

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Positive School Culture: A Multisite Case Study at SMPN 6 Torgamba

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 2025-07-02

Revised 2025-08-04

Accepted 2025-08-05

Keywords:

Character education

Cultural transformation

Positive Culture

Role of Islamic Education Teachers

ABSTRACT

Creating a positive school culture is essential for fostering students' moral, social, and academic development. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are seen as key agents in cultivating value-based environments within educational institutions. This study aims to analyse the role of PAI teachers in shaping a positive culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba by identifying the forms of positive culture developed, the teachers' planning strategies, their functional roles, and the supporting and inhibiting factors involved. A qualitative method with a case study approach was applied, utilising participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and a documentation study. The findings reveal that five core aspects of positive culture have been developed at the school: religious culture, discipline culture, literacy culture, mutual cooperation culture, and tolerance culture. PAI teachers' planning encompasses learning, religious programs, collaboration, and self-development. Their roles are embodied in six dimensions: as educators (mu'allim), role models (uswatun hasanah), mentors (mursyid), motivators, cultural facilitators, and evaluators. Key factors include school policy support, inter-teacher collaboration, active student engagement, parental and community involvement, and adequate facilities. Conversely, challenges include time constraints, diverse student backgrounds, negative technological influences, limited teacher competencies, and resistance to change. This study highlights the strategic role of PAI teachers in driving cultural transformation and recommends greater institutional support for character-based education in public schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge but a transformative endeavour that shapes a society's character, personality, and cultural identity. As key

institutions in the formal education system, schools are entrusted with creating environments prioritising academic achievement and emphasising moral integrity, discipline, and social responsibility [1]. Within this educational framework, Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) plays a vital role in fostering students' religious and ethical foundations. It serves as a crucial medium through which religious principles are internalised through theoretical understanding and practical application in daily life [2].

PAI teachers hold a unique and strategic position in this process. Their role transcends the boundaries of conventional teaching; they are not only transmitters of religious content but also mentors, counsellors, and role models who embody the values they seek to instil [3], [4]. PAI teachers are expected to guide students in developing a strong moral compass rooted in Islamic teachings through their presence and conduct. Religious understanding influences how individuals interpret and respond to life's challenges, and without a solid foundation, students may find it difficult to adhere to religious norms in an increasingly complex and morally ambiguous society. The absence of early value inculcation or the dominance of an environment devoid of religious influence often results in behavioural tendencies that deviate from Islamic principles. This is where the role of PAI teachers becomes indispensable, as agents of change who teach and exemplify Islamic values [5].

In the broader context of school culture, values such as discipline, cooperation, responsibility, and empathy are essential elements of a positive environment. A positive school culture reflects a shared commitment to uphold norms and behaviours that support students' holistic growth. This culture is not created overnight but results from ongoing interaction, reinforcement, and modelling, largely influenced by the educators who guide students daily. Among these educators, PAI teachers are uniquely positioned to integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions into school life, encouraging students to embody values inspired by the Qur'an and Sunnah. Their role extends beyond the classroom, encompassing interactions during extracurricular activities, school ceremonies, and even informal conversations. These interactions contribute significantly to students' moral development, especially when the teachers consistently display good character.

National education policy in Indonesia has increasingly recognised the importance of character education, particularly in response to the perceived moral decline among younger generations. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum), as the latest reform in the national education system, positions character education as a foundational pillar alongside literacy and numeracy [5], [6]. This policy explicitly supports the integration of religious and cultural values within the school curriculum and recognises the strategic role of PAI teachers in achieving these goals. However, despite this policy support, the practical implementation of Islamic values in school culture often faces various challenges. These include limited understanding of effective character education methods, a lack of institutional support, insufficient collaboration with parents, and a school environment that may not always reflect Islamic values consistently. Moreover, there remains a gap between the ideals promoted in the curriculum and the realities of daily school life, where Islamic values may not be fully translated into behaviour or institutional

norms [7], [8], [9]. This study is centred on exploring the role of PAI teachers in building a positive school culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba, a junior high school recognised for its efforts in integrating Islamic values into its educational practices [10], [11], [12].

