and character-based activities. At SDN Nanggala 1, teachers coordinated daily religious routines such as congregational prayers and Qur’anic recitation, while at SDN Ciranjang 1, teachers organized social–spiritual activities such as charity programs and community service. These coordinated efforts ensured that spiritual practices were embedded in students’ daily experiences.

Document analysis also demonstrated formal organizational arrangements. Both schools issued task assignments, activity schedules, and program committees responsible for implementing character education initiatives. These documents outlined specific roles, including coordinators, activity supervisors, and class facilitators. Such formalization indicates that spiritual value integration was institutionalized within the school’s management system rather than left to informal or spontaneous efforts.

Teachers emphasized that clear role distribution improved consistency and accountability. One teacher noted:

“Because each teacher has specific duties, we know what to prepare and how to support the program. It makes the activities run more smoothly and regularly.” (Interview, Teacher, SDN Nanggala 1)

This finding suggests that organizing not only enhanced efficiency but also strengthened commitment among staff members. When responsibilities were explicitly defined, teachers felt more engaged and responsible for students’ character development.

In addition, both schools involved parents and the broader community as part of their organizing strategy. Parents were encouraged to reinforce spiritual values at home and participate in school activities. Community leaders were occasionally invited to support

religious or social programs. This collaboration extended character education beyond the classroom and strengthened continuity between school and home environments.

Despite similarities, differences were observed in organizational emphasis. SDN Nanggala 1 applied a more formal and structured approach centered on scheduled religious routines and clearly defined hierarchies, while SDN Ciranjang 1 adopted a more flexible and contextual system that relied on teamwork and situational coordination. Nevertheless, both approaches effectively fostered cooperation and collective ownership of spiritual value integration. A summary of the organizing practices is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Organizing Practices for Spiritual Value Integration

Organizing Aspect	SDN Nanggala 1	SDN Ciranjang 1	Data Sources
Organizational structure	Formal committees and clear task distribution	Flexible collaborative teams	Documents
Teacher involvement	Religious and classroom teachers share duties	Integrated cross-subject responsibility	Interviews
Coordination	Regular meetings and schedules	Informal teamwork and discussion	Observation
Parent/community role	Reinforcement of values at home	Participation in social activities	Interviews
Management approach	Structured and routine-based	Contextual and adaptive	Observation

Overall, these findings demonstrate that effective organization of roles and collaborative structures significantly supported the internalization of spiritual values. By distributing responsibilities, coordinating stakeholders, and engaging families and communities, both schools transformed character education into a collective and sustainable institutional practice. This suggests that organizing is a strategic managerial process that enhances consistency, accountability, and long-term success of spirituality-based character programs.

3.3 Implementation of Spiritual Values Integration in Daily School Practices

Following the planning and organizing stages, the implementation phase represented the practical enactment of spiritual value integration in everyday school life. The findings indicate that both SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1 translated their planned character education strategies into routine, experiential, and practice-oriented activities that allowed students to internalize spiritual values through direct participation. Rather than limiting character education to verbal instruction or theoretical explanation, both schools emphasized habituation and lived experiences as the primary mechanisms for moral development.

Interview data reveal that teachers believed consistent practice was more effective than lecturing in shaping students' character. Spiritual values were reinforced through daily habits and teacher role modeling. One teacher explained:

“Students learn character not only from what we teach but from what they do every day. Therefore, we create routines so they practice discipline, respect, and responsibility continuously.” (Interview, Teacher, SDN Nanggala 1)



This statement highlights the emphasis on habituation. Character education was operationalized through repetitive and structured activities that gradually shaped students' behavior.

Observational findings further confirmed that spiritual practices were embedded within daily routines. At SDN Nanggala 1, students regularly participated in congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and short religious reflections before lessons began. These activities fostered discipline, spiritual awareness, and a sense of collective responsibility. Meanwhile, at SDN Ciranjang 1, implementation emphasized contextual and social–spiritual practices such as charity collections, cooperation (gotong royong), and community service. These activities encouraged empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility among students.

