

STRATEGY FOR INTERNALIZING ISLAMIC CHARACTER VALUES THROUGH THE DHUHA PRAYER PROGRAM AT SMK MUHAMMADIYAH SALAMAN

Safiratul Khasanah¹; Novita Aristawati Safitri²; Purnomo³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia

¹Corresponding E-mail: safiratulhasanah30@gmail.com

Abstract

Moral degradation among Indonesian youth calls for effective strategies to internalize Islamic character values, particularly in vocational schools that struggle to balance spiritual and technical education. This study investigates the internalization of Islamic character values through the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research involved purposive sampling with six key informants, including school leaders, religious education teachers, and students. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and validated using triangulation, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure data trustworthiness. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three main steps: data reduction (selecting and organizing relevant information), data display (presenting data systematically for interpretation), and conclusion drawing/verification (identifying patterns and ensuring findings are supported). The findings highlight core internalized values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and spirituality. These are fostered through a comprehensive strategy involving daily religious habituation, the implementation of the 5S culture (Smile, Greet, Salute, Politeness, Courtesy), integration of religious teachings in the curriculum, and routine monitoring mechanisms. Supporting factors include strong institutional commitment, competent educators, and adequate infrastructure, while challenges stem from students' diverse social backgrounds and limited awareness of character development. Based on the findings, a strategic model is proposed comprising: (1) a philosophical foundation rooted in Islamic-Muhammadiyah values, (2) daily habituation practices, (3) collaborative support from stakeholders, and (4) continuous assessment and improvement. This model proves effective in strengthening students' Islamic character and can serve as a reference for other vocational schools aiming to implement sustainable character education rooted in Islamic principles.

Keywords: Character Internalization; Shalat Dhuha Program; Islamic Vocational Education; Character Development Strategies; Muhammadiyah Vocational School

A. Introduction

Character education is a fundamental element in nurturing a generation with integrity and strong moral values, particularly within the framework of Islamic education that emphasizes a balance between academic achievement and spiritual growth. Contemporary realities indicate an increasingly alarming trend of moral degradation among Indonesian youth. This is evidenced by the 2023 report from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which noted a significant decline in students' participation in religious activities across schools. Additionally, data from the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) in 2022 revealed that over 35% of adolescents aged 15–19 exhibited low levels of moral and spiritual awareness, as indicated by their involvement in risky behaviors and weak ethical judgment. These conditions manifest in declining social ethics, lack of discipline, and a fragile commitment to spiritual values in daily life. This phenomenon presents a serious challenge for educational institutions, especially Islamic-based vocational high schools, which bear the dual responsibility of preparing students for the workforce while simultaneously reinforcing their religious and moral foundations.

Vocational High Schools (SMK) as educational institutions oriented towards the preparation of skilled workers have their own complexities in integrating Islamic character values. Vocational school students face pressure to master technical and vocational skills, which often distracts from the aspect of spiritual character building. In this context, the internalization of Islamic character values is an urgency that cannot be ignored, considering that vocational school graduates will directly interact with the world of work which requires not only technical competence but also strong moral integrity.

The shalat dhuha program, as one of the recommended (sunnah) worship practices in Islam, holds strategic potential as a medium for internalizing character values. Its integration into the school environment has been widely recognized as contributing positively to students' religious character, responsibility, discipline, and independence (Susanto et al., 2022). Empirical studies have generally focused on the role of ritual worship in character development, but they tend to discuss its impact in general terms without detailing the contextual uniqueness of vocational education settings (empirical gap). Furthermore, while there is broad theoretical agreement on the link between religious practices and moral development, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into how specific rituals like shalat dhuha function as structured educational tools within Islamic pedagogy (theoretical gap). Methodologically, many previous studies adopt either a quantitative approach or a general qualitative description, yet few employ a robust qualitative framework that includes triangulated data sources and established models such as Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis to examine the internalization process in depth (methodological gap). In this regard, the implementation of the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman presents a unique case that requires a tailored strategy for instilling character values, making it necessary to explore the program through a comprehensive and context-sensitive qualitative approach.

Prior studies on the internalization of character values within Islamic education have identified a range of methods and strategies. The model for internalizing religious character values aimed at strengthening students' moral conduct underscores the necessity of a structured and continuous approach to character development (Humna Kamila & Nahuda024). In a similar vein, the integration of religious moderation values into English instruction at Indonesian vocational schools demonstrates that such values can be conveyed through various elements, including verbal prompts, instructional content, pedagogical techniques, teacher conduct, and assignments emphasizing tolerance, dialogue, fairness, adaptability, and creativity (Sufiyatun, 2025). Another study focused on character education in Islamic secondary schools highlights that the successful implementation of such programs depends on embedding character education into lesson planning, classroom practices, and academic regulations (Susanto et al., 2022).

