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The Role of Teachers in Fostering Cultural and Religious Values in Elementary Schools

Sri Handayani[1], Hariki Fitrah[2*], Hamsidar[3]

[1] Universitas Almuslim, Aceh, Indonesia; srihandayani8843@gmail.com
[2] Universitas Almuslim, Aceh, Indonesia; harikifitrah@umuslim.ac.id
[3] Universitas Almuslim, Aceh, Indonesia ; hamsidar@umuslim.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Fostering cultural and religious values is essential to elementary students' character development, yet maintaining these values across school, family, social, and digital contexts remains challenging. This study examined teachers' roles and strategies in fostering cultural and religious values, their manifestations in students' behavior, and challenges to value internalization. A descriptive qualitative study was conducted at SD Negeri Keumangan, Pidie Regency, Aceh, Indonesia. Ten participants representing the principal, teachers, and students were purposively selected. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. Four themes emerged: teachers' multidimensional roles, value-internalization strategies, manifestations of values in students' behavior, and challenges to behavioral consistency. Teachers acted as role models, mentors, guides, and facilitators, while values were reinforced through classroom learning, the 5S culture, collective prayer, Qur'an recitation, and the "one day one verse" program. Students demonstrated increased politeness, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and religious participation; however, some behaviors remained dependent on teacher guidance. Gadget and social media influences, family backgrounds, and limited parental involvement challenged behavioral consistency. The findings indicate that structured habituation facilitates value-based behavior but does not automatically ensure internalization. Effective character education requires progression from teacher-regulated practices toward autonomous, cross-contextually consistent behavior supported by school–family collaboration.

***Corresponding Author:**
Hariki Fitrah
Universitas Almuslim, Aceh, Indonesia; harikifitrah@umuslim.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a fundamental component of elementary education because this stage plays an important role in developing students' moral, social, cultural, and religious foundations. Education at the elementary level is therefore expected not only to develop academic competence but also to

cultivate values that guide students in interacting with others and participating responsibly in social life. In the Indonesian educational context, this perspective is closely related to Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy, particularly the *Among* system and the principle of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani*, which position educators as role models, motivators, and facilitators of students' development. The philosophy emphasizes that character formation should occur through exemplary conduct, habituation, guidance, and educational environments that respect children's development (Handoko, 2023; Siswantara et al., 2023).

Cultural and religious values constitute important dimensions of character development because they provide students with moral and social references for everyday behavior. Cultural values such as politeness, mutual respect, cooperation, responsibility, discipline, and mutual assistance help students develop positive relationships within the school and wider community. Religious values, meanwhile, contribute to the development of spiritual awareness, moral responsibility, and behaviors consistent with religious teachings. These values cannot be effectively internalized through conceptual instruction alone; they require continuous practice through school culture, learning activities, habituation, and exemplary behavior. Previous research has shown that character formation in elementary schools can be strengthened when character values are incorporated into learning and supported by habituation and teacher modeling (Alkhasanah et al., 2023; Handoko, 2023).

Teachers consequently occupy a strategic position in the internalization of cultural and religious values. Their role extends beyond transmitting academic knowledge to serving as role models, mentors, facilitators, and moral guides whose daily behavior provides concrete examples for students. Alkhasanah et al. (2023) emphasized that elementary school teachers contribute to character formation through their roles as educators, models, mentors, and evaluators. Similarly, Handayani and Rakhmawati (2024) highlighted the importance of teachers in shaping students' learning characteristics and behavior. Teacher involvement is particularly important at the elementary level because character development occurs not only through formal instruction but also through repeated interactions, school routines, and students' observation of adult behavior. Thus, the consistency between the values taught by teachers and the behaviors demonstrated in everyday school life becomes an important element of value internalization.

The task of fostering students' character, however, has become increasingly complex in the digital era. Digital technology provides students with broad access to information and learning resources, but uncontrolled use can also expose children to behaviors and content that may conflict with the values promoted by schools and families. Studies have indicated that excessive or poorly supervised gadget use can affect students' religious behavior, discipline, and responsibility (Aminu et al., 2024; Puspita et al., 2024). Consequently, character education in contemporary elementary schools requires teachers not only to maintain conventional strategies of instruction, habituation, and modeling but also to develop adaptive approaches that respond to students' increasingly digital social environments. Recent research on character education in the digital era similarly emphasizes the continuing importance of teacher modeling and structured religious practices in helping students navigate technological influences (Komalasari et al., 2025).