The school presents an interesting case for examining how religious values can shape the overall ethos of a learning environment [13], [14]. A multisite qualitative approach has been selected to allow for a deeper understanding of the strategies employed by PAI teachers and how these strategies manifest across different contexts within the same school. By examining multiple sites and interactions, this research aims to identify the pedagogical methods, institutional supports, and social dynamics that influence the success or limitations of character formation efforts rooted in Islamic teachings [15], [16], [17].

Although the role of teachers in shaping school culture has been widely studied, specific research on the sociocultural contributions of PAI teachers remains limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on academic performance or instructional design in religious education, while the broader impact of PAI teachers on school values, student behaviour, and institutional climate has not received sufficient attention. This study seeks to fill that gap by highlighting the multifaceted role of PAI teachers as cultural agents within the school system. The novelty of this research lies in its multisite approach, which allows for comparative insights across various school settings and deeper analysis of the different factors that influence outcomes. Unlike previous studies that often adopt a single-focus perspective, this research aims to present a more holistic view of how Islamic values are operationalised in real educational settings [18], [19], [20].

In light of these considerations, the main problem addressed in this study is the need to understand how PAI teachers can effectively contribute to building a positive school culture grounded in Islamic values, amidst various implementation challenges. Despite national educational directives supporting character development, the on-the-ground practices and influences of PAI teachers in shaping school culture remain underexplored. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies do PAI teachers at SMPN 6 Torgamba utilise in fostering a positive school culture?
2. What factors support or hinder the implementation of these strategies?
3. How do students and other stakeholders perceive the role of PAI teachers in developing school culture?

This research is expected to contribute meaningful insights into how Islamic-based pedagogical practices can be integrated into broader school development efforts by addressing these questions. Furthermore, it seeks to offer practical recommendations for educators, school leaders, and policymakers on enhancing the role of religious education in forming morally grounded school environments. This study's implications are relevant to Islamic education research and the wider discourse on education reform, particularly in multicultural and religiously diverse societies such as Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multisite case study method to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in cultivating a positive school culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba, located in South Labuhanbatu Regency. The qualitative design captured participants' rich, contextualised experiences and perspectives. At the same time, the multisite case study refers specifically to the examination of multiple units within the school—such as different grade levels, classrooms, and activity domains (e.g., religious extracurricular programs and school-wide events)—to gain a more holistic understanding of how PAI teachers contribute to the formation of school culture across various settings [21], [22], [23].

SMPN 6 Torgamba was selected purposively based on its distinctive characteristics: integrating Islamic values into school routines amidst a socio-culturally diverse student population. This diversity provides a relevant context for examining how PAI teachers navigate and implement religious and moral instruction in building a cohesive school environment.

The research subjects included 60 participants, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of data. The participants consisted of:

- a. 5 Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers
- b. 40 students across different grade levels
- c. 1 school principal
- d. 4 vice principals (curriculum, student affairs, facilities, and religious programs)
- e. 5 school administrative and educational staff
- f. 5 extracurricular and counselling teachers involved in religious and character education programs

Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques:

1. Participant Observation – conducted in various school environments such as classrooms during PAI lessons, religious extracurricular activities (e.g., Islamic studies clubs, congregational prayers), and informal interactions between teachers and students in the school compound. This provided contextual data on behaviour, teacher-student interaction, and the embodiment of values in daily activities.
2. Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews – held with key informants, including PAI teachers, school leaders, and students, to explore their experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding the role of religious education in shaping school culture. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis.
3. Documentation Study – involved analysing school documents such as the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, religious activity schedules, school policy handbooks, student achievement records, and related circulars to triangulate and validate observed practices and narratives.

The research process followed four systematic stages:

1. Preparation – including a literature review, securing research permits from the District Education Office and the school principal, developing observation and interview instruments, and obtaining ethical clearance.
2. Data Collection – carried out over two months to ensure depth and variety in observed data across different school contexts.
3. Data Analysis – guided by Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis model, which consists of five steps:
 - a. Familiarising with the data,
 - b. Generating initial codes,
 - c. Searching for themes,
 - d. Reviewing and refining themes through triangulation, and
 - e. Producing thematic interpretations supported by illustrative quotes and field notes.
3. Reporting of Findings – in a structured manner that highlights the thematic roles, strategies, and challenges PAI teachers face in promoting a positive school culture.