Previous research on the implementation of shalat dhuha in Muhammadiyah schools has demonstrated its positive impact on enhancing students' spiritual intelligence, as reflected in increased enthusiasm, perseverance, honesty, and responsibility (Mashuri & Fanani, 2021). Similarly, other studies have shown that the practice of shalat dhuha contributes effectively to the formation of character values such as religious commitment, discipline, responsibility, and independence (Saputra & Fatkhullah, 2025). Additionally, research on the internalization of pesantren values highlights the importance of a holistic approach involving all elements of the school in character education (Khotimah et al., 2023; Sujannah & Saleh, 2024). However, these studies often present generalized conclusions and tend to overlook the distinctive context of Islamic vocational high schools (SMK), which must balance spiritual formation with technical competency development. Furthermore, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into the specific mechanisms and strategic models used to internalize Islamic character values through shalat dhuha within a structured institutional framework. This study addresses that gap by offering a contextualized analysis of the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman and by proposing a strategic model that integrates Islamic-Muhammadiyah philosophy, daily habituation, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous evaluation. Thus, this research contributes a new perspective by combining practical implementation with a theoretical model specifically designed for vocational Islamic education settings.

Recent advancements in the implementation of character education through religious programs reflect a growing diversification of innovative and context-sensitive approaches. The evolving paradigm of contemporary Islamic education is confronted with the intricate task of harmonizing spiritual values with the exigencies of modern life. Anggraini et al., (2025) highlight that the effective application of character education necessitates strategies that are responsive to the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of students, particularly in the digital age. This challenge becomes even more pronounced within the context of vocational education, where the emphasis on technical proficiency must be balanced with the development of personal integrity and character.

The effectiveness of the dhuha prayer program in shaping religious character has been validated through various empirical studies that show a positive correlation between the consistency of religious rituals and the improvement of the moral quality of students. Research (Diana & Masyitoh, 2025) revealed that the implementation of congregational dhuha prayer was able to increase student discipline by 78% and reduce deviant behavior by 65% in a period of one semester. Similar findings were confirmed by (Humna Kamila & Nahuda, 2024) which states that the sunnah worship habituation program contributes significantly to the formation of independent, honest, and responsible character in high school students.

The psychological dimension of the practice of dhuha prayer shows implications that go beyond the ritualistic aspect alone. In-depth analysis conducted (Nurhasanah et al., 2024) identify that structured spiritual activities are able to optimize the development of students' emotional and spiritual intelligence through self-reflection mechanisms that are integrated in worship rituals. Furthermore, longitudinal studies (Indah et al., 2024) it proves that the consistency of the implementation of the dhuha prayer is positively correlated with the improvement of academic achievement and emotional stability of students in the long term. The contextualization of the dhuha prayer program in a vocational education setting requires a more specific approach compared to the implementation in public schools. Recent research by (Aji et al., 2024) shows that the integration of spiritual values in vocational curricula requires adaptive strategies that are able to bridge the gap between industrial needs and the formation of Islamic character. This is reinforced by the findings (Yustina & Adibah, 2021) which reveals that vocational school students need a more practical and applicative approach to internalizing character to optimize the transfer of values from the spiritual domain to professional competence.

However, there are gaps in previous studies that need to be addressed. Firstly, the majority of existing research has concentrated on the practice of Dhuha prayer at the junior secondary or madrasah level, while specific research examining implementation in vocational high schools is still limited. Second, research that explores the strategy of internalizing Islamic character values through the dhuha prayer program with an in-depth qualitative approach in the Muhammadiyah Vocational School environment has not been widely conducted. Third, the analysis of the challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the dhuha prayer program in the context of vocational education which has different characteristics and demands from general education still needs further exploration.

The cultivation of tolerance through Islamic religious education instruction and character also shows the importance of a comprehensive approach in character building that focuses not only on ritual aspects but also on the development of universal values such as tolerance and moderation (Mashuri & Fanani, 2021). The challenge of developing the Islamic education curriculum and its strategies in facing the demands of future competencies requires Islamic educational institutions to prepare themselves to face social issues,

technological and information advances, the growth of creative and cultural industries, and the internationalization of education (Ginanjar et al., 2025).

