



Integration of the Hidden Curriculum in the Development of School Based Islamic Character Education

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Abstract

Islamic character education is a fundamental aspect in shaping pupils of noble character, integrity, and the ability to cope with the dynamics of 21st-century life. However, the implementation of character education in schools still tends to be oriented towards the formal curriculum, meaning that the process of internalising Islamic values has not yet taken place optimally in the daily lives of the school community. This study aims to analyse the integration of the hidden curriculum in the development of Islamic character education based on school culture, and to formulate an implementation framework that can strengthen the internalisation of Islamic character values in a sustainable manner. The study employs a qualitative approach using a multi-site case study design across several schools that have implemented character education programmes. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and focus group discussions involving headteachers, teachers, pupils, and parents. The data were analysed using an interactive model comprising data reduction, data presentation, verification, and drawing conclusions to identify the main themes of the study. The research findings indicate that the integration of the hidden curriculum takes place through five main dimensions, namely the religious culture as the foundation of the hidden curriculum, teacher exemplary behavior as a medium for internalizing values, inculcating values in academic and non-academic activities, value-based school leadership, collaboration between schools, families, and communities. This study suggests that the hidden curriculum should be positioned as an integral part of school governance through the strengthening of organisational culture and synergy amongst all stakeholders. These findings also offer a conceptual framework that can serve as a reference for the development of sustainable policies and practices in Islamic character education across various levels of education.

INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the main pillars in realizing the goals of national education, namely producing students who not only have academic competence, but also integrity, noble character, and are able to adapt to increasingly complex social changes (Husna & Hamid, 2025).

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From an Islamic educational perspective, character is not only understood as behavior that is in accordance with social norms, but also as a manifestation of Islamic values reflected in human relationships with Allah SWT, fellow humans, and the environment (Nugraha et al., 2025; Laily, 2026). Therefore, Islamic character education must be an integral part of the entire educational process in order to form students who have a balance between intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social intelligence.

The development of globalization, digitalization, and advances in information technology have brought about significant changes in the mindsets, lifestyles, and behaviors of the younger generation. While these developments open up opportunities for improving the quality of learning through broader access to information, they also present various challenges, including declining social awareness, increasing individualistic behavior, moral crises, intolerance, bullying, misuse of digital media, and a weakening of the internalization of religious values in students' lives (Mustikaweni et al., 2025; Firdaus et al., 2026). This phenomenon demonstrates that educational success cannot be measured solely by academic achievement, but also by the school's ability to build a culture capable of instilling values, attitudes, and character sustainably.

To date, the implementation of character education in many schools remains oriented toward the formal curriculum through subjects, co-curricular activities, and extracurricular programs. This approach is important, but it often fails to produce sustainable behavioral change because it emphasizes cognitive aspects rather than the process of internalizing values in everyday life. Character values are often taught as learning materials, but they are not fully realized in the school's organizational culture, interaction patterns within the school community, or educational leadership practices. As a result, there is a gap between the values taught and the values actually practiced in the school environment (Fajriansyah, 2025; Kurniawanto & Ratmayanti, 2026).

In that context, hidden curriculum has become an approach that is increasingly receiving attention in educational studies because it plays a role in shaping students' character through learning experiences that are not written in the formal curriculum. Hidden curriculum encompasses various elements that develop in school life, such as organizational culture, teacher role models, social interactions, rules, communication patterns, school traditions, reward systems, and the learning climate, which indirectly influence the formation of student attitudes, values, and behavior (Fauziyah et al., 2026). Unlike the formal curriculum, which is oriented towards achieving academic competencies, hidden curriculum working through a process of habituation, role modeling, cultural strengthening, and social experiences that take place continuously in school life.