To ensure research validity and credibility, several verification strategies were employed:

1. Source Triangulation across interviews, observations, and document analysis.
2. Member Checking, where selected participants reviewed summaries of their responses for accuracy.
3. Peer Debriefing involves discussion with fellow researchers for critical review and reflection.
4. Audit Trail Documentation is maintained throughout the research process to ensure transparency.

Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study. Participants were informed of the research purpose, voluntary involvement, and the right to withdraw. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants (and guardians for students under 18). Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising participant names and data in all reporting. The research was conducted under a formal permit issued by the Education Office of South Labuhanbatu Regency and with the full support of the school administration.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This study reveals that the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in creating a positive culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba is significant. Based on data analysis obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, three main findings illustrate how PAI teachers contribute to shaping a school culture based on Islamic values.

Positive Culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba

The study conducted at SMPN 6 Torgamba revealed a strong presence of positive cultural values deeply embedded in the daily life of the school community. These values, cultivated through deliberate efforts by Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers and supported by the school leadership, manifest in five key dimensions of school culture: religiosity, discipline, literacy, cooperation, and tolerance.

The first and most prominent dimension is the religious culture, which forms the moral foundation of students' character education. Regular congregational *Dhuhr* prayers are conducted in the school's prayer room, with students and teachers participating collectively. Recitations of *Asmaul Husna* and communal prayers are held before lessons begin, while *tadarus* (Qur'anic reading) sessions are routinely conducted every Friday morning. The school also actively commemorates Islamic holidays, such as the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday and *Isra' Mi'raj*, with full participation from the school community. The principal emphasised in an interview, "*The formation of a religious culture is the main foundation in building students' character at SMPN 6 Torgamba. Without it, our efforts would be superficial.*" A Grade 8 student added, "*I used to be shy about praying in front of others, but now I feel closer to Allah because we do it together daily.*"

The second dimension is the culture of discipline, reflected in the punctuality of teachers and students. Time management is emphasised, with a firm adherence to scheduled learning hours and strict rules enforcement. Reward and punishment systems are consistently applied to reinforce accountability. One IRE teacher remarked that *discipline is the key to shaping student character. If a student understands discipline, they will automatically learn about responsibility and consequences.*" Observations confirmed that students arrived on time and wore uniforms neatly, reflecting the school's commitment to behavioural order.

Thirdly, the literacy culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba has grown significantly, supported by structured programs such as a 15-minute reading session before lessons begin, a revitalised library program, and the establishment of wall magazines curated by students with Islamic-themed content. Data from school documentation indicated a 40% increase in reading interest over the last two years. A librarian noted, "*Students now come to the library not just because they have to, but because they want to.*" Furthermore, inter-class Islamic writing competitions have fostered both creativity and critical thinking among students.

The fourth cultural element is cooperation (gotong royong). The spirit of working together is seen in communal clean-up efforts, especially before religious holidays, and in charitable initiatives like fundraising for peers affected by natural disasters. Teachers and students collaborate in organising religious events and extracurricular programs. One student shared, "*When my friend's house was damaged in a flood, we collected donations. It made me feel we are more than classmates—we are a family.*"

Lastly, the culture of tolerance is consciously cultivated through inclusive practices and respect for diversity. Despite various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, students are taught to embrace differences. This is facilitated through student dialogue forums and

multicultural school events. A teacher explained, “*We encourage students to express their identities while learning to listen and respect others. This prepares them for life beyond school.*” A student stated, “*Even though I am from a different ethnic group, I feel accepted and appreciated here.*”

While the school’s positive culture appears well-developed, further research could explore measurable impacts—such as improvements in academic performance, attendance, or behavioural incidents—using quantitative tools. Nevertheless, the current findings, supported by rich qualitative data, underscore the pivotal role of Islamic Religious Education teachers and school leadership in shaping a values-driven, inclusive, and character-building environment at SMPN 6 Torgamba.

Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Planning in Creating a Positive Culture

The plan to foster a positive school culture was structured and comprehensive by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMPN 6 Torgamba. Four main planning dimensions were identified based on interviews with teachers, the principal, and students, and documentation analysis.

First, in instructional planning, PAI teachers formulated a syllabus and lesson plans that explicitly included character values aligned with Islamic teachings. The materials were designed to integrate positive cultural values, supported by interactive and student-centred teaching methods, to internalise those values. Additionally, evaluation tools were prepared to comprehensively assess students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. One PAI teacher, Mr. Rahmad, explained, “*In every lesson plan, we insert values like honesty, discipline, and tolerance, and ensure the learning activities reflect those principles—not just in theory, but in practice.*” A student supported his statement, Rina (Grade 8), who said, “*During our Islamic lessons, we often do group discussions where we are asked to reflect on our daily behaviour. That makes us more aware of our actions.*”

Second, regarding religious program planning, teachers developed annual activity schedules harmonised with the academic calendar. These included religious mentoring sessions conducted in small student groups, extracurricular religious activities such as Rohis (Rohani Islam), and Islamic holiday commemorations involving the entire school community. Documents such as the annual work plan of the Islamic Religious Education teacher illustrated the detailed and measurable nature of these religious programs. “*We ensure that every religious activity—from daily dhuha prayers to Islamic Day celebrations—is planned thoroughly, so students are not only participating but also understanding its meaning,*” noted Ms. Lestari, another PAI teacher.

Third, collaborative planning was a critical dimension, as reflected in the coordination between PAI teachers and various stakeholders—principals, subject teachers, parents, and local religious leaders. Regular meetings were held with parents to strengthen home-school synergy, while collaboration with community religious figures supported the execution of shared values. Moreover, joint program planning with the student council (OSIS) enabled student involvement in shaping a positive culture. The school principal, Mr. Sopian, emphasised, “*The success of our religious programs lies in the inclusive planning process. Our PAI teachers always involve others, including the students*

themselves.” An OSIS member, Fikri, echoed this: “*We are often asked to help organise religious events like Maulid Nabi and Ramadan programs. It makes us feel trusted and responsible.*”

Finally, self-development planning was evident in teachers’ efforts to enhance their professional capacity. This included participation in training and workshops, classroom action research, and involvement in the district-level MGMP (Subject Teacher Forum). PAI teachers also conducted comparative studies to observe best practices in other schools. Documentation showed that PAI teachers had attended at least five competency-building activities over the past year, highlighting their commitment to continuous improvement. “*We are not just teaching; we are also learning and growing,*” said Mr. Rahmad, “*because if we want to instil values, we must first embody them ourselves.*”

These dimensions of planning reflect Islamic Religious Education teachers’ proactive and collaborative role in shaping a school environment characterised by positive values and religious character. The various voices—from teachers to students to leadership—illustrate a unified commitment to embedding a culture of goodness in every aspect of school life.

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Creating a Positive Culture

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers at SMPN 6 Torgamba play a crucial and multifaceted role in cultivating a positive school culture. This role is manifested through six interrelated dimensions: educator, role model, guide, motivator, cultural facilitator, and evaluator. Each of these dimensions is implemented simultaneously and reinforces the others in daily school life.

First, the role of the IRE teacher as an *educator (mu'allim)* is central to integrating Islamic values into students’ cognitive and affective domains. Observations of classroom practices reveal that teachers consistently embed character education into their teaching materials, using real-life examples from Islamic teachings. One student remarked, “*When Ustadz teaches us, he connects the lesson to our daily life. It is not just about passing the test but becoming a better Muslim.*” Evaluations used by IRE teachers are described by students as fair and constructive, focusing on academic outcomes and behavioural and spiritual growth.