Empirical studies have identified several strategies for strengthening students' character. Handoko (2023), for example, demonstrated that character development based on Ki Hadjar Dewantara's *Among* system can be implemented through classroom learning, habituation, extracurricular activities, and teacher exemplification. Research on religious character has likewise emphasized the role of structured religious activities and consistent teacher guidance in internalizing religious values. More recent studies have shown that the internalization of Qur'anic values can take place through the combination of classroom instruction, routine religious practices, and teacher modeling, including strategies adapted to digital environments (Khoiriyah et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that teachers, school culture, habituation, and religious activities are important components of character education.

Nevertheless, the existing literature tends to examine these components separately or to emphasize character education in general, religious character, teacher roles, or the challenges of digital

technology. Less attention has been given to how teachers simultaneously integrate cultural values, religious values, school habituation, and exemplary practices within a specific local cultural context while responding to the challenges of students' digital lives. This gap is particularly relevant because character education is context-dependent: the values internalized at school are influenced not only by formal curricula and religious practices but also by local traditions, everyday social interactions, family backgrounds, and the cultural environment surrounding students. Therefore, examining character education within a particular school context can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural and religious values are translated from normative principles into everyday educational practices.

This issue is evident at SD Negeri Keumangan, Pidie Regency, Aceh, Indonesia. Preliminary observations indicated inconsistencies in students' attitudes and behavior. Some students demonstrated different levels of politeness and obedience depending on the teacher with whom they interacted, while others occasionally showed limited attention during lessons or passed teachers without displaying the forms of respectful interaction encouraged by the school. At the same time, the school implements cultural and religious practices intended to strengthen students' character, including the 5S culture, religious habituation, Qur'anic activities, teacher modeling, mutual cooperation, and activities connected to local traditions. These conditions provide an important context for examining not merely whether character education programs exist, but how teachers enact their roles in transforming cultural and religious values into students' everyday experiences and what challenges affect the consistency of this internalization process.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in its integrated examination of teacher roles, cultural and religious value internalization, school habituation, local cultural practices, and digital-era challenges within an elementary school context. Rather than examining teacher roles or religious character as isolated dimensions, this study focuses on how these elements interact in the everyday process of character formation. Such an approach is expected to contribute a contextually grounded understanding of character education, particularly regarding the relationship among teacher modeling, school routines, cultural practices, religious habituation, and the challenges arising from students' social and digital environments.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the roles and strategies of teachers in fostering cultural and religious values among elementary school students, examine how these values are manifested in students' attitudes and behavior, and identify the challenges teachers encounter in maintaining the consistency of value internalization in the digital era. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do teachers foster cultural and religious values through learning, habituation, and exemplary practices? (2) How are cultural and religious values manifested in students' attitudes and everyday behavior at school? and (3) What challenges do teachers encounter in internalizing these values amid family, social, and digital influences?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the roles and strategies of teachers in fostering cultural and religious values among elementary school students. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on understanding the process of value internalization within the natural school setting, including classroom learning, habituation activities, teacher modeling, and students' everyday interactions. In addition, the study examined students' attitudes and behaviors as manifestations of cultural and religious values and identified the challenges encountered by teachers in maintaining the consistency of these values amid family, social, and digital influences.

2.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SD Negeri Keumangan, Mutiara District, Pidie Regency, Aceh, Indonesia. The school was purposively selected because it implements various cultural and religious activities as part of its character education practices. These activities include the 5S culture (Smile, Greet, Speak Politely, Be Courteous, and Be Respectful), collective religious activities, Qur'an recitation, and the "one day one verse" program.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in and knowledge of cultural and religious value education at the school. A total of 10 participants were involved in the study, representing the school principal, teachers, and students. The principal was involved because of their responsibility for school policies and character education programs. Teachers were included because of their direct involvement in classroom instruction, habituation activities, student guidance, and the implementation of cultural and religious values. Students were included to provide information regarding their experiences of and responses to the cultural and religious practices implemented in the school. The involvement of these different groups enabled the study to examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. These techniques were used to obtain complementary information regarding teacher roles, school practices, students' behaviors, and the challenges associated with fostering cultural and religious values.

