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SCHOOL CULTURE AS A FIELD OF RELIGIOUS HABITUS FORMATION IN ISLAMIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A BOURDIEUSIAN CRITICAL REVIEW

Budaya Sekolah sebagai Arena Pembentukan Habitus Religius di Sekolah Dasar Islam: Tinjauan Kritis Bourdieusian

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Abstract

Penelitian tentang pendidikan karakter religius di sekolah dasar Islam di Indonesia sebagian besar mendokumentasikan program dan kegiatan pembiasaan, sedangkan mekanisme kultural yang membuat praktik berulang menjadi disposisi yang menetap masih kurang diteorikan. Artikel ini mengembangkan penjelasan konseptual atas mekanisme tersebut dengan mengintegrasikan kerangka field–habitus–capital Pierre Bourdieu, teori pendidikan karakter, dan konsep klasik pembentukan akhlak dalam tradisi Islam (ta'dib, riyadhah, uswah hasanah). Kajian menggunakan critical integrative literature review terhadap 21 artikel peer-reviewed terbitan 2021–2026, dilengkapi karya teoretis fondasional. Artikel-artikel tersebut dikode secara tematik ke dalam delapan kategori dan ditafsirkan melalui empat dimensi analitis: budaya sekolah sebagai arena, pembiasaan sebagai praktik, modal para aktor, serta pengakuan simbolik. Sintesis menunjukkan bahwa karakter religius lebih mungkin terbentuk ketika nilai Islam terintegrasi secara koheren dalam rutinitas, aturan, relasi, keteladanan guru, kepemimpinan, kemitraan keluarga, dan partisipasi siswa, bukan terbatas pada pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI). Karena itu, program yang sama dapat menghasilkan dampak berbeda antarsekolah, bergantung pada posisinya dalam arena sekolah, distribusi modal antaraktor, dan apakah pengakuan diberikan pada perilaku etis yang substantif atau sekadar kepatuhan ritual yang tampak. Artikel ini menawarkan kerangka rekursif lima lapis dan enam proposisi yang dapat diuji, serta mengingatkan bahwa budaya religius sekolah dapat

memunculkan kekerasan simbolik dan religiusitas performatif apabila koherensi dan agensi siswa diabaikan.

Research on religious character education in Indonesian Islamic primary schools has largely documented programs and habituation activities, while the cultural mechanism through which repeated practices become durable dispositions remains under-theorised. This article develops a conceptual explanation of that mechanism by integrating Pierre Bourdieu's field–habitus–capital framework with character-education theory and classical Islamic concepts of moral formation (*ta'dib*, *riyadah*, *uswah hasanah*). A critical integrative literature review was conducted on 21 peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2026, supplemented by foundational theoretical works. The studies were coded thematically into eight categories and interpreted through four analytical dimensions: school culture as field, habituation as practice, actors' capital, and symbolic recognition. The synthesis shows that religious character is more plausibly formed when Islamic values are embedded coherently in routines, rules, relationships, teacher exemplarity, leadership, family partnership, and student participation rather than confined to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons. The same program can therefore yield different outcomes across schools, depending on its position within the school field, the distribution of capital among actors, and whether recognition rewards substantive ethical conduct or merely visible ritual compliance. The article proposes a five-layer recursive framework and six testable propositions, and cautions that school religious culture may generate symbolic violence and performative religiosity when coherence and student agency are absent. The framework provides a basis for empirical research and for designing whole-school religious character education in Islamic primary schools.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The development of religious character in primary education cannot be reduced to the transmission of religious knowledge. At the elementary level, children encounter values through repeated experiences, relationships, routines, language, symbols, expectations, and the responses of significant adults. Character-education theory has long held that good character involves moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1991). The school is therefore not merely a place where religious concepts are taught; it is a social environment in which students learn what is considered normal, admirable,

unacceptable, and worthy of recognition. A mixed-method study of 576 Indonesian teachers found that character values are implemented mainly through habituation, integration, and imitation, and that teachers struggled to sustain these mechanisms when face-to-face interaction was lost during virtual learning (Hidayat et al., 2022).

A growing body of Indonesian research links religious character to school culture. A systematic review of character education in Indonesian Islamic elementary schools identified religious, nationalist, social, disciplinary, and mutual-cooperation values as recurring themes and recommended coaching, mentoring, and individual approaches supported by curriculum and madrasah programs (Arif et al., 2024). Qualitative case studies at the primary level describe religious character being cultivated through habitual congregational prayer, religious artefacts, and school vision (Bela & Santosa, 2023); through compulsory religious activities, teacher habituation and example, and school rules in a *madrasah ibtidaiyah* (Ikmal & Sa'adah, 2023); and through a culture of religious moderation integrated into intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities (Shawmi et al., 2025). Quantitative work in *madrasah ibtidaiyah* has also linked principals' pedagogical competence and school culture with students' character development (Juminah et al., 2023). In pesantren settings, a recent systematic review of 50 studies identified role modelling, habituation, curricular and institutional integration, and pesantren culture as a hidden curriculum as the main models of character education (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026).