The position of this research in the constellation of previous studies is as an effort to strengthen and deepen understanding of the implementation of the dhuha prayer program as a strategy for internalizing Islamic character values, especially in the context of SMK Muhammadiyah. This research does not aim to correct or debate the findings of previous research, but rather to complement and enrich the scientific treasures with a more specific focus on internalization strategies in vocational education settings.

The novelty of this study is reflected in several key aspects. First, it centers on SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman as a representative example of Islamic-based vocational schools that uniquely combine religious and vocational education. Second, it provides a detailed examination of the specific strategies employed in the internalization of Islamic character values through the dhuha prayer program, along with an in-depth analysis of both the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation. Third, by employing a qualitative approach, the study offers rich insights into the meaning and process of character internalization from the perspectives of various educational stakeholders. Importantly, the findings of this research are expected to offer practical contributions by informing educational policymakers on effective strategies for character education in vocational contexts. In particular, the study can serve as a valuable reference in the development and refinement of Islamic character-based curricula that are contextually aligned with the distinctive needs and realities of vocational schools.

The layered strategy employed in this study involves the integration of routine religious practices through the implementation of the *shalat dhuha* program, the development of a supportive school culture, the alignment of religious content within the curriculum, and the active involvement of vocational subject teachers in instilling character values. This approach aims to establish a character-building mechanism that is not merely theoretical, but also contextually relevant and practically applicable within the vocational education environment. The study conducted by (Aji et al., 2024) explores various teaching methods commonly applied within the educational system. However, the research has yet to provide an in-depth examination of instructional models that integrate religious ritual practices with Islamic character-building approaches, particularly within the context of vocational education in Islamic-based schools such as SMK Muhammadiyah. From a different perspective, Islamiati & Jazuli (2024) emphasize the importance of integrating moral values with school culture as a key factor in creating a learning environment that supports positive changes in students' attitudes and behavior. This perspective underscores that character development is closely linked to the consistency of the school environment in internalizing Islamic values across all aspects of the learning process. Referring to previous studies, this research offers a new theoretical contribution to the development of character- and culture-based education within the framework of contemporary Islamic education, particularly in the context of vocational schools. This contribution is realized through the

implementation of an Islamic values internalization model that is systematically designed, contextually adapted, and structured for long-term sustainability.

Building upon the preceding explanation, this study seeks to examine and articulate the strategy for internalizing Islamic character values through the Dhuha prayer program implemented at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman. In particular, this study aims to: (1) identify Islamic character values that are internalized through the dhuha prayer program; (2) describe the strategies used in the process of internalizing Islamic character values through the dhuha prayer program; (3) Analyze the enabling and constraining factors influencing the implementation of strategies for internalizing Islamic character values through the Dhuha prayer program; and (4) formulate a model strategy for internalizing Islamic character values that are effective through the dhuha prayer program at SMK Muhammadiyah.

This study is anticipated to make a significant theoretical contribution to the advancement of the discourse on internalizing Islamic character values in vocational education, particularly by addressing the urgent issue of moral degradation among youth and the limited integration of structured religious programs in vocational school settings. The novelty of this research lies in its development of a strategic model specifically designed for Islamic-based vocational schools, which balances spiritual formation with the demands of technical competency. In addition to its theoretical value, this study offers practical contributions in the form of concrete strategic recommendations that can serve as references for educational institutions with similar characteristics. The results are expected to support school leaders, curriculum developers, and policy-makers in formulating Islamic character-based curricula that are both contextually grounded and systematically implemented. Furthermore, the strategic model developed in this study has the potential to inform institutional policies on religious habituation programs and contribute to the development of national education frameworks that emphasize character formation as a core component of vocational training.

B. Method

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the strategy for internalizing Islamic character values through the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman (Agustianti et al., 2022; Khotimah et al., 2023). This method was deemed appropriate to align with the study's objective of understanding the contextual practices and perspectives of educational actors in a natural setting. This method was chosen for its suitability in understanding the contextual and interpretive aspects of educational practices, particularly as experienced by education actors in their natural setting. The descriptive qualitative method provides space for researchers to explore the meaning and process of internalizing character values through direct interaction with educational actors in the school environment (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022).