Second, the teacher functions as a *role model (uswatan hasanah)*, a role regarded highly by students. The consistent alignment between the teacher’s speech and actions builds trust and admiration among learners. A student shared in an interview: “*We respect and idolise our Islamic teacher because he does not just tell us what is right—he shows it in his behaviour. He is always kind, disciplined, and fair.*” Teachers model Islamic etiquette and discipline, influencing the overall moral tone of the school environment.

Third, as a *guide (mursyid)*, the IRE teacher provides personalised spiritual and emotional guidance. This role is reflected in small-group mentoring sessions and targeted religious counselling programs. One teacher says, “*Many students come to me not just to ask about religious rules, but also when they feel anxious, confused, or lost. I try to help them find peace through Islamic understanding.*” The documentation of these activities highlights the teacher’s involvement in fostering student resilience and moral awareness.

Fourth, the teacher's role as a *motivator* is apparent in using creative methods to inspire students to practice Islamic teachings. Strategies such as motivational storytelling from Islamic history, religious competitions, and behaviour-based reward programs are routinely employed. The principal commented: "*Our Islamic teachers are remarkable motivators—not only in religious matters but also in academics and self-confidence. They always find a way to lift the students' spirits.*" These approaches are credited with increasing student participation in religious activities and improving class discipline.

Fifth, the teacher acts as a *cultural facilitator*, responsible for shaping the school's religious atmosphere. IRE teachers cultivate a supportive environment for spiritual growth by initiating school-wide events such as congregational dhuha prayers, Islamic book corners, and discussion forums. Observations noted the presence of Islamic artefacts, such as calligraphy, motivational posters, and designated prayer spaces throughout the school. One teacher explained: "*We want students to feel Islam not only in the classroom but every corner of the school.*"

Finally, the role of *evaluator* involves the ongoing assessment of student behaviour and the effectiveness of religious programs. The IRE teacher collaborates with the school administration to reflect on the successes and shortcomings of various initiatives. The documentation states that a structured evaluation system monitors student progress and program outcomes. A teacher reflected: "*After each activity, we evaluate what worked and what did not. Sometimes we see improvement in behaviour and attendance. For example, after we started the dhuha prayer program, we noticed fewer latecomers and better attitudes in the morning.*"

Despite the substantial qualitative impact, further research is needed to measure the quantitative effectiveness of these strategies, such as improvements in student performance or reductions in behavioural issues compared to schools without such programs. Nonetheless, the integration of teacher interviews, student reflections, and documentation confirms that the IRE teacher's role is not isolated to religious instruction but significantly contributes to shaping a holistic, value-driven school culture.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Creating a Positive Culture

The study reveals that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers at SMPN 6 Torgamba play a vital role in fostering a positive school culture through six interconnected roles: educator, role model, guide, motivator, cultural facilitator, and evaluator. Educators (mu'allim) incorporate Islamic values into daily lessons, use character-based learning methods, and apply fair assessment practices. Classroom observations show that lessons emphasise religious knowledge and the shaping of Islamic attitudes and behaviours. One student, R.A. (Grade 9), expressed, "*I enjoy the way our teacher connects religious lessons to our daily lives—it makes the subject more meaningful and easier to apply outside the classroom.*"

As role models (uswatun hasanah), IRE teachers demonstrate consistent behaviour in line with Islamic teachings. A student shared, "*We respect and idolise the Islamic teacher because he not only teaches about Islam but also exemplifies it in his daily life.*"

Another teacher from the school added, “*The way PAI teachers carry themselves—calm, disciplined, and respectful—has a big influence on students' behaviour in general.*”

As guides (mursyid), these teachers provide personal mentoring, organise small-group religious sessions, and support students' self-development. Documentation from counselling sessions reflects their proactive involvement in addressing moral and religious issues. One student admitted, “*I once had personal struggles, but my PAI teacher listened to me and gave advice that helped me improve.*”

As motivators, IRE teachers create programs that reward positive behaviour, encourage religious practices, and use inspiring stories from Islamic history to spark enthusiasm. The school principal noted, “*Our Islamic Religious Education teachers have extraordinary abilities in motivating students, not only in religious matters but also in academic and personal development.*” Meanwhile, a member of the Student Council said, “*Rohi's activities are always exciting because we feel supported and encouraged by our teachers to be better Muslims and students.*”