Nevertheless, an analytical gap remains. Most of these studies describe *what* schools do congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, greeting routines, discipline, teacher exemplification and report that these practices contribute to religious character. Far fewer explain *how* such practices become part of students' relatively durable ways of perceiving, feeling, judging, and acting, or why the same program appears formative in one school and ceremonial in another. Even ecosystem-oriented work concentrates on pesantren and on identifying components rather than theorising the mechanism that links institutional practice to disposition (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026). Conversely, Bourdieusian analyses in religious education have mainly addressed policy discourse and curriculum reform rather than the everyday culture of primary schools (Matemba, 2021). The gap is therefore threefold: a mechanism gap (from program to disposition), a level gap (primary education), and an integration gap (between sociological theory, character-education theory, and Islamic concepts of moral formation).

The concept of school culture offers a starting point. Organisational culture comprises shared basic assumptions, espoused values, and visible artefacts (Schein, 2010); in schools, it is expressed through norms, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and relationships that shape how members experience institutional life (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Much of this influence operates through a hidden curriculum of routines, expectations, and evaluations that students learn alongside the formal curriculum (Jackson, 1968). School culture shapes adults as well as children: even the way student teachers share pedagogical knowledge with

their mentors depends on the support and explanation that the wider school culture provides (Cásková & Chudý, 2021). Character-education scholarship likewise argues that effective implementation requires attention to school climate and implementation quality, not only to discrete programs (Berkowitz, 2022).

Pierre Bourdieu's theory provides a productive lens for deepening this analysis. Bourdieu conceptualises social practice as the product of the relationship between habitus and capital within a field (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990). A *field* is a structured social space of positions in which actors compete over what counts as legitimate; *habitus* is a system of durable, transposable dispositions produced by social conditions and generative of practice; and *capital* economic, cultural, social, and symbolic comprises the resources valued within a field (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Applied to Islamic primary education, school culture can be interpreted as a field in which religious practices acquire legitimacy; teachers and leaders hold and distribute different forms of capital; students gradually acquire the practical logic of the institution; and repeated participation may produce religious dispositions.

Bourdieu's framework is not a neutral toolkit, however. His sociology of education was developed to show how schools reproduce social hierarchies by treating the cultural capital of dominant groups as natural merit and by exercising symbolic violence the imposition of meanings as legitimate while concealing the power relations behind them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Matemba (2021) shows how religious identity and struggles over symbolic power shape debates about religious education. A Bourdieusian reading of religious school culture must therefore ask not only how values become dispositions but also whose religiosity is recognised as legitimate and at what cost to students whose prior experiences differ. This critical edge distinguishes the present review from functionalist accounts of habituation.

Character-education and religious-education scholarship offer complementary perspectives. A longitudinal multilevel study of 1,865 Brazilian fourth and fifth graders found that justice beliefs mediate the relationship between an authoritative school climate and character virtues such as fairness and prosocial leadership (Thomas et al., 2023). Interviews with religious education teachers in England show broad agreement that the subject contributes to character and virtue literacy, but disagreement over whether moral virtues should be taught explicitly or left as an implicit by-product (Metcalfe et al., 2023), while teachers also respond creatively to whole-school values policies (McDonnell, 2023). Research on religious education further emphasises social justice, care, and epistemic justice (Mogra, 2022; Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022).

Islamic educational thought offers its own vocabulary for the same problem, yet this vocabulary is rarely brought into dialogue with sociological theory. Ibn Miskawayh argued that character (*khuluq*) is not fixed but can be reshaped through training and habituation (Ibn Miskawayh, 1968). Al-Ghazālī described moral formation as *riyadat al-nafs* disciplined, repeated practice that makes good conduct

increasingly natural and emphasised the decisive role of early upbringing and exemplary adults in forming children's dispositions (al-Ghazali, 1995). Al-Attas (1980) conceptualised Islamic education as *ta'dib*, the instilling of *adab*, understood as the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of things. These ideas have a notable affinity with Bourdieu: the Latin *habitus* translates Aristotle's *hexis*, a concept that also informed Miskawayh's ethics. At the same time, the Islamic tradition adds what Bourdieu deliberately brackets a normative horizon that specifies which dispositions are worth forming.

