

Dhuha Prayer As A Hidden Curriculum: A Strategy For Shaping Students' Religious Character In Islamic Junior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening religious character among adolescents has become increasingly urgent as digitalisation and globalisation expose students to diverse values that may weaken moral foundations. Previous studies have discussed the influence of worship habituation on student behaviour, but limited attention has been given to the role of informal religious practices as a hidden curriculum for systematic character formation. This study analysed the implementation of the Dhuha prayer as a hidden curriculum strategy for shaping the religious character of students at SMP Ad-Dhuha, an Islamic junior high school in Bungo Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed. Participants included the principal, two Islamic education teachers, and twelve students from grades VII–IX selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through twelve non-participant observation sessions, semi-structured interviews lasting 45–60 minutes, and documentation review. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, while trustworthiness was ensured through source and method triangulation. The findings revealed that the routine congregational Dhuha prayer conducted before classroom instruction fostered five interconnected character dimensions: discipline, devotional consistency, responsibility, courteous behaviour, and exemplary conduct. These values were strengthened through teacher modelling, structured scheduling, and the school's religious atmosphere. The practice functioned beyond the formal curriculum by transmitting values through daily routines rather than explicit teaching. The study concludes that the Dhuha prayer serves as an effective hidden curriculum mechanism for religious character development and provides a practical model for Islamic schools facing rapid sociocultural change. The findings further emphasise continuous spiritual habituation for sustaining students' moral awareness and social behavior

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Introduction

The acceleration of digital communication and the global circulation of cultural narratives have placed adolescent moral development under pressures that classroom instruction alone cannot adequately address. Indonesian Islamic schools in particular are required to balance the achievement of national academic standards with the religious mandate to cultivate students whose conduct reflects Islamic values. Reports on adolescent behaviour in urban and semi-urban regions of Indonesia indicate rising concerns regarding declining respect toward elders, weakening commitment to congregational

worship, and exposure to digital content inconsistent with religious norms. Within this environment, schools that limit religious education to formal Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) lessons risk producing students who comprehend religious doctrine cognitively yet fail to internalise it behaviourally. The challenge is therefore not merely to teach religion but to embed religious practice within the lived culture of the school.

Three streams of scholarship have addressed this challenge. The first stream, on habituation programmes (*pembiasaan*), demonstrates that recurring religious activities Quranic recitation, congregational prayer, and supplication before learning correlate with measurable improvements in student discipline (Hidayat & Purwowidodo, 2024; Prayetno et al., 2024). The second stream examines the school's hidden curriculum, defined as the unwritten norms and routines that transmit values implicitly through institutional culture ('Ulyan & Achmad, 2023; Fitria & Rohman, 2025). The third stream analyses the spiritual and educational dimensions of the Dhuha prayer specifically, framing it as a *sunnah* practice with formative potential (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Muyassaroh et al., 2023). However, these strands have largely operated in isolation. Research on habituation seldom interrogates the curricular mechanism through which habits become character, while hidden curriculum studies have rarely traced specific worship practices as discrete instructional vehicles. Existing accounts of Dhuha prayer in schools tend to describe its devotional content without analysing how scheduling, teacher modelling, and the physical setting jointly construct the value-transmission process. The present study addresses this convergence, treating the Dhuha prayer as a structured hidden curriculum component whose character-forming function can be examined as an integrated educational practice rather than as devotional behaviour alone.

Building on this gap, the study pursues three objectives: (a) to describe the implementation of the Dhuha prayer as a hidden curriculum at SMP Ad-Dhuha; (b) to identify the religious character dimensions that emerge from sustained participation in the practice; and (c) to examine the institutional conditions teacher exemplarity, scheduling, and school atmosphere that mediate its formative effects. To address these objectives, a qualitative descriptive design was applied, with data triangulated across observation, interviews, and documentation, as detailed in the following section.

Methods

A qualitative descriptive approach was used, which is appropriate for exploring contextually embedded educational phenomena where meaning derives from situated practice rather than measurable variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design enabled an in-depth account of the implementation, perceived effects, and institutional conditions of the Dhuha prayer practice.