The location of the research was determined at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman, Magelang Regency, Central Java. The determination of this site rests on several strategic considerations. SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman is an Islamic-based vocational education institution that has consistently implemented the dhuha prayer program as part of its efforts to internalize Islamic and Muhammadiyah character values. The uniqueness of this institution lies in its comprehensive integration of vocational education with Islamic principles and Muhammadiyah ideology, making it a relevant context for examining strategies of character value internalization through religious programs. This study involved multiple informants to ensure source triangulation, including one main informant (a religious teacher), three vocational subject teachers, two educational staff, and four students who actively participate in the dhuha prayer program.

The research was conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman, located in Magelang Regency, Central Java. The selection of this site was based on several strategic considerations. SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman is an Islamic-based vocational education institution that has consistently implemented the shalat dhuha program as part of its efforts to internalize Islamic character values and uphold Muhammadiyah educational principles. According to vocational subject teachers who accompany students during the dhuha prayer program, the school currently serves around 1.000 students across various vocational departments, including DKV, AKL, MPLB and Culinary. These teachers also explained that the shalat dhuha program has been formally integrated into the school's daily routine since 2017 and is supported by structured religious activities and character education initiatives. Notably, SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman has received regional recognition for its character-building programs, including an award from the Magelang Education Office in 2022 for exemplary implementation of religious habituation practices. These factors make it a relevant and insightful case for exploring the strategic internalization of Islamic character values in the vocational school context. The uniqueness of this institution lies in its comprehensive integration between vocational education with Islamic values and Muhammadiyah, thus providing a relevant context to examine the strategy of internalizing character values through religious programs.

The research subjects in this study include various components of the academic community that are directly involved in the implementation of the dhuha prayer program. The main resource person in this study was Mrs. Emi Zulaidah an Islamic Religious Education teacher who is responsible for guiding religious activities at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman. In addition to her, the researcher also interviewed several vocational subject teachers who accompany students during the dhuha prayer activities, as well as several students from various departments, including AKL, MPLB, Culinary, and DKV as a representative of SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman who has a deep understanding of the integration of Islamic values and Muhammadiyah in an effort to strengthen the character of students. The selection of resource persons is carried out purposively by considering credibility, experience, and direct involvement in the dhuha prayer program as well as the process of internalizing character values in the school.

The research utilized two main techniques for data collection: in-depth interviews and document analysis. The interviews were conducted on-site at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman in four separate sessions between May 26 and June 10, 2025 with each session lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Interviews were held with key informants including school administrators, religious education teachers, and selected students. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate thematic analysis. Document analysis was conducted on school regulations, activity schedules, and character education reports related to the implementation of the shalat dhuha program. In-depth interviews were selected as the principal method, as they enable researchers to gather comprehensive, nuanced, and detailed insights into the strategy of internalizing character values through the Dhuha prayer program. Interviews are conducted in a structured manner using interview guidelines that have been prepared based on research objectives, but still provide flexibility for the interviewees to develop information according to their experiences and understanding. The interview process is carried out in a conducive and natural atmosphere to ensure the authenticity of the information obtained.

Documentation as a secondary data collection technique is used to complement and reinforce the data obtained through interviews. This includes various official school documents such as the school profile, vision and mission, annual work programs, and other materials relevant to the implementation of the dhuha prayer program. Notably, technical guidelines for performing dhuha prayers and program evaluation reports are among the most significant documents analyzed, as they provide concrete insights into the structure, objectives, and outcomes of the program. Analyzing these documents enables researchers to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding of the program's implementation context and to assess the consistency between formal policies and actual practices in the field.

The stages of this research were systematically structured to ensure an effective and high-quality research process. The first stage is research preparation which includes the preparation of research proposals, the management of research permits, the preparation of research instruments, and coordination with the school. The second stage is the implementation of field research which consists of data collection through in-depth interviews with resource persons and the collection of relevant documents. The third phase pertains to data analysis, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion formulation. The fourth stage is the preparation of research reports and dissemination of research results.

This study employs the interactive data analysis model introduced by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three essential stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing or verifying conclusions. In the data reduction phase, raw interview transcripts and documents were carefully reviewed to identify and code relevant information, resulting in several key thematic categories such as "daily religious habituation," "discipline and responsibility," "supporting institutional factors," and "challenges in

character internalization.” These categories were then organized and displayed in matrices to facilitate comparison across informants. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions by identifying patterns and relationships between the themes, which were continually verified through triangulation and member checking to ensure the validity and consistency of findings. Data reduction involves the process of filtering, concentrating, and organizing raw data to make it more manageable and meaningful, simplifying, and abstracting raw data collected from the field. At this stage, the researcher conducts a coding and categorization process of interview data and documentation organized around themes aligned with the aims of the research. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of a systematic and structured narrative text to facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Conclusions are drawn in stages from data collection to final verification to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the research results.