This article therefore addresses the question: how can school culture be understood as a field that transforms Islamic values into religious habitus among primary-school students? It has three objectives: (1) to identify the dominant mechanisms through which school culture contributes to religious character formation in the reviewed literature; (2) to reinterpret those mechanisms through Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital, including their critical implications; and (3) to formulate an integrated framework that connects Bourdieusian sociology, character-education theory, and Islamic concepts of moral formation.

The article makes three contributions. Theoretically, it shifts the unit of analysis from "religious activities" to the cultural mechanism that makes activities meaningful and durable. Analytically, it links school culture, habitus, capital, and symbolic recognition with character education and Islamic concepts of *ta'dib* and *riyadah* rather than treating them as separate traditions. Practically, it derives design principles and testable propositions for Islamic primary schools that seek to make religious character part of everyday institutional life.

B. METHOD

This study employed a critical integrative literature review. A critical review goes beyond summarising publications to evaluate ideas across a body of literature and generate conceptual innovation, such as a model or theoretical synthesis (Grant & Booth, 2009). An integrative orientation suits topics studied across different traditions and methodologies because it allows empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to be combined without treating heterogeneous studies as statistically commensurable (Snyder, 2019). Because the aim was theory building rather than effect estimation, the review followed the logic of a theory-synthesis conceptual article, in which concepts from different research streams are integrated to explain a focal phenomenon (Jaakkola, 2020). The review therefore does not claim the exhaustive coverage or effect estimation expected of a systematic review.

The search was organised around four conceptual clusters: (a) school culture and school climate; (b) religious, moral, or character formation; (c) Islamic or religious education in school settings; and (d) Bourdieusian concepts such as field, habitus, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, and practice. English and Indonesian terms were combined, for example ("school culture" OR "budaya sekolah" OR "kultur

sekolah") AND ("religious character" OR "karakter religius" OR "character education") AND ("Islamic" OR "madrasah" OR "sekolah dasar"), together with ("Bourdieu" OR "habitus" OR "cultural capital") AND ("religious education" OR "character education"). Sources were identified through Scopus-indexed journal records, SINTA records, Google Scholar, and official journal portals, supplemented by backward citation searching. The final search and the verification of every retained source against its journal landing page or DOI record were completed in September 2026.

Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026, written in English or Indonesian, available in full text, verifiable through a DOI or an official journal record, and directly relevant to school culture or climate, religious or moral character formation, Islamic or religious education, or Bourdieusian explanations of practice, with either a primary-school focus or clearly transferable implications. Publications with only incidental reference to character or religion, conference papers, theses, and records whose bibliographic details could not be verified were excluded. Foundational theoretical works (Bourdieu, Lickona, Schein, and classical Islamic sources) and methodological sources were used to define concepts and justify the approach but were not part of the reviewed corpus. The final corpus comprised 21 studies.

Of the 21 studies, 13 were conducted in Indonesian contexts and eight in international contexts (England, Scotland and Malawi, the Czech Republic, Brazil, and the United States). Nine focused on the primary level, including *madrasah ibtidaiyah*, general elementary schools, parents of Islamic primary pupils, and primary *maktab* curricula; the remainder addressed junior and senior secondary schools, pesantren, teacher education, or general school contexts (Appendix Table A1). Findings from non-primary settings were used only to illuminate mechanisms and are explicitly marked as transferred in the discussion.

Analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in four stages. First, each study was mapped by context, educational level, design, and central concepts. Second, findings were coded both inductively and deductively into eight categories: institutional routines, teacher modelling, peer relations, leadership, family engagement, symbolic environment, curriculum integration, and student agency. Third, these categories were interpreted through four analytical dimensions derived from Bourdieu's framework and character-education theory (Table 1). Fourth, convergent and divergent findings were synthesised into a conceptual framework and a set of propositions. Coding was conducted by a single author; to enhance trustworthiness, an audit trail of coding decisions was maintained and the emerging framework was checked against disconfirming findings. This procedure follows the critical-review logic of appraisal, synthesis, and conceptual development (Grant & Booth, 2009) and responds to calls for explicit theoretical frameworks in religious-education research (Cullen, 2022).