Beyond formal activities, teachers consistently modeled positive behavior during classroom interactions. The researcher observed teachers demonstrating politeness, patience, fairness, and mutual respect when communicating with students. Such role modeling reinforced moral messages implicitly and created a supportive school climate. Students were also encouraged to practice good manners, help peers, and resolve conflicts peacefully, indicating that character education was integrated into daily interpersonal relationships.

Document analysis provided additional support for these observations. Activity logs, school schedules, and program reports documented routine spiritual practices and character-building events. Lesson plans also included reflective discussions, storytelling, and cooperative tasks aimed at strengthening moral awareness. These records suggest that implementation was systematic and monitored rather than incidental.

Teachers reported noticeable behavioral changes among students as a result of consistent practice. One teacher stated:

“Students are now more disciplined and respectful. They remind each other to follow the rules and help their friends without being asked.” (Interview, Teacher, SDN Ciranjang 1)

This finding indicates that repeated exposure to structured spiritual and social activities gradually fostered internalized habits rather than temporary compliance.

Although both schools shared similar objectives, their implementation approaches differed. SDN Nanggala 1 relied more heavily on ritual-based religious habituation, while SDN Ciranjang 1 emphasized contextual and social engagement. Despite these variations, both approaches effectively promoted value internalization through experiential learning and routine practice. A summary of the implementation practices is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Implementation Practices for Spiritual Value Integration

Implementation Aspect	SDN Nanggala 1	SDN Ciranjang 1	Data Sources
Daily routines	Congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation	Charity, cooperation, social service	Observation
Learning strategies	Religious reflection and guidance	Contextual and experiential activities	Interviews
Teacher modeling	Discipline and spiritual guidance	Empathy and social responsibility	Observation
Student participation	Collective worship and rituals	Community-based projects	Observation
Main emphasis	Ritual-based habituation	Social–spiritual engagement	Documents

Overall, these findings demonstrate that effective implementation of spiritual values depends on consistent habituation, experiential learning, and positive role modeling. By embedding character practices into daily routines and real-life activities, both schools transformed spiritual education into lived experiences rather than abstract teachings. This suggests that sustained and practice-oriented implementation is essential for fostering lasting character formation in elementary education.

3.4 Evaluation and Monitoring of Spiritual Values Integration for Character Formation

Evaluation constituted a crucial managerial function in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of spiritual value integration at SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1. The findings indicate that evaluation was not treated merely as a formal administrative procedure but as a continuous reflective process aimed at monitoring students' behavioral development, assessing program effectiveness, and improving future strategies. Both schools emphasized authentic and behavioral assessment rather than relying solely on cognitive or written tests, recognizing that character formation is best observed through daily actions and attitudes.

Interview data reveal that principals and teachers viewed evaluation as an ongoing responsibility embedded in everyday supervision. Rather than conducting periodic examinations, teachers continuously observed students' discipline, responsibility, respect, and empathy during school activities. One principal stated:

"Tests cannot measure character. We evaluate students through their behavior—how they speak, how they treat friends, and how they follow school rules."
(Interview, Principal, SDN Nanggala 1)

This statement highlights the emphasis on behavioral indicators as the primary measure of success. Evaluation focused on observable character traits rather than abstract knowledge.

Observational findings further confirmed that monitoring occurred routinely throughout the school day. Teachers supervised students during prayers, classroom activities, and social interactions, providing immediate feedback when inappropriate behaviors occurred and reinforcing positive attitudes. The researcher observed that teachers frequently reminded students about discipline, honesty, and cooperation, demonstrating that evaluation was closely connected to daily guidance rather than delayed correction. Such continuous supervision created a consistent environment for character reinforcement.