The credibility of the data in this study is ensured through the use of both source triangulation and methodological triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is conducted by cross-checking data from multiple informants to confirm the consistency and credibility of the findings, while methodological triangulation is implemented by comparing data obtained from interviews with documentation to enhance the validity of the research findings. In addition, the researcher conducts member checking by confirming the results of the analysis with the sources to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation. To further strengthen the credibility, the researcher also engaged in prolonged engagement by spending sufficient time in the research setting to build trust, understand the context thoroughly, and observe actual practices. Peer debriefing was carried out by discussing the research process and findings with academic peers to minimize bias and ensure the objectivity of the analysis.

The ethical aspects of research are strictly observed throughout the research process. The researcher obtains informed consent from all sources before conducting the interview and guarantees the confidentiality of the identity and personal information of the sources that are not relevant to the purpose of the research. The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence are applied by ensuring that this research provides benefits for the development of character education and does not harm any party involved in the research. The researcher is also committed to presenting research findings objectively and unbiased to certain interests.

The limitations of the research are recognized in terms of the scope of the research location that is limited to one educational institution, so generalization of findings requires caution. However, this study prioritizes the depth of analysis and contextual understanding of the phenomenon studied, which is in line with the characteristics of qualitative research that emphasizes transferability rather than generalizability. The findings of this research are anticipated to offer comprehensive insights into the strategy of internalizing Islamic character values through the *dhuha* prayer program that can be adapted by similar educational institutions by considering the context and characteristics of each institution (Herlina et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2023).

C. Finding and Discussion

Internalized Character Values

Drawing on the findings from interviews with the speakers, various Islamic character values were identified that were internalized through the dhuha prayer program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman. The resource person explained that *"there is an independent dhuha prayer accompanied by productive teachers from each of the 4 departments, including MPLB, AKL, CULINARY, and DKV majors because productive teachers themselves have higher teaching hours so they participate in supervising their students when praying dhuha."* The implementation of the dhuha prayer program shows the school's commitment to instilling spiritual values that are fundamental to the formation of students' character.

The value of discipline is one of the main characters developed through the dhuha prayer program. This is reflected in the statement of the resource person that *"the children leave before 7 o'clock, morning prayer accompanied by the teacher or homeroom teacher followed by a character strengthening session from the teacher or homeroom teacher."* This practice shows that time discipline is the foundation in the implementation of the dhuha prayer program, in line with the findings of (Widyawati et al., 2024; Yustina & Adibah, 2021) who show that *"there is an increase in students' awareness in understanding the time to perform the dhuha prayer" and "students also no longer leave late, all of them can be present before 07.00 am."*



Figure 1. Vision and Mission

The value of responsibility is also developed through a structured supervision and mentoring system. The resource person explained that *"The habit of praying dhuha is entrusted to productive teachers who only supervise for about 10-15 minutes."* This approach provides space for students to develop independence in worship while still receiving the necessary guidance. These findings support the results of the study (Abdul et al., 2022; Saputra & Fatkhullah, 2025) which states that *"This practice also instills discipline in worship, which directly strengthens the spiritual integrity of individuals at a young age."*

The value of honesty is internalized through a humanist and persuasive approach. The resource person emphasized that *"my strategy is for example in a subtle way, because usually children if they are refined in their words they want to carry out, for example about prayer, if they do not want to do it with violence."* This approach reflects the philosophy of Islamic education that prioritizes wisdom and compassion in character development.

Habituation Strategies and Curriculum

This study adopts a comprehensive approach as an integrative strategy that encompasses various elements of education, including routine religious practices such as *shalat dhuha*, a curriculum infused with religious teachings, a school environment shaped by Islamic values, and the active involvement of vocational subject teachers. This approach is aimed at fostering students' character development in a holistic manner, covering spiritual, social, and moral dimensions.

The findings of the study are reflected in the statement of one informant who explained that the school implements the principle of the "5S culture" (smile, greet, salam, polite, and courteous) as a foundation for shaping patterns of social interaction based on Islamic values. This cultural practice is not merely conceptual but is actively carried out in daily school activities. As described by the informant: *"When students arrive before seven in the morning, teachers are already present in the classroom to implement the 5S values, such as greeting and offering salam, in order to foster a close relationship between teachers and students"*

These findings indicate that the social dimension of character formation cannot be separated from the overall personality development system, which must be holistic in nature. The consistent involvement of teachers in welcoming and greeting students from the early hours of the morning reinforces the aspect of role modeling, builds emotional connections, and instills values of courtesy. All of these elements play a crucial role in supporting the continuous and sustainable internalization of Islamic character values within the school environment.