Observations were conducted directly in the school environment, particularly during classroom learning, school routines, religious activities, and students' everyday interactions. The observation focused on manifestations of cultural and religious values in students' behavior. The cultural values observed included politeness, respect for teachers and peers, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, honesty, and implementation of the 5S culture. These indicators were identified through students' communication, behavior, participation in classroom activities, and interactions within the school environment. The religious values observed included participation in prayer and Qur'anic activities, worship discipline, respectful behavior, gratitude, mutual assistance, and other attitudes reflecting religious teachings in daily school life.

In-depth interviews were conducted with participants who had direct knowledge and experience of the implementation of cultural and religious value education. The interviews explored several aspects, including teachers' roles in character formation, strategies for integrating cultural and religious values into classroom learning, implementation of habituation programs, teacher modeling, students' responses to these practices, and challenges encountered in maintaining students' cultural and religious values. Particular attention was given to challenges associated with students' family backgrounds, peer interactions, parental involvement, and the influence of gadgets and digital media.

Documentation was used as supporting data to complement information obtained from observations and interviews. Documentary evidence related to school programs and cultural and religious activities was examined to provide contextual information and support the interpretation of the findings. The combination of observation, interviews, and documentation enabled the researchers to compare information obtained from different sources and techniques.

2.4 Research Instruments

In this qualitative study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument and was directly involved in data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Supporting instruments consisted of observation guidelines, interview guidelines, field notes, and documentation records.

The observation guidelines were developed to identify manifestations of cultural and religious values in everyday school activities. Meanwhile, the interview guidelines were developed according to the research objectives and focused on teacher roles and strategies, cultural and religious habituation, students' behavioral responses, and challenges in the value-internalization process. The guidelines

provided a systematic framework for data collection while allowing the researcher to explore relevant information emerging during the fieldwork.

2.5 Data Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, particularly the school principal, teachers, and students. This comparison was intended to identify similarities, differences, and consistency among participants' perspectives regarding the implementation of cultural and religious values.

Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. Statements obtained from interviews regarding classroom practices, teacher modeling, cultural habituation, and religious activities were compared with observations of actual practices in the school environment and relevant documentary evidence. This process was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings and ensure that the interpretations were grounded in multiple sources of empirical evidence.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data analysis was conducted iteratively to identify recurring patterns and relationships across interview, observation, and documentation data.

In the data condensation stage, information obtained from interviews, field observations, and documentation was reviewed, selected, and organized according to its relevance to the research questions. Relevant data were grouped into categories related to teacher roles, strategies for fostering cultural and religious values, students' attitudes and behaviors, habituation practices, and challenges in the internalization process.

In the data display stage, the categorized data were organized systematically to facilitate comparison across participants and data sources. Related categories were subsequently grouped into broader themes, including teacher modeling, integration of values into classroom learning, cultural and religious habituation, students' behavioral responses, digital influences, and collaboration between the school and families.

Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted by identifying recurring patterns and relationships among the themes. Emerging interpretations were continuously compared with the original data to ensure that the conclusions remained grounded in the participants' accounts and observed school practices. The resulting themes were used to explain how teachers fostered cultural and religious values, how these values were manifested in students' everyday behavior, and what challenges affected the consistency of the value-internalization process.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with permission from the school authority. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the academic use of the information they provided. Participant identities were protected in the reporting of the findings by using informant codes rather than individual names. For example, participants were identified as Informant A (Principal), Informant B (Teacher), and Informant C (Student). Information obtained during the research was used solely for research purposes, and participants' identities were kept confidential throughout the reporting process.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the interview and observational data identified four major themes related to the fostering of cultural and religious values at SD Negeri Keumangan: (1) teachers' multidimensional roles in value internalization, (2) strategies for internalizing cultural and religious values, (3) manifestations of cultural and religious values in students' behavior, and (4) challenges in maintaining the consistency of value internalization. These themes and their corresponding subthemes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes Emerging from the Data

Themes	Subthemes	Main Evidence
Teachers' roles in value internalization	Role model; mentor and guide; facilitator of value-based learning	Teacher behavior, classroom guidance, daily interactions
Strategies for internalizing values	Integration into learning; cultural habituation; religious habituation; extracurricular and local cultural activities	5S culture, collective prayer, Qur'an recitation, one day one verse, mutual cooperation
Manifestations in students' behavior	Politeness and respect; discipline and responsibility; cooperation; religious participation	Student–teacher interactions, classroom activities, religious routines
Challenges and sustainability	Inconsistent behavior; gadget and social media influences; family backgrounds; parental involvement	Interviews with teachers and students and school observations

