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The Principal's Role in Developing Religious and Disciplinary School Culture: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the need to understand how school leadership shapes value based cultures, particularly the integration of religious and disciplinary practices in elementary education. It aims to (1) explore the principal's role in developing religious culture, (2) examine the principal's role in fostering discipline culture, and (3) identify supporting and inhibiting factors influencing their implementation at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran. A qualitative case study approach was applied, with data collected through semi structured interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and sixth grade students. Data were analyzed using an interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that the principal plays a central role through four interconnected mechanisms: policy and program formulation, role modeling and value communication, supervision and reinforcement, and the provision of facilities alongside stakeholder engagement. Religious culture is manifested in routine worship practices, moral conduct, and courteous interactions, whereas discipline culture is reflected in rule compliance, punctuality, and student accountability. Both cultures are structurally linked, with religious values functioning as an internal driver that strengthens disciplined behavior. Supporting factors include strong teacher competence and commitment, parental involvement, and adequate infrastructure, while constraints arise from limited time, student resistance, and resource limitations. The study implies that effective leadership practice in schools requires principals to adopt a holistic and value driven approach by integrating moral frameworks into institutional policies, modeling expected behaviors consistently, and fostering collaborative engagement with stakeholders. Sustainable cultural development depends on adaptive leadership that aligns organizational systems, human resources, and environmental support to reinforce both internalized values and observable behaviors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character **education** constitutes a central priority within the national education system, yet its implementation often encounters gaps between formal curricular design and the internalization of values in students' daily behavior. A critical issue lies in how schools translate abstract values particularly religiosity and discipline into lived practices that shape student character. Although school culture is widely recognized as a medium for value transmission, inconsistencies remain evident across institutions, including fragmented policies, limited teacher alignment, and insufficient supervisory mechanisms. These conditions indicate that the problem is not merely conceptual but managerial, emphasizing the need to examine leadership practices that effectively integrate values into sustainable school culture. Addressing this issue requires a leadership centered approach that positions the principal as the key agent in orchestrating cultural transformation. This study proposes that the development of religious and disciplinary culture can be strengthened through systematic strategies, including the integration of values into institutional policies, the reinforcement of habituation programs, and the establishment of collaborative networks involving teachers, parents, and the broader community. By focusing on leadership practices, this research seeks to uncover how value internalization is operationalized through structured planning, consistent implementation, and continuous evaluation within the school environment.

This study aims to explore how principals develop religious and discipline culture in an elementary school context. Specifically, it seeks to analyze leadership roles in shaping value based practices and to identify contextual factors that influence their effectiveness. From a theoretical perspective, this research is grounded in educational leadership and organizational culture theories. Transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of role modeling and inspirational influence in shaping followers' behavior [1], while school culture theory highlights the role of repeated practices, shared norms, and institutional values in forming collective behavior. Furthermore, character education theory underscores that moral and disciplinary values are more effectively internalized when embedded in consistent daily activities rather than delivered solely through formal instruction [2]. These frameworks collectively support the argument that leadership, culture, and habituation are interconnected dimensions in shaping student character.

Previous studies have demonstrated that principal leadership significantly affects the development of religious and disciplinary culture. Research by [3] found that leadership effectiveness correlates with the successful integration of religious values into school routines. Similarly, [4] identified that strategies such as role modeling, policy alignment, and stakeholder collaboration contribute to strengthening discipline and religiosity in schools. Other studies emphasize the importance of teacher involvement and parental support in sustaining value based programs [5]. However, most existing research tends to be descriptive or concentrated at the secondary education level, leaving a gap in empirical evidence from elementary schools, particularly within faith based institutions like Muhammadiyah schools. Additionally, limited attention has been given to how leadership practices are contextualized within specific local settings. This study addresses that gap by focusing on SD

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Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran as a unique case, where significant institutional growth reflects increasing public trust. By examining how the principal systematically manages religious and disciplinary values, this research contributes a contextualized understanding of leadership practices at the elementary level within a faith based educational framework.

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The expected outcomes of this research include both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it aims to enrich the discourse on educational leadership by integrating perspectives on value based culture development in elementary education. Practically, the findings are expected to provide actionable insights for school leaders in designing and implementing effective strategies for character education. Ultimately, this study aspires to support the creation of sustainable school cultures that foster not only compliance with rules but also the internalization of moral and spiritual values among students.