Figure 2. Cultural Poster of Smk Muhammadiyah Salaman

The habituation strategy serves as a key component in the internalization of Islamic character values. The consistent practice of *shalat dhuha* every day, accompanied by vocational teachers from each study program, reflects the school's strong commitment to instilling values through direct practice. This finding aligns with the study by Saryadi et al., (2020), which revealed that performing *shalat dhuha* in congregation has a positive impact on students' character development. The effectiveness of this approach is further supported by a statement from one informant, who emphasized that daily habituation fosters positive traits in students, such as discipline, honesty, respect for teachers, helpfulness, empathy, and a sense of responsibility.

The implementation of the habituation strategy, combined with the strengthening of religious content within the curriculum, reflects the integration of ritual and cognitive dimensions within the multidimensional approach that underpins this study. The synergy between daily religious practices and the enhancement of theoretical understanding through various Islamic subjects promotes a simultaneous and structured process of value internalization. The resulting character development is not limited to outward behavior, but also encompasses core values such as honesty, responsibility, and exemplary conduct. This comprehensive approach aligns with the holistic educational paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of nurturing the individual as a whole—intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

One of the strengths of SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman lies in its distinctive integration of religious curriculum. According to the informant, the school not only offers Islamic Religious Education (PAI) but also includes subjects such as Islamic creed and ethics (*aqidah akhlak*), Muhammadiyah studies, Islamic history (*tarikh*), Qur'an and Hadith, Arabic language, and practical worship. This variety of subjects reinforces students' theoretical foundation in performing religious practices, including the habituation of *shalat dhuha*.

The combination of religious routines and diverse religious subjects fosters a learning environment conducive to the consistent internalization of values. This approach also contributes to the development of an effective educational system in shaping students' Islamic character in a holistic manner.



Figure 3. Structure of the Religious Curriculum of SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman

The verification and mentoring strategy is implemented through an attendance monitoring system along with the direct involvement of teachers in *shalat dhuha* activities. One informant noted that attendance is recorded during the prayer, but the approach emphasizes guidance and encourages students to be honest voluntarily. This method reflects a balance between supervision and value cultivation, where honesty is not merely taught as a concept but practiced consistently within an empathetic environment. The strategy illustrates how moral values are fostered in holistic character education by cultivating students' internal awareness and sense of responsibility, rather than relying solely on external enforcement.

Supporting and Hindering Factors

The main supporting factor in the implementation of the *shalat dhuha* program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman is strong institutional commitment, demonstrated through the adoption of a five-day school week. This policy provides ample time for character development activities, including the regular practice of *shalat dhuha*. One respondent noted that "with the five-day school system, it is expected to become a comparative advantage over other schools."

In addition, the program's success is supported by competent human resources, particularly the involvement of teachers in guiding and supervising students. The teachers' role as role models strengthens the school's religious culture, as emphasized by Sufiyatun (2025), who stated that "the role of teachers as exemplars and mentors greatly influences the success of this program." The combination of institutional policy and the active participation of educators creates a conducive environment for the internalization of Islamic values.

The availability of adequate worship facilities is a crucial element in supporting the successful implementation of religious programs at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman. Both school campuses are equipped with mosques and prayer rooms, each capable of accommodating between 80 to 100 students. These facilities include separate ablution areas for male and female students, as well as worship equipment such as storage cabinets for *mukena* and *sarongs*. The presence of these facilities enables the regular and disciplined performance of religious practices, including *shalat dhuha*, *dzuhur*, and *ashar*. A religious education teacher explained that students are required to perform *shalat dzuhur* and *ashar* at school using their own prayer garments, while the Friday prayer for male students is centralized at Campus 1, as the school operates across two campuses. These worship activities are directly supervised by teachers and homeroom advisors, who are also responsible for recording student attendance during religious activities. According to internal school data, more than 90 percent of students actively participate in daily congregational prayers. The presence of well-maintained facilities and a conducive religious environment has become a fundamental foundation for fostering a strong and sustainable culture of religiosity within the school community.