Document analysis provided additional evidence of structured evaluation practices. Both schools maintained behavior records, activity reports, attendance logs, and reflective notes documenting students' participation in spiritual and social programs. Some classes used simple character checklists or reflection journals to track students' progress over time. These documents served as references during teacher meetings to assess whether planned activities effectively supported character development.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of collaborative reflection. One teacher noted:

“After each program or activity, we discuss the results together. If students show improvement, we continue the strategy. If not, we modify it.” (Interview, Teacher, SDN Ciranjang 1)

This finding suggests that evaluation was participatory and developmental rather than punitive. Teachers collectively reviewed outcomes and adjusted strategies to improve future implementation.

In addition, parental feedback was incorporated into the evaluation process. Both schools communicated with parents to monitor whether spiritual and character behaviors were also practiced at home. This home–school collaboration provided broader perspectives on students’ behavioral consistency and strengthened the overall effectiveness of the program.

Although both schools shared similar evaluation principles, differences were observed in approach. SDN Nanggala 1 applied more formal and structured monitoring through routine checklists and scheduled reviews, while SDN Ciranjang 1 emphasized informal observation and reflective discussions. Despite these differences, both systems effectively supported continuous improvement and accountability. A summary of the evaluation practices is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Evaluation and Monitoring Practices for Spiritual Value Integration

Evaluation Aspect	SDN Nanggala 1	SDN Ciranjang 1	Data Sources
Assessment method	Behavior checklists and supervision	Observation and reflective dialogue	Observation, interviews
Documentation	Reports and attendance logs	Reflection notes and journals	Documents
Monitoring focus	Discipline and religious routines	Empathy and social behavior	Observation
Feedback system	Structured teacher guidance	Discussion-based feedback	Interviews
Evaluation approach	Formal and systematic	Flexible and participatory	Interviews

Overall, these findings demonstrate that systematic evaluation and monitoring played a significant role in sustaining the integration of spiritual values. By combining authentic behavioral assessment, reflective discussions, and documented evidence, both schools ensured that character education remained measurable, accountable, and continuously refined. This suggests that evaluation functions not merely as a control mechanism but as an ongoing learning process that strengthens the institutionalization of spirituality-based character formation.

3.5 Discussion

This study examined how spiritual values are systematically integrated to strengthen students’ character formation through four interrelated managerial functions: planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. The findings demonstrate that character education rooted in spiritual values is most effective when managed as a structured and school-wide process rather than delivered through incidental moral instruction or ritual activities alone. In both SDN Nanggala 1 and SDN Ciranjang 1, spiritual development was

sustained not merely by religious teachings but by coherent management practices that embedded values into daily routines, collaborative structures, and continuous supervision. This suggests that character formation is fundamentally both a pedagogical and managerial endeavor.

First, the planning practices identified in this study reflect the principles of strategic educational management. By embedding spiritual goals into school work plans, instructional designs, and activity schedules, both schools institutionalized character education within formal structures. This finding aligns with Bush's assertion that systematic planning determines the sustainability of educational programs and prevents initiatives from becoming fragmented or temporary [26]–[28]. Similarly, Hoy and Miskel emphasize that clear goal setting and structured planning enhance organizational coherence and accountability [29]. The present findings confirm that deliberate planning allows spiritual values to be consistently translated into actionable programs rather than remaining abstract ideals.

Second, the organizing stage highlights the importance of distributed leadership and collective responsibility in character education. Spiritual value integration was not limited to religious education teachers but involved classroom teachers, staff members, parents, and the broader school community. This collaborative approach supports Hallinger's concept of instructional and shared leadership, which posits that effective school improvement depends on coordinated efforts among all stakeholders [30]. When responsibilities are distributed, character education becomes embedded across subjects and activities, reinforcing values through multiple learning contexts. These results also resonate with Lickona's framework, which underscores **the role of the whole school environment in shaping students' moral behavior.**

Third, the implementation findings demonstrate that habituation and experiential learning are essential for internalizing spiritual values. Daily routines **such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, charity programs, and social service activities** enabled students to practice discipline, empathy, and responsibility directly. This supports experiential learning theory, which argues that meaningful character development occurs through repeated action and lived experience rather than passive instruction [31]. Previous studies similarly highlight that modeling and practice are more influential than verbal moral teaching in shaping children's behavior [32]. The current study extends these insights by demonstrating how such practices become more effective when supported by systematic management and routine reinforcement.