3.1 Teachers' Multidimensional Roles in Value Internalization

The first theme concerns the multiple roles performed by teachers in fostering cultural and religious values. The findings indicate that teachers function not only as providers of academic knowledge but also as role models, mentors, guides, and facilitators of students' character development. These roles were enacted through classroom instruction, daily interactions, habituation activities, and teachers' direct involvement in cultural and religious practices.

3.1.1 Teachers as Role Models

Teacher modeling emerged as an important component of value internalization. Teachers demonstrated expected values through their own behavior, particularly politeness, discipline, responsibility, respectful communication, and participation in religious activities. Through these everyday practices, students were provided with concrete examples of how cultural and religious values could be expressed in school life.

This role was emphasized by Informant B (Teacher), who stated:

"Teachers must become role models because students tend to imitate the attitudes and behavior they observe every day at school" (Interview, Monday, April 13, 2026).

Observational data supported this statement. Teachers were observed demonstrating polite behavior, discipline, and responsibility during classroom activities and interactions with students. Students, in turn, displayed similar behaviors in their interactions with teachers and peers. Thus, teacher modeling operated through direct behavioral examples rather than solely through verbal instruction.

3.1.2 Teachers as Mentors and Guides

Teachers also acted as mentors and guides in reinforcing expected behaviors. When students demonstrated limited discipline or inconsistent participation in cultural and religious activities, teachers provided guidance and reminders. This was particularly evident during religious activities, when several students required teacher encouragement to remain focused and participate appropriately.

The principal similarly emphasized that the teacher's role extended beyond classroom instruction:

"The role of teachers is very important in shaping students' character. This is carried out through learning activities and extracurricular activities" (Informant A, Interview, Saturday, April 11, 2026).

The interview data indicate that teachers continuously guided students to practice values such as honesty, discipline, politeness, responsibility, and mutual respect. Guidance, therefore, occurred not only during formal teaching but also through everyday interactions and school routines.

3.1.3 Teachers as Facilitators of Value-Based Learning

Teachers facilitated the internalization of values by connecting academic content with situations encountered in students' everyday lives. Cultural and religious values were incorporated into classroom interactions and learning activities rather than being treated exclusively as separate character-education content.

Values such as politeness, responsibility, honesty, discipline, and mutual respect were communicated through explanations, discussions, examples, and interactions during classroom activities. This approach enabled the cultivation of values to occur alongside academic learning and provided opportunities for students to apply these values in practical situations.

3.2 Strategies for Internalizing Cultural and Religious Values

The second theme concerns the strategies employed by teachers and the school to internalize cultural and religious values. Four interconnected strategies were identified: integration of values into classroom learning, cultural habituation, religious habituation, and extracurricular or culturally contextualized activities.

3.2.1 Integration of Values into Classroom Learning

The findings show that cultural and religious values were integrated into classroom learning. Teachers connected instructional content with values relevant to students' daily lives and reinforced expected behaviors during classroom interactions.

The integration was particularly evident in the cultivation of honesty, responsibility, discipline, politeness, cooperation, and mutual respect. Teachers used direct explanations and examples from everyday situations to help students understand how these values could be applied beyond conceptual knowledge.

Observation further indicated that value integration occurred through the organization of classroom activities. Students participated in discussions and group activities that required cooperation, responsibility, and respectful interaction. Consequently, the classroom functioned not only as a setting for academic instruction but also as a space for practicing character values.

3.2.2 Cultural Habituation Through the 5S Culture

Cultural habituation was implemented through everyday routines, particularly the 5S culture: Smile, Greet, Speak Politely, Be Courteous, and Be Respectful. The program was intended to establish patterns of respectful interaction among students, teachers, and other members of the school community.

Observations showed that the 5S culture was visible in students' everyday behavior. Students were observed greeting teachers politely and interacting respectfully with teachers and peers. Politeness was reinforced through repeated interactions rather than through occasional activities.

Other cultural values, including cooperation and mutual assistance, were also practiced through classroom group activities and collective school activities. These practices provided students with opportunities to experience cultural values as part of their everyday social relationships.