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2. METHOD

Type and Research Approach

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This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply explore the principal's role in developing religious and disciplinary culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran. This approach is suitable for explaining contextual social phenomena and presenting rich, meaningful findings [6]. It supports diverse data collection methods (in depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation) and inductive analysis to identify patterns and themes [7]. In education, it effectively reveals leadership strategies, role modeling, habituation practices, and policy implementation dynamics [8].

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Research Location and Time

The study was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran, located in Lamongan, East Java, from January to June 2026. The school, under Muhammadiyah, emphasizes character building through religious and disciplinary values and has shown significant student growth (from 14 students in 2013 to 186 in 2026). This makes it a relevant setting to examine how principals develop and integrate these values into daily school life.

Data and Data Sources

a. Types of Data

The study uses primary data (interviews) and secondary data (documents, records, and related materials). Data are qualitative in nature (words, actions, documents) collected through interviews, observation, and documentation to understand phenomena holistically [9]. Data include:

1. The principal's role in developing religious and disciplinary culture.
2. Implementation of these cultures in school.
3. Their interrelationship in school life.
4. Supporting and inhibiting factors.

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b. Data Sources

Primary data come from the principal, teachers, staff, and students directly involved in school activities. Secondary data include school documents such as vision and mission, work programs, regulations, activity reports, and relevant prior studies (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected naturally using multiple methods to ensure depth and credibility including:

a. In depth Interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and students to explore leadership roles, the relationship between religious and disciplinary culture, and supporting and inhibiting factors.

b. Observation

Observation was used to directly examine school activities and social context, including religious practices (prayer, recitation), disciplinary behaviors (punctuality, rule compliance), and leadership role modeling.

c. Documentation Study

Documentation was used to obtain written and recorded data and verify findings [10], including school vision and mission, principal programs, school rules, activity reports, and other relevant archives.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [11]. In this process, data were coded thematically, beginning with open coding to identify initial concepts, followed by categorization into themes related to leadership roles, cultural implementation, and influencing factors. Thematic patterns were then interpreted to construct a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data Validity

To ensure trustworthiness, this study employed source triangulation (comparing data from different participants) and technique triangulation (cross verifying interview, observation, and documentation data), thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. RESULTS

The Role of the Principal in Building a Religious Culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran

The research findings indicate that the principal plays a strategic role in building a religious culture through mechanisms such as policy and program formulation, role modeling and value communication, supervision and reinforcement, as well as the provision of facilities and stakeholder involvement. These findings are in line with the concept of educational leadership that positions the principal as an agent of change within the school organization. According to [8], in the context of qualitative research, the role of key actors

greatly determines the direction and success of value implementation within a social system, including in educational settings. Furthermore, [12] emphasizes that the principal functions as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, and innovator who contributes to the overall development of school culture.

In terms of policy and program formulation, the principal of SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran has integrated religious values into the school's vision, mission, and structured habituation programs. Programs such as collective prayer, Qur'an recitation (tadarus), and routine religious activities reflect systematic efforts to internalize religious values. This is consistent with [13], who states that value based school policies are the primary foundation for building a strong school culture. Policies that are carefully designed and consistently implemented will create repeated behavioral patterns that eventually become culture.

Furthermore, in the aspect of role modeling and value communication, the findings show that the principal acts as a role model in demonstrating religious behavior within the school environment. The principal consistently demonstrates discipline, participates in worship activities, and communicates religious messages to the school community. These findings are consistent with transformational leadership theory proposed by [14], which states that effective leaders are able to influence subordinates through exemplary behavior and value based inspiration. In addition, [15] emphasizes that consistent value communication strengthens cultural internalization within educational organizations.

In the aspect of supervision and reinforcement, the principal monitors the implementation of religious activities and provides feedback to teachers and students. The supervision carried out is not merely supervisory in nature but also developmental and continuous. This is in line with the view of [16], who argue that processes of analysis and reflection in qualitative research strengthen understanding of social practices, including in the context of educational supervision. Furthermore, [17] emphasizes that effective supervision must be accompanied by constructive feedback and positive reinforcement to improve individual performance and behavior.