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions of the Review

Analytical Dimension	Key Question	Indicative Literature	Interpretive Implication
School culture as field	Which practices and norms become legitimate in the school?	Schein (2010); Deal & Peterson (2016); Bela & Santosa (2023); Ikmal & Sa'adah (2023)	Culture structures the range of acceptable action.
Habituation as practice	How do repeated activities become ordinary conduct?	Hidayat et al. (2022); Arif et al. (2024); Harfi et al. (2025); Shawmi et al. (2025)	Repetition matters when connected to meaning and relationships.
Actors' capital	Who embodies and legitimises values, and with what resources?	Akhyar et al. (2024); Juminah et al. (2023); Diana et al. (2021); Pramono et al. (2023)	Adult exemplarity and school–family networks mediate value formation.
Symbolic recognition	Which conduct is recognised as a sign of a "good student"?	Bourdieu & Passeron (1990); Matemba (2021); Thomas et al. (2023); Stones & Fraser-Pearce (2022)	Recognition can reinforce substantive virtue or reward mere ritual performance.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. School Culture as Field: Beyond a Collection of Religious Programs

Across the reviewed literature, religious character education is implemented through recurring practices: congregational prayer, Qur'anic reading, religious greetings, moral reminders, cleanliness, discipline, religious celebrations, teacher modelling, and extracurricular activities. These practices appear consistently in primary-level studies (Bela & Santosa, 2023; Ikmal & Sa'adah, 2023; Shawmi et al., 2025) and, as transferred evidence, in secondary and pesantren settings (Akhyar et al., 2024; Harfi et al., 2025; Miftahuddin et al., 2024). The recurring finding is that character formation requires continuity between what schools teach and what school members repeatedly do (Hidayat et al., 2022).

The analytical unit, however, should not be the activity itself. Two schools may both conduct congregational prayer, yet its social meaning may differ. In one school, prayer may be a compliance ritual monitored through attendance and sanctions; in another, it may be embedded in a broader culture of punctuality, mutual care, reflection, and collective responsibility. The difference lies in the field surrounding the activity. From a Bourdieusian perspective, a school is not a neutral container but a structured space with rules, positions, histories, and unequal resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Through leadership decisions, schedules, assessment, and everyday communication, the institution establishes what counts as legitimate participation. The question therefore shifts from "Does the school

have a religious program?" to "How is the program positioned within the field of the school?".

This distinction helps explain why program-based character education sometimes produces limited transformation. When a school emphasises the visible performance of activities but does not align teacher behaviour, peer interaction, institutional rules, and evaluation, students may learn to perform the activity without developing the corresponding disposition. Berkowitz (2022) identifies implementation fidelity and the alignment of practices with targeted outcomes as recurring weaknesses of character education, and argues that assessment must cover implementation and school climate as well as student outcomes. The field perspective also prevents an individualistic reading of character: if a student repeatedly fails to demonstrate a value, the explanation should not automatically be located in the child. A school may teach cooperation while rewarding only individual competition, or teach honesty while students perceive disciplinary practices as unfair. Character formation is shaped by the coherence or incoherence between espoused values and lived practice (Schein, 2010).

2. From Habituation to Habitus: Bourdieu in Dialogue with *Ta'dīb* and *Riyadah*

Habitus is not a habit in the behavioural sense. It refers to socially produced dispositions that guide perception and action without continuous conscious calculation a "feel for the game" acquired through immersion in a field (Bourdieu, 1990). In school, students encounter repeated expectations: greet others politely, pray at designated times, maintain cleanliness, speak respectfully, help peers, and fulfil responsibilities. Over time, these expectations may become taken-for-granted orientations; the student acts not only because a rule is present but because the practice feels natural and appropriate. A case study of an integrated Islamic senior high school reports that its discipline culture written rules, advice, and sanctions produced a strong effect on religious character, evidenced by students' unease when they missed or were late for prayer (Harfi et al., 2025). Studies of school-culture-based design in a *madrasah ibtidaiyah* likewise describe compulsory daily worship, teacher example, and rules operating together (Ikmal & Sa'adah, 2023). These findings can be read as empirical traces of dispositional formation, although, as section 5 argues, they are also open to a more critical reading.

The Islamic tradition describes the same transition in its own terms. Al-Ghazali's account of *riyadah* holds that virtues are acquired by repeatedly performing the acts associated with them until they become second nature, and that children's early environment and the adults around them are decisive in this process (al-Ghazali, 1995). Ibn Miskawayh (1968) similarly argued that character is malleable through habituation. Read together with Bourdieu, these sources suggest a shared insight that durable dispositions are formed through embodied repetition within a social environment while differing on its evaluation. Bourdieu explains how dispositions are produced without prescribing which ones are good; the Islamic tradition supplies that normative horizon through the concept of *adab* and the aim of *ta'dib* (al-Attas,

1980). Integrating them allows the analysis to be both explanatory and normative.