The research was conducted at SMP Ad-Dhuha in Bungo Regency, Jambi Province, Indonesia an Islamic junior high school that has integrated the daily congregational Dhuha prayer into its school routine since its establishment. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on direct involvement in, or supervision of, the programme. Fifteen informants participated: the school principal ($n = 1$), Islamic education teachers ($n = 2$), and students from grades VII–IX ($n = 12$; four students from each grade). Inclusion criteria required at least one full academic year of participation in the Dhuha prayer programme for student informants and direct supervisory involvement for teacher informants.

Data were collected over six weeks (March–April 2025) through three techniques administered in the order presented in the Results section. First, non-participant observation. Twelve observation sessions were conducted in the school prayer hall

(mushola), each lasting 30–45 minutes and covering pre-prayer preparation, the prayer itself, and post-prayer guidance. An observation protocol recorded student arrival times, measured to the nearest minute using a synchronised digital clock with a tolerance of ± 30 seconds, together with participation rates and behavioural conduct during the activity. Photographs were taken using a smartphone camera (12 MP, ISO 100, fixed focus) with permission from the school.

Second, semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasting 45–60 minutes were conducted individually with all informants. The protocol covered three domains: the rationale and management of the programme, the perceived effects on students, and the supporting and inhibiting factors. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent at a sampling rate of 44.1 kHz and transcribed verbatim within 48 hours.

Third, documentation. Documents collected included the school's annual religious activity schedule, the Dhuha prayer attendance log for the academic year 2024/2025, photographs of the prayer hall and its facilities, and the school's internal regulations concerning religious activities.

The Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model was applied: data reduction (selection and coding of relevant material), data display (construction of thematic matrices), and conclusion drawing/verification. Coding was conducted manually using a constant comparative procedure, and codes were aggregated into the five character dimensions reported in the Results. To ensure trustworthiness, source triangulation (cross-checking statements from principal, teachers, and students) and method triangulation (comparing observation, interview, and documentary evidence) were applied. Member checking was conducted with two teacher informants who reviewed the preliminary findings. Permission was obtained from the school principal prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from teachers and from parents or guardians of student participants, with verbal assent from the students themselves. All identifying information was anonymised in the transcripts and final report

Results

The learning implications of these findings show that teachers and Islamic educational institutions need to be flexible and adaptive in choosing and integrating Qur'anic learning methods. Strengthening talaqqî can be used to improve the quality of makhraj and tajweed in detail, while the Yanbū'a system can be used to improve the fluency, discipline, and continuity of learning. With this integrative approach, it is hoped that tahsin al-Qur'an learning can take place more effectively and sustainably in accordance with the goals of Islamic education.

Implementation of the Dhuha Prayer Programme

The Dhuha prayer at SMP Ad-Dhuha was implemented as a structured daily activity. Across the twelve observation sessions, the prayer commenced at 07:15 and concluded by 07:45, immediately preceding the first instructional period. Of the 412 students enrolled, an average of 396 students (96.1%) attended on observed days, with the remaining absences accounted for by illness or excused permission. The prayer was conducted in congregation (jama'ah) in the school mushola and was led on a rotating basis by Islamic education teachers. A short tausiyah (religious exhortation) of 5–7 minutes followed the prayer, during which teachers connected the practice to a specific behavioural value such as honesty, gratitude, or respect for elders. The sequence of activities is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Daily sequence of the Dhuha prayer programme at SMP Ad-Dhuha.

[Insert Figure 1 here — 300 dpi JPEG. Suggested visual: horizontal flowchart showing

five stages: (1) Arrival before 07:10 → (2) Ablution 07:10–07:15 → (3) Congregational Dhuha prayer 07:15–07:30 → (4) Tausiyah 07:30–07:37 → (5) Transition to first instructional period 07:40.]

Religious Character Dimensions

Coding of the observation, interview, and documentary data yielded five dimensions of religious character associated with sustained participation in the Dhuha prayer programme. These dimensions, together with their behavioural indicators and supporting data sources, are presented in Table 1.