In terms of the availability of facilities and stakeholder involvement, this study shows that adequate facilities and support from teachers, parents, and the school committee are important factors in building a religious culture. The availability of prayer rooms, religious learning media, and a conducive school environment supports the optimal implementation of religious activities. This is consistent with [18], who states that the success of school management is strongly influenced by the availability of resources and stakeholder participation. In addition, [19] emphasizes that parental involvement in education contributes significantly to students' character development.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that religious culture in schools is not formed instantly but through a systematic and continuous process involving various components of the school. The principal, as a leader, plays a key role in integrating religious values into school policies, practices, and culture. Thus, the success of building a religious culture is largely determined by the quality of the principal's leadership in managing values, resources, and social relationships within the school environment in a holistic and sustainable manner.

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The Role of the Principal in Building a Discipline Culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran

The research findings show that the principal has a highly strategic role in building a discipline culture through four main mechanisms: policy and program formulation, role modeling and value communication, supervision and reinforcement, and the provision of facilities and stakeholder involvement. Discipline culture in the school context is not merely interpreted as compliance with rules, but as the result of value internalization formed through consistent and structured habituation processes. This is in line with the view of Husaini Usman (2019), who states that the principal, as an educational leader, has the responsibility to build a value system and organizational culture that supports the creation of disciplined behavior among school members. In addition, [20] emphasizes that effective school leadership is able to direct the behavior of organizational members through clear policies and consistent managerial practices.

In the aspect of policy and program formulation, the principal of SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran has established structured rules and discipline development programs, such as attendance regulations, punctuality, uniform usage, and orderly management of learning activities. These policies are not merely administrative but are also systematically socialized to teachers and students. These findings are consistent with [21], who states that school policies designed participatively and implemented consistently will form a strong discipline culture. Furthermore, recent research in educational management shows that the success of forming student discipline is strongly influenced by the clarity of rules, consistency of implementation, and the involvement of all school members in enforcing these rules.

In the aspect of role modeling and value communication, the principal demonstrates disciplined behavior through punctual attendance, compliance with rules, and firmness in enforcing regulations. This role modeling is important because teachers and students tend to imitate the behavior of leaders they directly observe. This is in line with transformational leadership theory proposed by [22], which emphasizes that idealized influence is one of the main components in shaping followers' behavior. In addition, communication of discipline values carried out repeatedly through morning assemblies, briefings, and daily interactions strengthens students' understanding and awareness of the importance of discipline. [23] also emphasizes that effective organizational communication plays an important role in shaping norms and individual behavior within an institution.

In the aspect of supervision and reinforcement, the principal actively monitors the implementation of discipline in the school environment, both through classroom visits, supervision of daily activities, and evaluation of violations that occur. In addition, the principal provides reinforcement in the form of appreciation for students and teachers who demonstrate disciplined behavior, as well as educational sanctions for violations. These findings are consistent with [24], who states that educational supervision must include coaching and reinforcement functions to improve the quality of individual behavior and performance. In this context, positive reinforcement has proven to be more effective in forming sustainable disciplined behavior compared to purely punitive approaches.

In terms of the availability of facilities and stakeholder involvement, this study shows that a well organized school environment, adequate facilities, and support from teachers and

parents are important factors in supporting the formation of a discipline culture. The availability of facilities such as rule boards, activity schedules, and orderly administrative systems helps students understand and comply with school regulations. This is consistent with [25], who states that good facilities management will create a conducive learning environment and support the formation of positive behavior. In addition, Joyce Epstein (2019) emphasizes that parental involvement in supporting school rules greatly influences the consistency of students' disciplined behavior, both at school and at home.

Principal's Role in Building Religious Culture

The findings show that the principal implements religious culture through four integrated mechanisms: (1) policy and program formulation, (2) role modeling and value communication, (3) supervision and reinforcement, and (4) provision of facilities with stakeholder involvement. Religious values are embedded in the school's vision, mission, and structured habituation programs such as collective prayers, Qur'an recitation, and routine worship activities. The principal consistently demonstrates religious behavior and communicates values through daily interactions, while supervision ensures the continuity of programs. Supporting facilities such as prayer spaces and religious learning media along with active involvement from teachers and parents, strengthen the implementation. As a result, religious culture is reflected in students' habitual worship practices, polite behavior, and internalized moral values.