Various studies show that hidden curriculum has a significant contribution to the formation of student character through a positive school culture, values-based leadership, and harmonious interpersonal relationships. However, most research still views hidden curriculum as an implicit social phenomenon and has not yet developed it as a systematic framework for Islamic character education. On the other hand, research on Islamic character education generally focuses more on the integration of Islamic values in learning, the development of teaching materials, or the implementation of religious activities, while the relationship between hidden curriculum and school culture as a medium for internalizing Islamic values is still relatively limited (Melinda et al., 2025). This condition indicates the need to develop a more comprehensive approach by integrating hidden curriculum into the school culture so that the character building process takes place consistently, comprehensively and sustainably.

Furthermore, most previous studies still position school culture as a supporting factor for character education, rather than as a system that integrates values, organizational structure, leadership, social interaction, and habits within a single implementation framework. However, the success of Islamic character education is greatly influenced by the alignment between the school's vision, leadership, organizational culture, educator role models, family involvement, and the students' social environment (Lasmanah & Mukarom, 2026). Therefore, an integrative framework is needed that can connect all of these components so that hidden curriculum not only understood as a naturally occurring practice, but also as an educational strategy that is systematically designed, managed, and evaluated.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze integration hidden curriculum in developing Islamic character education based on school culture and formulating an implementation framework that can strengthen the internalization of Islamic values in a sustainable manner. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual framework that integrates hidden curriculum with school culture as an ecosystem for Islamic character education (Saputra et al., 2024; Hamidah et al., 2026). This framework positions religious culture, educator role models, value instillation, value-based leadership, and collaboration between schools, families, and the community as a unified whole that interacts in shaping students' character. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of hidden curriculum from an Islamic education perspective, while practically providing recommendations for schools in designing policies and strategies for strengthening character education that are more effective, contextual, and sustainable.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design to analyze integration. Hidden curriculum in the development of Islamic character education based on school culture. The research location was selected randomly purposive. In several schools that consistently implement religious culture and character-strengthening programs, the research informants consisted of school principals, teachers, students, parents, and school supervisors who were selected using the technique purposive And snowball sampling (Engkizar et al., 2023; Abdullah & Abdulghani, 2025; Rosyadi & Athari, 2025; Fitrah et al., 2026). Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and focus group discussion in order to obtain comprehensive information regarding implementation hidden curriculum in both academic and non-academic activities. Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis process began with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify key themes, followed by comparative analysis across locations to identify patterns of integration. Hidden curriculum in school culture. The validity of the data is guaranteed through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, and is strengthened by member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trail so that research findings have a high level of credibility, dependability, and confirm ability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that integration hidden curriculum in developing Islamic character education, it is not formed solely through formal learning, but rather through a school culture that consistently internalizes Islamic values into all educational activities. These findings indicate that the success of character education is greatly influenced by the alignment between school policies, leadership, educator role models, habits, the learning environment, and family involvement. Based on the

results of the data analysis, the integration hidden curriculum in developing Islamic character education based on school culture, this is realized through five main dimensions, namely: (1) religious culture as the foundation of the hidden curriculum, (2) teacher exemplary behavior as a medium for internalizing values, (3) inculcating values in academic and non-academic activities, (4) value-based school leadership (5) collaboration between schools, families, and communities. A more detailed explanation of the integration of the hidden curriculum into the development of Islamic character education based on school culture can be seen in Figure 1.