The literature thus supports a distinction between procedural compliance and embodied disposition. Formation is better described as meaningful repetition than as repetition alone: institutional expectation, observed example, participation, social feedback, reflection and affective attachment, repeated enactment, and an increasingly taken-for-granted orientation. The sequence is neither linear nor deterministic. Habitus generates tendencies, not fixed destinies; students may resist, reinterpret, or selectively adopt practices, and these responses can themselves modify the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

3. Moral Knowing, Moral Feeling, and Moral Action within the Field

Lickona's (1991) framework explains the pedagogical movement from knowing a value to living it. Moral knowing concerns understanding and reasoning about what is good; moral feeling concerns conscience, empathy, and commitment; and moral action concerns the competence, will, and habit required to do what is good. The framework has also been adopted as one of the character-education models used in Indonesian Islamic elementary schools (Arif et al., 2024). Bourdieu complements Lickona by explaining why knowledge does not automatically produce action: practice is shaped by dispositions, social expectations, available resources, and perceptions of what is possible (Bourdieu, 1990). A student may know that honesty is commanded, feel admiration for honest behaviour, and still act dishonestly under peer pressure. When honesty is repeatedly modelled, expected, protected, and recognised, however, the student encounters a field in which honest action becomes practically available.

The two theories therefore operate at different but complementary levels. Lickona clarifies the pedagogical dimensions of moral formation, Bourdieu explains the social conditions under which those dimensions become embodied in practice, and the Islamic tradition specifies the ends toward which formation is directed. This also clarifies the relation between habituation and internalisation. Habituation refers to repeated practice, whereas internalisation involves the transformation of external expectations into personally meaningful orientations; a student can habituate to a routine without valuing it. Internalisation becomes more plausible when students understand the meaning of a practice, experience relational support, have opportunities to act, and recognise the value as legitimate.

Assessment should reflect this distinction. Written tests provide evidence of moral knowing but cannot by themselves establish moral feeling or action. Consistent with calls to assess implementation, school climate, and character development together (Berkowitz, 2022), a more coherent formative approach combines observation of patterns across contexts, student reflection, portfolios, peer feedback, and family communication, while avoiding reductive labelling of students' religiosity.

4. Capital and Actors: Teachers, Leaders, Peers, and Families

Cultural capital helps explain differences in students' readiness to participate in school religious culture. Students enter school with different experiences of prayer, Qur'anic learning, religious vocabulary, and family routines. These are not differences in intelligence or commitment but in prior cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1986). A child who has experienced religious routines at home may find school practices familiar and be quickly recognised as a "good student", while another child may need explicit guidance. The pesantren review identifies the diversity of students' backgrounds as a key implementation challenge (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026), and research in religious-education classrooms shows how unequal relationships to knowledge can divide students into epistemic "haves" and "have nots" (Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022). Bourdieu's warning is pertinent here: when schools treat family-acquired religiosity as natural merit, they risk converting inherited advantage into institutional recognition (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The coaching, mentoring, and individual approaches recommended for Islamic elementary schools (Arif et al., 2024) can be understood as ways of redistributing religious cultural capital, and only to the extent that they do so can a school function as a compensatory rather than a reproductive space.

Social capital resources available through relationships, trust, and reciprocity is equally central. The teacher combines pedagogical authority with symbolic legitimacy; students observe how teachers respond to mistakes, disagreement, fairness, and difference. Islamic education captures this through *uswah hasanah*; in sociological terms, teacher exemplarity is the embodiment of the field's legitimate dispositions. In a public junior secondary school, the leadership of Islamic Religious Education teachers through habituated congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, cross-functional coordination, and reward-and-sanction systems was associated with more than two-thirds of interviewed students moving from reluctance to regular religious practice (Akhyar et al., 2024). At the primary level, a study of twenty elementary schools linked a supportive school environment and competent teachers with students' character building (Pramono et al., 2023). Conversely, if teachers demand punctuality while routinely starting late, or teach compassion while publicly humiliating students, the hidden curriculum undermines the formal one (Jackson, 1968). Teacher professional development should therefore include reflective work on emotional regulation, fairness, feedback, and conflict management, making it a central infrastructure of character education rather than an add-on.

Leadership structures the field itself. Leaders allocate time, resources, and recognition, and determine whether religious character becomes an institutional culture or remains a set of individual initiatives (Deal & Peterson, 2016). In *madrasah ibtidaiyah*, principals' pedagogical competence and school culture jointly predicted students' character development, although principal competence alone was less influential than teacher performance (Juminah et al., 2023). When religious character is

integrated into curriculum, student affairs, teacher development, family communication, and evaluation, it becomes part of the institutional logic; when it is delegated solely to the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher, its field effect is likely to be weaker. Families extend the field further. Among parents of Islamic primary pupils, religiosity mediated the effects of positive parenting and agreeableness on parental engagement in character education (Diana et al., 2021). When school and family routines communicate incompatible expectations, students may experience what can be called dispositional tension; the aim is not to demand identical family practices but to build communication and realistic collaboration.