As cultural facilitators, they coordinate religious activities that involve the entire school, create a conducive religious environment, and promote dialogue on contemporary issues. Observations show that the school is adorned with Islamic elements such as calligraphy and motivational posters. A local religious leader who often collaborates with the school remarked, “*The school is one of the few in the area that actively involves the community in student character development.*”

Lastly, in their role as evaluators, they assess character development, monitor program effectiveness, and involve stakeholders in reflecting on improvements. Though these practices are systematically documented, the study suggests more analytical comparisons with other institutions and more precise behavioural or academic outcomes data.

3.2. Discussion

The positive culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba manifests through five interconnected dimensions—religiosity, discipline, literacy, cooperation, and tolerance—all deeply rooted in Islamic values that permeate school life beyond the classroom. This culture reflects a holistic internalisation of Islamic teachings, where traditions and behavioural norms are infused with religious principles. Religious practices in the school have transcended mere ritual and symbolism, shaping the character of both students and educators. A PAI teacher remarked, “*We try to make religion not just part of a subject, but a lived experience throughout the school environment.*”

Discipline at the school is not only enforced through rules but is internalised through habitual practices informed by religious routines. Daily worship, punctuality, and orderliness are integrated into students' behaviour, reflecting Durkheim's and Charles's theories that stress the moral significance of consistent discipline. Combining routine religious practices and moral development strengthens students' sense of responsibility and respect.

The literacy culture integrates Islamic knowledge with general critical thinking skills. Reading materials and reflective activities focus on deepening students'

understanding of Islam while nurturing intellectual curiosity. This resonates with Al-Attas' emphasis on knowledge rooted in values. A student explained, "*Reading about the lives of the prophets not only helps my faith but also inspires me to think more deeply about how I behave in daily life.*"

Mutual cooperation and tolerance are emphasised in the school community, reflecting Islamic teachings on brotherhood and harmony. Students from different backgrounds work together on religious events, community service, and inter-grade mentoring. These practices foster an inclusive environment, encouraging respect and compassion. A teacher shared, "*We always remind our students that Islam teaches rahmatan lil'alamin—mercy for all. That means respecting and helping one another, no matter where you come from.*"

In planning cultural development, Islamic Religious Education teachers adopt a four-pronged approach: instructional planning, religious programming, collaboration, and personal growth. Lesson plans systematically incorporate character values, ensuring the learning experience supports moral formation. Religious activities such as Qur'an recitations, Islamic celebrations, and mentoring programs are deliberately planned to align with the curriculum and student needs. A PAI teacher noted, "*Our programs are not spontaneous; we design them carefully to match students' development and integrate them into our academic calendar.*"

Collaboration extends to partnerships with other teachers, school leaders, and external communities. Cross-subject integration of Islamic values and joint activities with non-PAI teachers creates a unified cultural atmosphere. Planning also includes professional development. PAI teachers actively participate in MGMP forums and seek training to adapt to students' changing contexts. One teacher reflected, "*To guide students effectively, we must continuously learn and reflect on ourselves. That is why I joined comparative studies and teacher discussions.*"

The role of PAI teachers in shaping school culture is multifaceted. They act as educators, moral exemplars, mentors, motivators, facilitators, and evaluators. This comprehensive role mirrors Islamic pedagogical traditions and modern educational theories. Teachers guide not only through instruction but through personal conduct. Students mentioned that "*PAI teachers practice what they preach—when we see them patient, disciplined, and humble, we are encouraged to follow.*" Their mentorship extends beyond academics into spiritual and personal guidance, often through counselling sessions or informal conversations.

As cultural facilitators, these teachers initiate and sustain religious symbols and rituals that reinforce identity, from daily prayers to decorative artefacts carrying Islamic messages. They also evaluate students' moral and religious development through continuous observation and structured feedback, adjusting strategies as needed.