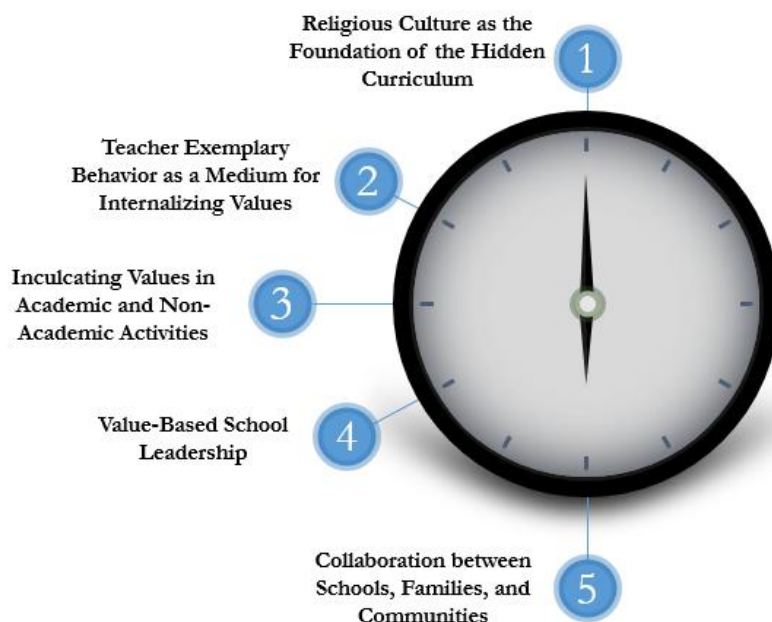


Fig 1. The Five Dimensions of Curriculum Integration Inherent in the Development of Islamic Character Education Based on School Culture

Religious Culture as the Foundation of the Hidden Curriculum

The results of the study show that religious culture is the main foundation in integration. Hidden curriculum to develop Islamic character education in schools. Religious culture is not only manifested through routine religious activities, but has become a value system that shapes the mindset, attitudes, and behavior of all school members (Afdhal et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2026). Practices such as the habit of reading the Qur'an before learning, congregational prayer, communal prayer, the culture of greeting, the habit of almsgiving, maintaining cleanliness, and the application of Islamic communication ethics become part of daily life that consistently builds students' character. Through this process, Islamic values are not only learned cognitively, but are internalized through real experiences that occur continuously within the school environment.

These findings indicate that hidden curriculum Religious values work effectively through a school culture that creates harmony between the values taught in the formal curriculum and the values practiced in everyday life. When the entire school community demonstrates a commitment to implementing religious values, students gain authentic learning experiences through observation, habituation, and social interaction. This process strengthens character formation because students not only gain knowledge about honesty, discipline, responsibility, and caring but also witness how these values are manifested in the behavior of teachers, principals, and peers (Hayati & Dahliana, 2022; Ibad et al., 2025). Thus, religious culture serves as a more effective mechanism for internalizing values than approaches that focus solely

on delivering learning materials.

From the perspective of Islamic education, this finding is in line with the concept correction which places the formation of morals as the main goal of education. Character education is not sufficient through the transfer of knowledge (education), but must be realized through habituation, role modeling, and the creation of an environment that reflects Islamic values. Therefore, religious culture becomes a social space that allows students to develop spiritual, moral, emotional, and social dimensions in an integrated manner. A religious school environment also fosters an intrinsic awareness of behaving in accordance with Islamic teachings, so that adherence to values is not only based on school rules but also grows from students' moral awareness (Sholeh et al., 2025; Fawaid & Kholil, 2026).

Based on these findings, this study confirms that religious culture is not merely a complement to educational activities, but rather the core of integration. Hidden curriculum in the development of Islamic character education. The novelty of this research lies in its placement of religious culture as a key element connecting educators' exemplary behavior, habituation, values-based leadership, and collaboration between schools, families, and communities within a single character education ecosystem. This integrative model demonstrates that the success of Islamic character education is largely determined by a school's ability to build a culture that consistently transforms Islamic values into sustainable habits, identities, and character traits in students.

Teacher Exemplary Behavior as a Medium for Internalizing Values

The results of the study show that teacher role models are the most strategic dimension in integration. Hidden curriculum because they are the primary medium for internalizing Islamic character values. Teachers serve not only as transmitters of learning materials but also as role models whose daily behavior, attitudes, and ethics are observed and imitated by students. Research findings show that values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, trustworthiness, simplicity, hard work, and respect for others are more easily internalized when consistently displayed in teacher behavior (Ulum & Riswadi, 2023; Salim et al., 2024). Thus, the process of character formation occurs naturally through daily interactions, not solely through the delivery of moral concepts in learning activities.