3.2.3 Religious Habituation

Religious habituation represented another prominent strategy. The school implemented routine activities including collective prayer, Qur'an recitation, the recitation of Surah Yasin every Friday, and the "one day one verse" program.

According to Informant A, the Friday Surah Yasin recitation involved students and teachers collectively. The "one day one verse" program involved daily Qur'anic reading and memorization. These activities were implemented continuously as part of the school's effort to familiarize students with religious practices.

Observational data indicated that students generally participated in collective prayers, Qur'an recitation, and the "one day one verse" program in an orderly manner. Most students demonstrated enthusiasm and discipline during these activities, although some still required reminders and guidance from teachers.

The findings therefore indicate that religious value internalization was implemented through repetition and routine participation. Religious values were not limited to verbal instruction but were embedded in practices that students encountered regularly within the school environment.

3.2.4 Extracurricular and Local Cultural Activities

Value internalization also occurred through activities outside regular classroom instruction. Interview data indicated that religious holiday commemorations, mutual cooperation activities, and programs associated with local culture were used to provide students with direct experiences of togetherness, social awareness, cooperation, and appreciation of cultural values.

These activities expanded the process of character formation beyond classroom learning. Students were provided with opportunities to participate directly in collective activities that reflected the cultural and religious values promoted by the school.

3.3 Manifestations of Cultural and Religious Values in Students' Behavior

The third theme concerns how the values fostered by teachers and school programs were manifested in students' everyday behavior. The findings indicate several observable manifestations, particularly politeness and respect, discipline and responsibility, cooperation, and participation in religious activities.

3.3.1 Politeness and Respect

Observational data showed that students generally demonstrated polite behavior toward teachers and peers. Students were observed greeting teachers, using respectful forms of interaction, and participating appropriately in classroom activities. Implementation of the 5S culture was also visible in everyday school interactions.

Informant C (Student) indicated that participation in the school's cultural and religious activities helped students become more respectful toward teachers. This suggests that students themselves perceived a relationship between participation in school programs and changes in their behavior.

Nevertheless, respectful behavior was not entirely consistent. Preliminary and subsequent observations indicated that some students behaved differently depending on the teacher with whom they interacted. Some students also occasionally talked during lessons or demonstrated limited attention. Thus, the findings indicate positive behavioral manifestations while simultaneously showing that the internalization process remained incomplete.

3.3.2 Discipline and Responsibility

Discipline and responsibility were visible during classroom and religious activities. Most students participated in routine religious programs in an orderly manner and followed school activities as expected. Classroom observations also indicated active participation in learning and group activities.

Informant C reported that the activities implemented by the school helped students become more disciplined and responsible in their everyday behavior. However, several students still required guidance and reminders, particularly during religious activities. These findings indicate that discipline and responsibility had begun to emerge as observable behaviors but still depended partly on teacher supervision.

3.3.3 Cooperation and Social Interaction

Cooperation was observed particularly during classroom group activities and collective school programs. Students demonstrated cooperative attitudes when participating in group learning and other shared activities. Mutual cooperation activities also provided opportunities for students to practice togetherness and social responsibility.

These findings suggest that cultural values were manifested not only in individual behavior, such as politeness and discipline, but also in students' social relationships. The school environment provided repeated opportunities for students to interact with peers in situations requiring cooperation and mutual assistance.

3.3.4 Participation in Religious Practices

Students' participation in collective prayer, Qur'an recitation, Friday Surah Yasin recitation, and the "one day one verse" program constituted the most visible manifestation of religious habituation. Most students participated actively and demonstrated discipline during these activities.

The school environment also reflected religious values through teachers' participation and modeling. However, observation revealed that some students occasionally lost focus during religious activities and required reminders. Therefore, regular participation in religious practices did not necessarily indicate that religious values had been fully internalized by all students.

3.4 Challenges in Maintaining the Consistency of Value Internalization

The fourth theme concerns the challenges faced by teachers in ensuring that cultural and religious values were practiced consistently. The data indicate that the main challenges were inconsistent student behavior, the influence of gadgets and social media, differences in family backgrounds, and limited parental involvement.