Principal's Role in Building Discipline Culture

The development of discipline culture follows the same four mechanisms. The principal establishes clear and structured rules related to punctuality, attendance, and classroom order, which are consistently communicated and enforced. Role modeling is evident through the principal's punctuality and adherence to regulations, influencing both teachers and students. Supervision is conducted through regular monitoring and evaluation of student behavior, accompanied by reinforcement strategies such as rewards and educational sanctions. Facilities such as rule boards and structured schedules support behavioral consistency. Consequently, discipline culture is manifested in students' compliance with rules, responsibility, and orderly participation in school activities.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The findings identify several supporting factors, including strong teacher competence and commitment, parental involvement, adequate facilities, and consistent school policies. These elements facilitate the internalization of both religious and discipline values. However, several inhibiting factors were also observed. Time constraints limit the optimal implementation of programs, while student resistance particularly during early habituation affects consistency. In addition, limited resources and uneven teacher commitment in enforcing rules hinder the development of a stable school culture.

Relationship Between Religious and Discipline Culture

The study reveals a reciprocal relationship between religious and discipline culture. Religious values function as an internal foundation that shapes students' awareness and self regulation, while discipline represents the external manifestation of these values in daily behavior. Routine religious activities indirectly reinforce discipline by promoting punctuality, responsibility, and respect for rules. This integration results in a cohesive value system that supports character formation.

3.2. DISCUSSION

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Principals in Building Religious and Discipline Culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran

The findings indicate that the principal's success in building religious and discipline culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran is influenced by both supporting and inhibiting factors that interact with one another. From the perspective of educational management, the formation of school culture is the result of interactions among leadership, human resources, organizational systems, and the external environment. [26] emphasizes that the effectiveness of school leadership is strongly influenced by internal organizational conditions and environmental support; therefore, the success of value implementation depends not only on the leader but also on the readiness of the system as a whole. This is further supported by [27], who states that effective educational leadership must be capable of managing various contextual factors that influence school organizational performance.

The main supporting factor identified in this study is the competence and commitment of teachers in supporting religious and discipline programs. Teachers act as the direct implementers of values in the learning process and daily interactions with students. When teachers have a high level of understanding and awareness of the importance of religious and discipline values, the process of value internalization among students becomes more effective. This is in line with [28], who states that teacher quality is a key factor in the successful implementation of school culture. In addition, support from parents and the community is also an important factor, particularly in strengthening the consistency of values between the school and home environments. Joyce Epstein (2019) emphasizes that family involvement in education enhances the success of student character development, including in aspects of religiosity and discipline.

Furthermore, the availability of adequate facilities also supports the development of religious and discipline culture. Facilities such as places of worship, religious learning media, and a well organized school environment provide opportunities for students to continuously practice positive behaviors. This aligns with [29], who states that effective facilities management creates a conducive learning environment and supports the formation of school culture. In addition, the consistency of policies and programs designed by the principal is another important supporting factor, as program continuity strengthens the processes of habituation and value internalization among students.

However, this study also identifies several inhibiting factors affecting the effectiveness of the principal's role. One major obstacle is time constraints in program implementation, both for principals and teachers. The density of academic activities often causes religious and discipline habituation programs to be implemented suboptimally.

Additionally, there is resistance from some students toward the implementation of discipline rules, especially during the early stages of habituation. This is consistent with organizational change theory proposed by [30], which states that changes within organizations often encounter resistance from individuals who are not yet accustomed to new systems.

Other obstacles include limited resources, both in terms of additional facilities and technical support for program implementation. Although facilities are generally available, further development is still needed to support activities more optimally. In addition, the lack of consistency among some teachers in enforcing rules also becomes a barrier to building a strong discipline culture. [31] emphasizes that school cultural change requires collective commitment and consistency from all organizational members, and a lack of synergy among individuals can hinder the expected transformation process.

Overall, the findings indicate that the success of principals in building religious and discipline culture is highly influenced by the synergy between supporting factors and their ability to overcome existing challenges. Principals are required not only to design policies and programs but also to manage human resources, build collaboration with stakeholders, and create a conducive environment for value internalization. Therefore, adaptive, collaborative, and culture oriented leadership becomes the key to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of religious and discipline culture development in schools.