5. Symbolic Recognition and the Risk of Symbolic Violence

Symbolic capital refers to resources recognised as legitimate within a field. In an Islamic school, religious knowledge, ethical behaviour, service, and discipline may carry symbolic value; students learn that certain conduct is admired not merely because a teacher orders it but because the community treats it as a sign of a good student. Religious symbols, slogans, stories of exemplary figures, Qur'anic quotations, prayer spaces, and ceremonies contribute to this symbolic environment (Bela & Santosa, 2023). Yet symbolic representation alone is insufficient. When symbols are disconnected from lived practice, they become decorative rather than formative. A Qur'anic verse about compassion becomes educationally powerful when students experience compassionate treatment; a message about honesty becomes credible when disciplinary procedures are transparent and fair. Longitudinal evidence that students' justice beliefs mediate the effect of school climate on character virtues (Thomas et al., 2023) suggests that the perceived fairness of the field is itself formative.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence adds a critical dimension that is largely absent from the reviewed Indonesian literature. Recognition systems awards for the "most diligent in prayer", public lists of students who missed congregational worship, or sanction-based monitoring can reward visible ritual compliance rather than integrated character. The same evidence that appears to demonstrate internalisation, such as students' unease when missing prayer under a sanction-based discipline culture (Harfi et al., 2025), can also be read as the internalisation of surveillance rather than of the value itself; distinguishing the two requires research designs that the current literature rarely employs. Because such arrangements appear natural within the school's *doxa* the taken-for-granted assumptions of the field they are seldom questioned. A boarding-school case shows how a particular textual interpretation of Islamic sources can define which civic practices count as religiously legitimate for students (Miftahuddin et al., 2024), illustrating how the field determines the content of "religious character" itself. Bourdieu's notion of *hysteresis* is also instructive: dispositions formed in one field may become misaligned when students move into fields with different rules, such as digital peer cultures. Studies of the pandemic shift to online learning report weakened imitation-based character formation and a measurable, if modest, effect on

students' responsibility (Hidayat et al., 2022; Saliman et al., 2023). A critical religious school culture therefore asks not only whether values are recognised, but whether recognition attaches to substantive ethical conduct, whether it is equitably distributed, and whether it leaves room for students' own understanding and agency (Mogra, 2022; Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022).

6. An Integrated Framework: School Culture as a Recursive Field of Religious Habitus Formation

Based on the synthesis, this article proposes a framework in which school culture functions as a field of religious character formation with five linked layers (Figure 1; Table 2): (1) a normative layer of Islamic values, *adab*, and institutional vision; (2) a structural layer of rules, schedules, leadership, curriculum, and facilities; (3) a relational layer of teacher–student, peer, family, and community relationships; (4) a practice layer of habituation, modelling, participation, reflection, and service; and (5) a dispositional layer in which religious habitus is expressed as relatively stable ways of perceiving, judging, and acting. Four forms of capital mediate the process: cultural capital (religious knowledge, language, and practical competence), social capital (trust and supportive relationships), symbolic capital (recognition of exemplary conduct), and economic or material resources (time, space, and facilities), although material resources alone do not guarantee formation.