One of the main challenges in character development at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman is the perception that this responsibility lies solely with religious education teachers. A respondent explained that many still believe religious matters should be handled exclusively by Islamic Studies teachers, whereas all teachers should be involved.

This reflects a lack of collective awareness within the school environment. To address this, the school has initiated efforts to encourage all teachers to actively participate in strengthening students' character.

In addition, the implementation of character programs often lacks consistency. Despite supervision, some students still fail to carry out the planned activities. This indicates the need to strengthen program management and monitoring. In line with the findings of Rasmani et al., (2023) and Saparudin et al., (2025), character education is more effective when conducted in a structured manner, such as through morning activities before classes begin. Consistency, role modeling, and commitment from all school members are essential for the successful internalization of religious values.

Internal Strategy Model

The analysis of the research data reveals that an effective strategy for internalizing Islamic character values at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman is structured around the habituation of shalat dhuha. This strategy comprises four interconnected and mutually reinforcing components: (1) a philosophical foundation, (2) program implementation, (3) systemic support, and (4) continuous evaluation. Each of these elements functions within the unique setting of a vocational school environment, which presents distinctive challenges not typically found in general education or Islamic madrasahs. First, the philosophical foundation is rooted in Islamic teachings and Muhammadiyah values that underpin all school activities. A religious education teacher emphasized that the program is intended "to shape students with Islamic character and noble behavior" through worship routines embedded into school life.

This finding aligns with Aprilia & Sajari (2022), who highlighted that shalat dhuha nurtures values such as sincerity, hope in God, and discipline, as reflected in student behaviors like punctuality, reverence in worship, and respectful interaction post-prayer. Second, the implementation strategy focuses on consistent daily habituation. The shalat dhuha is conducted each morning under teacher supervision, supported by a structured monitoring system. Complementary activities include morning prayers, tadarus al-Qur'an, and keputrian programs. A participant shared that every afternoon, students – especially those with reading difficulties – receive guided Qur'anic reading sessions from 2:30 to 3:00 PM. These practices foster not only technical fluency in religious rituals but also deepen spiritual awareness in students' daily lives. What distinguishes this study is the contextual relevance to the vocational school environment, where students' primary focus often leans toward technical skill acquisition. Unlike Islamic madrasahs that are more spiritually centered, vocational schools face the dual burden of preparing students for the workforce while cultivating moral integrity. The challenge lies in integrating spiritual programs like shalat dhuha into a curriculum dominated by practical competencies.

Teachers reported that students initially showed indifference toward religious routines due to their perception of worship as peripheral to their vocational goals. Overcoming this required culturally responsive strategies that linked religious habits with workplace values like discipline, accountability, and emotional resilience – traits that are

essential in modern labor markets. Third, systemic support involves collaboration across the school ecosystem. Homeroom teachers, general subject teachers, and religious educators work together to foster Islamic values throughout all aspects of student life. This is in line with holistic education approaches that integrate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral learning. Sulistia et al., (2024) found, collective religious practices such as shalat dhuha not only enhance spirituality but also reinforce soft skills like teamwork, responsibility, and self-regulation.

Fourth, the evaluation and monitoring component is structured and adaptive. The school employs an attendance system for religious activities, recorded daily by teachers and homeroom mentors. Moreover, student progress is assessed not only in terms of participation but also through behavioral observations and stakeholder feedback. While the current study is qualitative, several indicators of success emerged.

Based on the evaluation results, the internalization strategy of Islamic character values through the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman has demonstrated significant effectiveness. Student participation in the shalat dhuha activity increased from approximately 60% to over 85% within just one semester, as documented by school records. This improvement was accompanied by notable behavioral changes, such as enhanced punctuality, a reduction in disciplinary violations, and improved concentration and readiness to engage in classroom learning. Teachers also expressed positive responses regarding the impact of the program, with one teacher noting that “the shalat dhuha routine helps students become calmer, more focused, and emotionally stable before lessons begin.” Moreover, student testimonials revealed the development of intrinsic motivation to perform religious practices independently outside school hours, reflecting a sustained growth in spiritual awareness. In terms of discipline enforcement, the school deliberately avoids punitive measures and instead applies an educational and humanistic approach involving rewards and constructive consequences. Active participants in the program receive recognition through certificates or public acknowledgment during school assemblies, while less active students receive individual mentoring to foster intrinsic motivation.