Research analysis shows that the effectiveness of teacher role models lies in the consistency between words and actions. Students tend to attach stronger meaning to the actual behavior they witness than to the advice they hear. When teachers arrive on time, perform religious services with discipline, speak politely, act fairly, respect differences, and demonstrate concern for students, these values gradually become the standards of behavior followed by students. Conversely, a mismatch between the values taught and the teacher's behavior can lead to a crisis of trust and reduce the effectiveness of character education because students receive contradictory moral messages. This suggests that hidden curriculum working through a process of observation, imitation, habituation, and reflection that takes place continuously in school life (Maulana & Jannah, 2026).

From the perspective of Islamic education, this finding is in line with the concept good deed swchich places role models as the most effective educational method in shaping morals. Teachers are seen not only as teacher (teacher), but also as teacher (educators) who are responsible for guiding the intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social development of students. Therefore, integration hidden curriculum Teachers' exemplary behavior is a crucial foundation for building a school culture oriented toward Islamic values. The novelty of this research demonstrates that teacher exemplary behavior not only functions as an individual behavior but also as

part of a school culture system that connects leadership, habits, and the learning environment to shape Islamic character sustainably.

Inculcating Values in Academic and Non-Academic Activities

The results of the study show that the habituation of values in academic and non-academic activities is the main mechanism in integrating hidden curriculum into the development of Islamic character education. The habituation process is not only carried out through classroom learning activities, but is also integrated into all school activities, such as congregational worship, Quran literacy programs, extracurricular activities, student organizations, social service, community service, queuing culture, maintaining cleanliness, time discipline, and the application of polite communication ethics (Muslim, 2023; Khamdani et al., 2026). These findings indicate that the internalization of Islamic values takes place continuously through real experiences experienced by students in various contexts of school life. Thus, character education does not stop at mastering cognitive aspects, but develops into habits that are reflected in everyday behavior.

Further analysis shows that consistent habituation can strengthen the transformation of values into character (Solichin et al., 2026). Students not only understand the concepts of honesty, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, social awareness, and trustworthiness, but also have the opportunity to practice these values directly in academic and non-academic activities. Repeated experiences accompanied by reinforcement from teachers and the school environment create a deeper internalization process so that these values develop into part of the students' identity and behavioral culture. This demonstrates that hidden curriculum works through a habituation mechanism that gradually changes external behavior into internal moral awareness, so that Islamic character grows not because of the pressure of rules, but because of individual awareness of the importance of these values (Sutrisno et al., 2026).

In the perspective of Islamic education, habituation (voice) is an effective educational method for shaping morals because it connects knowledge, experience, and action in a continuous process. Therefore, instilling values through academic and non-academic activities is a strategy that can strengthen integration. Hidden curriculum with school culture. The novelty of this research shows that habituation is not merely positioned as an educational routine, but as a pedagogical mechanism that integrates the formal curriculum, school organizational culture, and students' social experiences to build Islamic character holistically and sustainably (Murcahyanto & Mohzana, 2023). This approach creates a learning ecosystem that allows Islamic values to develop into a shared culture that is deeply rooted in school life.

Value-Based School Leadership

The results of the study show that value-based school leadership is a strategic factor in the success of integration. Hidden curriculum for the development of Islamic character education. The principal not only acts as an administrator managing managerial aspects, but also as a leader who builds a vision, organizational culture, and school climate oriented towards Islamic values (Hermalinda et al., 2025; Sutikno, 2026). Research findings show that school policies regarding religious habits, strengthening a culture of discipline, role models, appreciation for positive behavior, and teacher professional development are the main foundations in creating an educational environment conducive to the internalization of Islamic character. Thus, values-based leadership can create harmony between the institution's vision, school policies, and daily educational practices, thus hidden curriculum develop as part of the school's organizational culture.