3.4.1 Inconsistency Between School-Based Habituation and Everyday Behavior

Although students generally demonstrated positive attitudes at school, the findings showed that these behaviors were not always consistent. Some students still talked during lessons, showed limited focus during religious activities, or required teacher reminders to follow expected behavior.

Student interviews also indicated that maintaining the values practiced at school became more difficult outside the school environment. Informant C acknowledged that consistently practicing these values outside school remained challenging.

This finding highlights a distinction between participating in structured school activities and independently maintaining the same values in other situations. The data therefore suggest that habituation had produced observable positive behaviors, but the transition from externally guided behavior to consistent personal practice remained an ongoing process.

3.4.2 Influence of Gadgets and Social Media

Gadget and social media use emerged as a challenge to the consistency of students' behavior. Student interviews indicated that digital influences made it more difficult for some students to maintain cultural and religious practices outside school.

Observations also showed that peer interactions and gadget-related influences were associated with occasional lack of focus in learning and religious activities. Digital technology therefore emerged in the data not as a separate educational issue but as one of the contextual factors affecting students' behavioral consistency.

3.4.3 Differences in Family Backgrounds and Parental Involvement

Differences in family backgrounds constituted another challenge identified in the study. The values and habits reinforced at school were not always supported to the same extent in students' home environments. Limited parental involvement further complicated teachers' efforts to maintain continuity between school-based character education and students' behavior outside school.

Both teacher and student perspectives indicated the importance of collaboration between the school and parents. Because teachers could directly supervise students only within the school environment, the continuity of cultural and religious practices depended partly on reinforcement within the family.

3.5 Synthesis of the Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the fostering of cultural and religious values at SD Negeri Keumangan operates through an interconnected process involving teacher roles, classroom learning, habituation, exemplary behavior, and school activities. Teachers function as role models, mentors, guides, and facilitators, while cultural and religious values are reinforced through the 5S culture, classroom interactions, collective religious practices, Qur'anic activities, and extracurricular experiences.

The data also show that students manifested these values through politeness, respect, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and participation in religious practices. However, the internalization process was not uniform or complete. Some students continued to require teacher guidance, and the consistency of their behavior was affected by digital influences, peer interactions, family backgrounds, and parental involvement.

The findings, therefore, reveal a distinction between value habituation within a structured school environment and consistent value internalization across different contexts. While school-based practices provided repeated opportunities for students to enact cultural and religious values, maintaining these behaviors beyond direct teacher supervision remained a central challenge.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the fostering of cultural and religious values at SD Negeri Keumangan operates through an interconnected process involving teacher modeling, value-based classroom interactions, cultural and religious habituation, and students' participation in collective school activities. Teachers function not only as providers of academic knowledge but also as role models, mentors, and facilitators who translate abstract values into observable practices. This role is particularly important in elementary education because values such as politeness, discipline, responsibility, respect, and cooperation become more accessible to students when they are consistently demonstrated in everyday interactions. Teacher modeling, therefore, functions as a bridge between knowing a value and understanding how that value should be enacted. This interpretation is supported by Alkhasanah et al. (2023), who identified teachers' roles as models, mentors, guides, and evaluators in elementary students' character development. More recent evidence also indicates that teacher modeling, when combined with structured habituation, provides an important mechanism for the internalization of religious values in school settings (Maisarah et al., 2026).

The findings further indicate that value internalization was strengthened through repeated practices such as the 5S culture, collective prayer, Qur'an recitation, Friday Surah Yasin recitation, and the "one day one verse" program. These routines are pedagogically significant because they transform character education from abstract moral instruction into repeated behavioral experiences. Students do not merely receive information about respect, discipline, cooperation, or religious responsibility; they are provided with opportunities to practice these values within everyday school life. Habituation can therefore be interpreted as a mechanism connecting cognitive understanding with behavioral enactment. Previous research has similarly shown that systematic habituation in elementary schools can strengthen students' character when it is consistently supported by the school environment and teacher exemplification (Ananda et al., 2026). However, the present findings add an important qualification: repeated participation in character-building activities should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that the underlying values have been fully internalized.