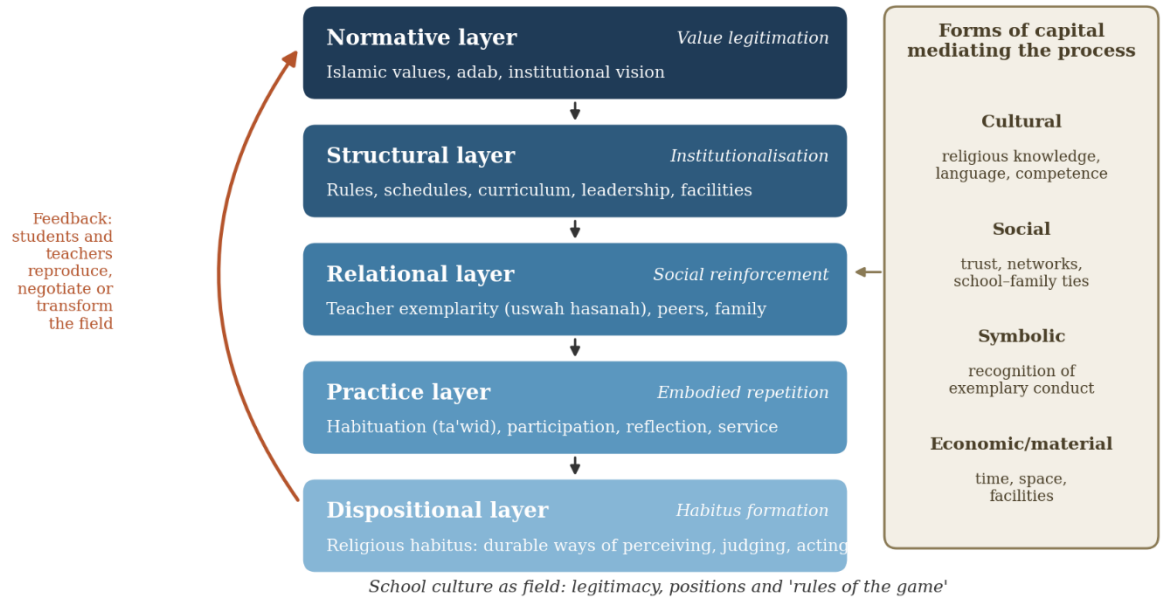

Figure 1. School Culture as a Recursive Field of Religious Habitus Formation

The model is recursive rather than linear. Normative values shape structures; structures organise relationships and practices; practices contribute to habitus; and students' and teachers' dispositions subsequently reproduce, negotiate, or transform the culture. School culture is thus not simply imposed by leaders; it is continuously reproduced through the actions of its members, which is why student agency must remain part of the model. The main theoretical contribution is therefore not the claim that school culture matters, which existing research already supports, but an explanation of how it matters. The proposed mechanism can be summarised as a chain: value legitimation within the field → distribution and recognition of capital → meaningful participation and modelling → repeated practice → moral embodiment → relatively durable religious disposition → reproduction or transformation of school culture. The framework extends existing literature in two ways. First, it explains why habituation is formative under some conditions but ceremonial under others. Second, it situates Islamic character education within a broader sociological account of institutional culture while retaining an explicitly Islamic normative horizon.

Table 2. Layers of the proposed framework

Layer	Core Mechanism	Examples in Islamic Primary Education	Expected Transformation
Normative	Value legitimation	Faith, worship, honesty, compassion, responsibility; *adab* as institutional ideal	Students understand what the school considers meaningful.
Structural	Institutionalisation	Rules, schedules, curriculum, leadership, facilities	Values become embedded in organisational routines.
Relational	Social reinforcement	Teacher exemplarity (*uswah hasanah*), peer norms, family engagement	Values gain interpersonal meaning and support.
Practice	Embodied repetition	Prayer, greetings, service, cleanliness, reflection, classroom responsibilities	Students repeatedly enact values in real situations.
Dispositional	Habitus formation	Spontaneous respectful, responsible, and religious conduct	Values become relatively durable orientations for action.

Table 3 compares the framework with existing approaches. Each approach captures part of the process; the proposed framework does not replace them but specifies the conditions under which each becomes formative.

Table 3. Comparison with Existing Approaches

Approach	Primary Emphasis	Strength	Limitation if Used Alone	Contribution of the Proposed Framework
Program-based	Religious activities and routines	Easy to implement and observe	May become ceremonial	Explains the cultural conditions that make routines formative.
Curriculum-based	Integration of values into subjects	Connects character with learning	May overlook the hidden curriculum	Adds schoolwide field and relational dimensions.
Teacher modelling	Teacher example and interaction	Strong relational mechanism	Depends heavily on individual teachers	Places modelling within institutional culture.
Whole-school character education	Climate, ethos, leadership, relationships	Comprehensive	Less explicit about religious meaning	Adds Islamic normative content and Bourdieusian mechanisms.
Bourdieusian	Field, habitus, capital, symbolic power	Explains reproduction and practice	Needs educational and normative operationalisation	Connects sociology with Islamic concepts and practical design.

7. Implications for Islamic Primary School Practice

Six design principles follow from the framework. *First*, schools should define a small number of core religious-character values and translate them into observable practices across settings; responsibility, for instance, should appear in classroom tasks, worship routines, student leadership, cleanliness, group work, and family communication. The goal is coherence, not the multiplication of activities, which risks program fatigue. *Second*, schools should audit their hidden curriculum by asking whether teacher communication, disciplinary procedures, reward systems, spatial organisation, and peer interaction communicate the same values as the formal curriculum. *Third*, teacher professional development should include reflective character practice, treating teachers' own dispositions as part of the curriculum.