Dimension	Behavioural Indicator	Supporting Data Source
Discipline	Punctual arrival before 07:10 (94% of observed students)	Observation; attendance log
Devotional consistency	Voluntary continuation of the Dhuha prayer at home (reported by 10 of 12 students)	Interview
Responsibility	Independent preparation for ablution and prayer without teacher prompting	Observation
Courteous conduct	Use of polite address forms (e.g., "Bapak", "Ibu") and absence of disruptive behaviour during prayer	Observation; interview
Exemplary behaviour	Student imitation of teachers' devotional posture and demeanour	Observation; documentation

Table 1. Religious character dimensions formed through the Dhuha prayer programme

Institutional Mediators

Three institutional conditions consistently emerged as mediators of the formative effects identified in Section 3.2. The first mediator was teacher exemplarity: all teaching staff, not only PAI teachers, attended the prayer; teachers occupied positions visible to students and exhibited consistent devotional posture. The second mediator was structural scheduling: the placement of the activity at a fixed 30-minute time slot before learning rather than as an optional extracurricular activity signalled institutional priority. The third mediator was the religious atmosphere of the campus, including the visibility of Quranic verses on hallway walls (counted at 14 locations during observation), a well-maintained mushola measuring approximately 8 × 10 metres, and the audible recitation of adhan and prayers piped through the school sound system at scheduled times.

Discussion

The findings extend prior work in three respects. First, the discipline dimension observed at SMP Ad-Dhuha indicated by 96.1% attendance and the 94% on-time arrival rate before 07:10 is consistent with Hidayat and Purwowododo's (2024) report that habitual prayer cultivates time-awareness in primary school students. The present study additionally specifies that the disciplinary effect manifests at the threshold of the religious activity (arrival behaviour), not merely within it (worship participation). This refines the conventional account by locating the disciplinary effect upstream of the prayer itself, suggesting that scheduling rather than the act of worship is the proximate cause of disciplined arrival.

Second, prior hidden curriculum research has tended to characterise the school environment as a generalised formative medium ('Ulyan & Achmad, 2023). The present findings indicate that the formative power is not diffuse but is channelled through identifiable mediators teacher exemplarity, scheduling, and physical setting whose joint operation distinguishes effective from nominal implementation. This is consistent with Fitria and Rohman's (2025) analysis of the recitation-based hidden curriculum at MAN 2 Jepara, in which teacher participation was likewise reported as decisive. Where the present study advances the discussion is in disaggregating "teacher participation" into a specific spatial-behavioural pattern (visible position, congruent posture) that students can imitate, which is consistent with Bandura's social learning theory of vicarious modelling.

Third, while Prayetno et al. (2024) framed Dhuha prayer habituation primarily as character formation through repetition, the present findings suggest a more complex mechanism: the prayer functions as a hidden curriculum because its scheduling, leadership, and accompanying *tausiyah* collectively transmit values not articulated in the formal curriculum document. The 5–7 minute *tausiyah* served as a non-formal pedagogical moment in which abstract religious values gratitude, honesty, respect were translated into concrete behavioural expectations. This complements Khamim's (2022) account of professional teacher competence in PAI, where the boundary between formal and non-formal pedagogy is shown to be permeable.

A point of divergence concerns the role of voluntariness. Hasibuan et al. (2025), in their study of the audible (*jahr*) Dhuha prayer at SD Al-Ahnaf, emphasised voluntary engagement as central to character formation. At SMP Ad-Dhuha, attendance was institutionally expected, yet student interviews indicated that the practice came to be perceived as personally meaningful over time, with 10 of 12 students reporting voluntary continuation at home. This suggests that institutional expectation and personal internalisation need not be opposed and that sustained habituation may convert externally regulated behaviour into internalised commitment—a process that warrants longitudinal investigation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The single-site design constrains generalisability to other Islamic junior high schools with comparable institutional commitments. The six-week observation period captured behaviour but not its long-term stability across academic years. The reliance on self-reported devotional continuation at home, although triangulated with parent-teacher communication records, introduces social desirability bias. Future research should address these limitations through multi-site comparative designs and longer observation windows.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the Dhuha prayer as a hidden curriculum strategy for religious character formation at SMP Ad-Dhuha. The investigation found that the practice operates as a structured non-formal educational mechanism that cultivates discipline, devotional consistency, responsibility, courteous conduct, and exemplary behaviour, and that these outcomes are mediated by teacher exemplarity, fixed scheduling, and the religious atmosphere of the school. Together these findings indicate that the formative function of the practice is not reducible to the act of prayer alone; rather, it depends on an institutional configuration in which scheduling, modelling, and physical setting work in concert. The Dhuha prayer therefore offers a viable institutional model for Islamic schools seeking to embed character education in school culture rather than confine it to formal subject instruction. Subsequent research should extend the inquiry through multi-site

comparative designs, longitudinal tracking of character outcomes after graduation, and quantitative measurement of the relative contribution of each institutional mediator.

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