This distinction between habituation and internalization is particularly evident in students' behavior. Observations showed that students generally demonstrated politeness, cooperation, discipline, responsibility, and active participation in religious activities. Nevertheless, some students continued to talk during lessons, lose focus during religious activities, or require reminders from teachers. Students also acknowledged that maintaining these behaviors outside school was more difficult, particularly in relation to gadget and social media influences. These findings suggest that students may demonstrate desirable behaviors within a structured environment before developing the capacity to maintain those behaviors independently. In other words, school routines can successfully produce opportunities for value-based behavior, while deeper internalization requires students to reproduce these values when external supervision is reduced. Thus, participation in character programs and behavioral consistency should be treated as related but conceptually different indicators of character development.

This interpretation provides an important contribution to understanding the effectiveness of character education. The success of character education should not be evaluated solely by the existence of programs or the frequency of students' participation in them. A more meaningful indicator is the

extent to which students demonstrate behavioral consistency across contexts. Values can be considered increasingly internalized when students demonstrate respect, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and religious-moral awareness not only during structured school activities but also in less supervised situations. The findings, therefore, position character formation as a developmental movement from externally regulated behavior toward increasingly self-regulated behavior. In this process, teacher modeling and habituation provide the initial structure, while reflection, repeated practice, and opportunities for autonomous action are required to strengthen internalization.

The influence of gadgets and social media should also be understood within this broader process rather than simply interpreted as a cause of moral decline. The present data indicate that digital influences represent an additional social environment in which students encounter patterns of behavior that may differ from those reinforced at school. Previous research has reported associations between poorly supervised gadget use and students' religious behavior and discipline (Aminu et al., 2024; Puspita et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the educational implication is not merely to restrict technology but to extend character education into students' digital lives. Values such as responsibility, respect, discipline, and self-control remain relevant when students communicate online, access digital content, or manage screen time. Character education and digital literacy should therefore be approached as interconnected educational concerns. Teacher–parent collaboration is particularly important in this process because students' digital activities often occur beyond direct school supervision (Harjanto et al., 2026).

The findings concerning family backgrounds and parental involvement further demonstrate the limitations of school-based character education when it operates in isolation. Teachers can establish routines and reinforce values during school hours, but the continuity of these values depends partly on students' experiences within families and other social environments. School and family should therefore be understood as interconnected contexts of value formation rather than separate sources of character education. Previous research has emphasized that school–family partnerships can provide continuity in children's character development by creating mutually reinforcing educational environments (Suharta et al., 2020). In the present study, students' difficulty maintaining expected behaviors outside school indicates that collaboration with parents should move beyond communicating school programs toward establishing shared expectations and consistent reinforcement of cultural, religious, and digital behavior.

Overall, the scientific contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing the fostering of cultural and religious values as a progressive process: teacher modeling and value-based instruction → structured habituation → observable behavioral practice → cross-contextual internalization. The findings suggest that the school has established mechanisms that enable students to practice cultural and religious values, but the central challenge lies in transforming school-regulated practices into values that students maintain across school, family, social, and digital contexts. Thus, effective character education should not be understood merely as the repetition of desirable behavior. It is a developmental process through which externally structured practices are gradually transformed into increasingly autonomous and contextually consistent value-based behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the fostering of cultural and religious values at SD Negeri Keumangan is implemented through an interconnected process of teacher modeling, value-based classroom learning, cultural and religious habituation, and collective school activities. Teachers play multidimensional roles as role models, mentors, guides, and facilitators who translate values such as politeness, respect, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and religious commitment into everyday educational practices. The implementation of the 5S culture, collective prayer, Qur'an recitation, Friday Surah Yasin recitation, and the "one day one verse" program provides repeated opportunities for students to practice these values, which are reflected in their interactions, discipline, cooperation, and participation in religious activities. However, the findings also indicate that habituation does not

automatically result in complete value internalization, as some students continue to require teacher guidance and experience difficulties in maintaining consistent behavior beyond structured school settings, particularly amid gadget and social media influences, differences in family backgrounds, and limited parental involvement. Therefore, the central implication of this study is that character education should progress from teacher-directed modeling and structured habituation toward increasingly autonomous and cross-contextually consistent value-based behavior. Strengthening collaboration among teachers, families, and the wider school community, while integrating character education with students' digital experiences, is therefore essential for sustaining cultural and religious values across school, family, social, and digital environments. Although this study provides a contextually grounded understanding of value internalization in one elementary school, its findings are limited to a specific school context; future studies involving multiple schools and broader participant groups are recommended to examine how the transition from school-based habituation to cross-contextual value internalization occurs across different educational and sociocultural settings.

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