Fourth, families should be treated as partners rather than recipients, with communication focused on shared developmental goals and realistic forms of participation. *Fifth*, schools should create meaningful opportunities for student agency leading prayer preparation, peer support, charity projects, environmental care, and reflective discussion so that students understand why they act and experience themselves as capable moral agents. *Sixth*, evaluation should focus on patterns rather than isolated

performances, combining teacher observation, student reflection, portfolios, and family communication, while avoiding surveillance of religiosity and public rankings that may produce symbolic violence.

8. Propositions and Research Agenda

The synthesis yields six propositions for future qualitative, longitudinal, or mixed-method research. *Proposition 1:* the stronger the coherence between a school's stated religious values and the everyday behaviour of its institutional actors, the greater the likelihood that repeated practices contribute to durable religious dispositions. *Proposition 2:* religious habituation is more likely to become habitus when students participate actively and understand the meaning of the practice; repetition alone tends to produce procedural compliance. *Proposition 3:* teacher exemplarity mediates between institutional values and student dispositions, which should be examined through observation of teacher–student interaction rather than teacher self-report.

Proposition 4: social capital strengthens formation when school, peer, and family relationships are characterised by trust, reciprocity, and shared expectations, whereas contradictory expectations produce dispositional tension. *Proposition 5:* symbolic recognition shapes which forms of religious behaviour become desirable; recognition attached to visible ritual rather than substantive ethical conduct is likely to foster performative religiosity. *Proposition 6:* the sustainability of religious character education depends on institutional reproduction beyond individual charismatic leaders a risk illustrated by pesantren's reported dependence on the *kyai* as the central role model (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026) through distributed ownership, documented routines, teacher development, and student participation.

These propositions are deliberately framed for future empirical testing; they are not causal hypotheses established by the review. Three research agendas follow. First, comparative case studies across Islamic primary schools with different institutional profiles could examine how identical practices acquire different meanings, ideally with longitudinal designs because habitus formation cannot be captured through one-time observation. Second, comparative studies of Islamic schools, *madrasah ibtidaiyah*, and public schools with religious programs could distinguish context-specific from general mechanisms, and mixed-method designs could test whether the qualitative mechanisms correspond with measurable changes in character-related outcomes. Third, research on digital childhood should examine how online interaction changes recognition, peer norms, and moral practice, given evidence that reduced face-to-face interaction complicates habituation and imitation (Hidayat et al., 2022).

9. Limitations

This review has several limitations. *First*, the corpus is methodologically heterogeneous, comprising case studies, surveys, mixed-method studies, and reviews; the synthesis therefore aims at explanatory

integration rather than causal estimation and does not claim that one mechanism is universally stronger than another. *Second*, fewer than half of the 21 studies focused on the primary level, so some mechanisms were transferred from secondary, pesantren, or international contexts; these transfers require empirical verification in primary schools. *Third*, many Indonesian studies describe successful programs in particular schools and may reflect a positive-selection tendency, which underlines the need for research on unsuccessful, contested, or uneven implementation.

Fourth, religious character is not operationalised consistently across studies; the framework treats it as multidimensional, encompassing orientation toward God, ethical conduct, responsibility toward others, self-regulation, and constructive social participation. *Fifth*, coding was conducted by a single author, which limits inter-rater verification despite the use of an audit trail; and because this is an integrative rather than systematic review, the corpus is purposive rather than exhaustive. *Sixth*, the framework is a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical model validated through primary data; its value lies in generating mechanisms that can be tested, refined, or challenged. Finally, habitus should not be treated as a synonym for habit, nor capital reduced to financial resources; the framework is most useful when field, habitus, and capital are analysed relationally.

D. CONCLUSION

This review set out to explain how school culture can function as a field that transforms Islamic values into religious habitus among primary-school students. The synthesis of 21 studies indicates that religious routines, curriculum integration, teacher exemplarity, leadership, peer relations, family engagement, and symbolic environments are educationally powerful when they operate as a coherent cultural system rather than as separate programs. The central issue is therefore not how many religious activities a school provides but how those activities become meaningful, socially supported, and embodied in everyday conduct.

By integrating Bourdieu's field–habitus–capital framework with character-education theory and the Islamic concepts of *ta'dib*, *riyadah*, and *uswah hasanah*, the article proposes a five-layer recursive framework in which values shape structures, structures organise relationships and practices, practices contribute to habitus, and students' dispositions in turn reproduce or transform the school culture. The Bourdieusian lens also reveals a risk that the reviewed literature rarely addresses: religious school culture can reward performative religiosity and reproduce inequalities in religious cultural capital when coherence and student agency are absent. For Islamic primary schools, the practical implication is that sustainable religious character education should be designed as whole-school culture. The six propositions offered here provide a basis for empirical testing through comparative and longitudinal research.

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