In terms of support, the school benefits from clear policies prioritising Islamic values, including vision statements, budgeting, and regulations reinforcing religious identity. The principal stated, "*We allocate funds and time because religious culture is a school priority, not a side activity.*" Teacher collaboration further strengthens this ecosystem, as seen in joint program execution and consistent behaviour modelling across

all subjects. Active student involvement, such as through OSIS and rohis, helps reinforce ownership of values. A student explained, *“It feels different when we lead the prayer programs ourselves—we are more engaged and serious.”*

The broader community, including parents and religious leaders, also supports these efforts. Parents often attend Islamic parenting seminars and provide feedback through regular meetings. Community figures are invited to school events, lending social legitimacy and continuity between school and home values. Additionally, the school is well-equipped with prayer rooms, religious learning tools, and reading resources that physically represent the school's commitment to Islamic education.

Nevertheless, several barriers exist. Time constraints limit how deeply PAI content can be delivered, especially with only three weekly instructional hours. Teachers report difficulties in scheduling religious activities around academic demands. “Sometimes, I want to hold extra sessions, but there is just no room in the schedule,” one teacher shared.

Student diversity presents another challenge. Religious understanding and practices vary widely due to differing family backgrounds. Observations reveal noticeable gaps in students' religious habits. This variability demands differentiated approaches, which can be challenging to implement consistently.

Technology adds further complexity. Students spend 4–5 hours daily on gadgets and social media, often absorbing content at odds with Islamic values. One student admitted, “Sometimes I skip reading Qur'an because I get distracted scrolling TikTok.” Teachers struggle to counter these influences within limited contact time.

Another constraint is the lack of specific training for PAI teachers in developing culture-based Islamic pedagogy. Teachers noted the absence of targeted workshops or resources on building school culture. Resistance to change from some school members also hampers progress. Veteran teachers, for instance, questioned newer PAI methods. “They say our way is too flashy or deviates from the norm,” a young teacher shared.

Overall, the findings show that while a positive culture has been substantially developed at SMPN 6 Torgamba through the proactive efforts of PAI teachers and the school community's support, various sociocultural and structural challenges persist. Addressing these barriers through strategic policy, professional development, and adaptive cultural programming remains essential to sustaining and enhancing Islamic values within the school context [24], [25], [26].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in creating a positive culture at SMPN 6 Torgamba, it can be concluded that PAI teachers have a significant and multidimensional contribution in shaping and developing a positive school culture. Their roles encompass being educators, role models, mentors, motivators, cultural facilitators, and evaluators. These roles are reflected in the successful cultivation of five core cultural aspects: religious culture, discipline culture, literacy culture, mutual cooperation culture, and tolerance culture. These values are embedded in daily routines and various school activities, contributing to a conducive and value-driven educational environment. This success is supported by systematic planning, including

integrating religious and moral values into lesson planning, implementing school religious programs, collaborating with various stakeholders, and continuous teacher professional development. External factors such as supportive school policies, inter-teacher collaboration, active student involvement, support from parents and the community, and adequate school facilities further enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. However, the development of a positive school culture is not without challenges. Limitations such as time constraints in the curriculum, diversity in student backgrounds, negative influences of technology and social media, limited competencies of some teachers, and resistance to change from students or stakeholders need to be addressed. These obstacles highlight the importance of ongoing strategies that are adaptive and sustainable. The implications of this study suggest that policymakers and school leaders must recognise the strategic role of PAI teachers not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as cultural agents who contribute to holistic student development. Future educational policies should institutionalise support systems for teachers to effectively integrate character and cultural values through curriculum design, training programs, and inter-sectoral cooperation. To address the identified limitations, it is recommended that schools invest in capacity-building initiatives for teachers, especially in cultural leadership and digital literacy. Stronger collaboration with families and local communities and school-based innovations tailored to local contexts are essential in strengthening and sustaining a positive culture. This research addresses the gap highlighted in the introduction—namely, the limited exploration of the role of PAI teachers in fostering school culture, particularly in rural or underrepresented school contexts. By providing a detailed analysis of both internal and external contributing factors, this study offers a model that can inform similar efforts in other regions. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of cultural initiatives led by PAI teachers or to compare models across different educational settings to refine further strategies for nurturing positive school culture nationwide.

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