Further analysis shows that the effectiveness of school leadership lies in its ability to integrate all components of education into a single system oriented toward character formation. The principal plays a role as instructional leader at a time moral leader which ensures that every academic program, non-academic activity, rules, reward system, and communication patterns within the school community reflect Islamic values. Participatory leadership also encourages the involvement of teachers, education staff, students, and parents in building a positive school culture. This condition indicates that hidden curriculum does not develop spontaneously, but is the result of a leadership process that is able to direct, coordinate, and evaluate the implementation of values continuously in all aspects of school life (Alfarezel, 2025; Suparjo et al., 2026; Syamilah & Arifin, 2026).

In the perspective of Islamic education, value-based leadership reflects the principle of trust, 'adl (justice), shura (deliberation), and good deeds (exemplary), which positions leaders as drivers of moral and cultural transformation in organizations. The novelty of this research shows that school leadership functions not only as a policy maker, but also as a key link between religious culture, teacher role models, the instillation of values, and collaboration with families and communities in building an ecosystem hidden curriculum (Aini & Hinayah, 2025). This model emphasizes that the success of Islamic character education is highly dependent on leadership capable of transforming Islamic values into a vibrant, consistent, and sustainable institutional culture.

Collaboration between Schools, Families, and Communities

The results of the study show that collaboration between schools, families and communities is a dimension that strengthens the effectiveness of integration hidden curriculum in developing Islamic character education. The formation of student character cannot be left entirely to schools but requires the continuity of educational values and practices within the family and community (Kurniawati et al., 2022; Mahfudi & Rifa'i, 2025). Research findings show that schools build various forms of collaboration through intensive communication with parents, programs, and parenting, reporting on student character development, joint religious activities, home visits, and the involvement of community leaders and religious institutions in various character-building programs. This collaboration creates a shared understanding of the Islamic values that must be developed so that students receive consistent character strengthening across various life settings.

Further analysis shows that the synergy between schools, families, and communities creates an educational ecosystem that strengthens the internalization of values through continuous experiences (Ubadah & Fatimah, 2023; Bahri, 2024). When values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, social concern, and noble character are consistently implemented in schools, reinforced within the family environment, and supported by community culture, students more easily incorporate these values into their personalities. Conversely, a mismatch between school culture and parenting patterns at home or in the social environment has the potential to create value conflicts that hinder character development. These findings confirm that hidden curriculum not only shaped by the internal culture of the school, but also influenced by the quality of students' interactions with the external environment which is part of their socialization process (Yusufali, 2021; Munif, 2025; Noreng et al., 2026).

In the perspective of Islamic education, collaboration between schools, families and communities reflects the principle of collective responsibility (mutual responsibility) in educating a generation with noble character (Supaat & Muslim, 2023). The family serves as the primary educational institution, schools as institutions

that develop and reinforce values, while society serves as a space for character actualization in social life. The novelty of this research shows that the collaboration between these three environments is not merely a form of administrative partnership, but rather an integral component of the ecosystem hidden curriculum which connects pedagogical, cultural, and social dimensions in the development of Islamic character education. This collaborative model provides a more comprehensive framework for schools to build a character culture that is adaptive, sustainable, and relevant to contemporary educational challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that integration hidden curriculum is an effective strategy in developing Islamic character education based on school culture through the establishment of an educational ecosystem that internalizes Islamic values in a sustainable manner. This process is realized through five main dimensions: religious culture as the foundation for character formation, teacher role models as a medium for internalizing values, character habituation in academic and non-academic activities, value-based school leadership that guides organizational culture, and collaboration between schools, families, and communities that strengthens the consistency of character education across various environments. The research findings confirm that the success of character education is determined not only by the implementation of the formal curriculum, but also by the quality of the school culture that implicitly shapes students' learning experiences through social interactions, habituation, and role models. The novelty of this research lies in the development of an integrative framework hidden curriculum based on school culture that connects structural, cultural, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions in a conceptual model for strengthening Islamic character education. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of Islamic character education hidden curriculum from the perspective of Islamic education by placing it as an ecosystem for character formation, while practically providing a foundation for schools and policy makers to design more systematic, collaborative, adaptive, and sustainable character education strategies in facing the challenges of 21st century education.

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