Fourth, continuous evaluation and monitoring were found to be critical for sustaining character development. Both schools relied on authentic assessments, behavioral observations, and reflective discussions rather than standardized testing. This approach corresponds with the concept of continuous improvement in educational management, where feedback loops facilitate learning and adaptation. Evaluation functioned as a developmental process that enabled teachers to identify gaps, provide immediate guidance, and refine strategies. Similarly, it argues that systematic monitoring enhances program credibility and effectiveness. Thus, evaluation not only measures outcomes but also reinforces the ongoing cultivation of values.

Despite these strengths, the study also identified challenges, including time limitations, varying teacher readiness, and the difficulty of assessing character outcomes objectively. Such challenges reflect broader concerns in character education research, where moral development is complex and context-dependent. However, the adaptive strategies observed, such as flexible coordination, parental involvement, and contextual activities, demonstrate the importance of responsive leadership. This aligns with the concept of adaptive leadership, which emphasizes flexibility and innovation in addressing contextual constraints. Effective management, therefore, becomes essential in overcoming structural and cultural barriers.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by integrating character education and educational management perspectives. While previous research often focuses on spiritual practices or moral instruction separately, this study frames spiritual value integration as a managerial process governed by planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation functions. This management lens offers a more comprehensive explanation of how character programs become institutionalized and sustainable. The novelty of the study lies in its comparative multi-site analysis, which illustrates that different approaches, ritual-based or contextual, can be equally effective when managed systematically.

Overall, the discussion suggests that strengthening students' character through spiritual values requires more than religious activities or moral messages. It demands strategic leadership, collaborative structures, consistent habituation, and reflective evaluation. When these managerial processes operate cohesively, spiritual education evolves into a lived school culture rather than a symbolic program. Consequently, enhancing school leaders' and teachers' managerial competencies is a crucial step toward achieving sustainable and meaningful character formation in elementary education.

4. CONCLUSION

This multi-site case study demonstrates that the successful integration of spiritual values for character formation depends on systematic educational management rather than isolated religious activities. The findings indicate that when spiritual values are embedded through structured planning, collaborative organization, consistent implementation, and continuous evaluation, character education becomes institutionalized as part of the school culture. The integration process is most effective when supported by shared responsibility among school leaders, teachers, parents, and the wider community. Thus, character formation emerges not merely from moral instruction but from coherent managerial practices that sustain value internalization in daily school life.

The implications of this study highlight the importance of strengthening managerial competencies among school leaders and teachers in implementing character education programs. Schools seeking to enhance students' moral development should adopt a holistic management approach that integrates spiritual values into strategic planning documents, collaborative structures, experiential learning routines, and authentic evaluation systems. For policymakers, the findings suggest that character education initiatives should be supported not only through curriculum mandates but also through leadership training and institutional capacity building.

This research is limited to two public elementary schools within a specific regional and cultural context in Indonesia. The qualitative multi-site design provides in-depth insights but does not aim for statistical generalization across broader educational settings. Differences in school culture, leadership style, religious interpretation, and community involvement may influence how spiritual values are integrated in other contexts.

Future research may expand the study across diverse regions, school types, or religious backgrounds to explore variations in spiritual value integration models. Quantitative or mixed-method studies could examine the measurable impact of managerial integration on students' behavioral outcomes. Further research may also investigate digital-era challenges and how spiritual character education adapts to technological and social changes.

In a broader societal perspective, this study contributes to the discourse on sustainable character education by demonstrating that spiritual value integration requires structured leadership, institutional commitment, and community collaboration. By transforming spiritual education into a managed and lived school culture, elementary schools can foster responsible, empathetic, and morally grounded individuals who are better prepared to contribute positively to society.

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