The Relationship Between Religious Culture and Discipline Culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran

The findings show that religious culture and discipline culture at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Maduran have an integrative and mutually reinforcing relationship in shaping students' character. Religious culture, manifested through habituation practices such as worship, collective prayers, and courteous behavior, functions not only as ritual activities but also as a value foundation that builds students' internal awareness of the importance of discipline. Religious values such as responsibility, honesty, and obedience directly contribute to the formation of disciplined behavior in daily school life. This is in line with Thomas Lickona (2018), who emphasizes that character education based on moral and spiritual values produces stronger self discipline compared to discipline based solely on formal rules.

This relationship is also evident in the habituation process consistently implemented in schools. Routine religious activities, such as prayers before and after lessons and collective worship, indirectly train students to be punctual, follow rules, and appreciate order. This process indicates that discipline is not only formed through rule enforcement but also through repeated value internalization in daily practices. This aligns with [32] theory of organizational culture formation, which states that culture is built through repeated patterns of behavior that are continuously practiced and transmitted within an organization.

Furthermore, the principal's role in integrating these two cultures is a key factor in their success. Through policies, role modeling, supervision, and the provision of a supportive environment, the principal is able to systematically link religious values with disciplinary practices. For example, emphasizing punctuality in worship activities also serves as a means of teaching time discipline to students. This is consistent with Tony Bush (2020), who states

that school leaders play a role in integrating organizational values into real practices through effective leadership mechanisms.

Moreover, the findings show that teachers act as reinforcing agents who bridge religious and discipline values within classroom learning. Teachers not only deliver subject matter but also instill religious values integrated with classroom rules and regulations. As a result, students understand rules not merely as formal obligations but as values that must be practiced.

However, the relationship between religious and discipline culture is also influenced by consistency and the context of implementation. If religious activities are carried out merely symbolically without reinforcing values, their impact on student discipline becomes less optimal. Therefore, continuous integration between values, practices, and reinforcement is necessary to ensure that both cultures are truly internalized. This is supported by [33], who states that value internalization requires contextual, reflective, and continuous processes to effectively influence individual behavior.

Religious culture is formed not only through ritual activities but through the consistent integration of institutional policies and daily practices, indicating that value internalization requires continuity and reinforcement, as character formation becomes more effective when embedded in habitual actions. In parallel, discipline culture evolves beyond mere rule enforcement, emerging from internal awareness shaped by repeated exposure to structured norms. A key finding of this study is the integrative relationship between religious and discipline culture, where religious values function as the moral foundation that strengthens disciplined behavior, suggesting that effective discipline relies on both internalized ethics and external regulation. Leadership effectiveness is further reinforced by the active involvement of teachers and stakeholders, as collaboration between schools and families enhances value consistency, although challenges such as time constraints and inconsistent implementation require adaptive leadership strategies. **This study is limited by its focus on a single case and** qualitative approach, which may affect generalizability, as well as its concentration on one grade level. Nevertheless, the findings highlight the importance of integrative leadership that aligns policy, role modeling, and collaboration to support sustainable character development, emphasizing that strong school culture emerges from continuous and systemic practices rather than isolated programs.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the development of religious and discipline culture in elementary schools is fundamentally shaped by integrative and value oriented leadership. The principal's role extends beyond administrative functions to orchestrating a cohesive system where values are embedded into policies, practices, and social interactions. The findings confirm that sustainable character formation emerges when leadership aligns institutional structures with continuous habituation and collective engagement, enabling values to be internalized rather than merely enforced. From a practical perspective, this research implies that effective school leadership should prioritize a holistic approach that combines strategic planning, exemplary conduct, and collaborative involvement of stakeholders. Schools seeking to strengthen character education need to ensure consistency

between formal regulations and daily practices, while also fostering synergy between teachers, parents, and the broader community. Such alignment enhances the sustainability of both religious and discipline culture within educational settings.

However, this study is bounded by its focus on a single elementary school context and the use of qualitative methods, which limit the generalizability of the findings. The contextual nature of the case also means that leadership practices and cultural dynamics may differ in other institutional or regional settings. Future research is recommended to expand the scope by incorporating comparative studies across multiple schools or educational levels, as well as integrating quantitative approaches to measure the impact of leadership on student outcomes more systematically. Further studies may also explore the role of digital environments and contemporary challenges in shaping school culture. This research contributes to the broader educational community by providing a contextual model of leadership driven culture development, offering insights that can inform policy, practice, and future academic inquiry in character education.

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