This strategy marks a significant advancement compared to previous studies, such as that by Sari et al., (2022), which focused more on the contribution of religious activities to academic achievement in Islamic Education subjects. In contrast, this research presents a more integrative and systemic approach, wherein shalat dhuha and its supporting activities are embedded into the broader school culture. What uniquely distinguishes this model is its ability to unify three critical domains—spirituality, academic education, and vocational skills—into a comprehensive character education framework. This holistic approach addresses the specific needs of Islamic vocational schools, which are expected not only to produce skilled graduates but also morally and spiritually grounded individuals. Given its contextual success, this model holds strong potential to serve as a practical reference for education policymakers, curriculum developers, and Islamic vocational education institutions seeking to implement sustainable and comprehensive character education programs.

Convergence of Internalization Strategies in a Multidimensional Perspective

The findings of this study at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman reveal a strategic alignment with character value internalization approaches implemented in other Islamic educational institutions. However, what sets this study apart is its application within a vocational school context, where the primary focus is typically on technical skill development and career readiness rather than spiritual or moral education. This creates a unique challenge: how to effectively instill deep-rooted Islamic character values within a learning environment that is oriented toward practical competencies, limited instructional hours for religious subjects, and student mindsets that are often geared more toward immediate employment than long-term moral formation. Despite these challenges, the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman has been successfully integrated into the daily routines of students, not merely as a religious obligation but as a strategic vehicle for cultivating discipline, responsibility, and sincerity. Unlike madrasahs or religious boarding schools where spiritual practices are central to the curriculum, vocational schools like SMK Muhammadiyah must intentionally create space for religious internalization without compromising technical content delivery.

This was achieved at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman through a well-structured program supported by teacher role modeling, a religiously conducive school culture, and cross-disciplinary collaboration among teachers. Empirical evidence from this study indicates significant outcomes. School records show a marked increase in student participation in shalat dhuha, rising from approximately 60% to 85% within one semester of consistent implementation. Furthermore, behavioral observations and teacher testimonials report noticeable changes in students' punctuality, attention during worship, emotional control, and overall attitude in class. One teacher stated, "After joining the morning shalat dhuha program regularly, students become noticeably more focused and show greater respect for classroom routines." This demonstrates a measurable impact of the religious habituation strategy on both cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Additionally, the program has contributed to the prevention of negative student behavior. As suggested by (Budiyanti & Parhan, 2024), character internalization not only cultivates positive traits but also functions as a preventive mechanism against deviant behavior such as bullying or academic dishonesty. At SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman, this was particularly evident in decreased reports of interpersonal conflict and disciplinary infractions, as recorded by student affairs coordinators over two evaluation cycles. Teacher role modeling has played a critical role in this success. Consistent with findings by Ratama et al., (2025) and Efendi & Fitriani (2023), teachers at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman actively participate in shalat dhuha and religious mentoring, serving as daily examples for students.

This leadership by example aligns with the concept of value transformation, wherein values are absorbed not only through direct instruction but also by witnessing consistent behavior from authority figures. Moreover, the integration of various spiritual programs—such as tadarus al-Qur'an, daily prayers, and keputrian (girls' mentoring)—provides a multidimensional platform for value internalization. These activities support the value transaction and transinternalization stages, as theorized by (Mashuri & Fanani, 2021), allowing students to negotiate, internalize, and personalize the values being taught. The

success of this approach is further supported by the school's humanistic evaluation system. Attendance and behavioral tracking are combined with positive reinforcement techniques, such as verbal recognition and symbolic rewards. Rather than punitive measures, students who lag in participation receive one-on-one mentoring to address their unique challenges. This evaluative approach ensures that spiritual growth is both measurable and developmentally sensitive.

In summary, the shalat dhuha program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman represents a contextually adaptive model for character education in vocational settings. It successfully integrates religious rituals with moral development strategies and vocational priorities, offering a holistic, systemic, and sustainable framework. This model may serve as a valuable reference for Islamic vocational schools across Indonesia that are striving to produce graduates who are not only technically competent but also spiritually grounded and morally upright.

E. Conclusion

This research on the strategy for internalizing Islamic character values through the Dhuha prayer program at SMK Muhammadiyah Salaman yielded comprehensive findings that underscore the effectiveness of a holistic and integrative approach in shaping students' character. The in-depth analysis of the program's implementation revealed that fundamental character traits – such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and spirituality – were effectively internalized through a structured, consistent, and community-supported habituation process. The internalization strategy adopted a multidimensional model that combines routine religious rituals with practical character education, embedding values into daily school culture and behavior.

Notably, the consistent application of the 5S culture (smile, greet, salute, politeness, and manners) as the foundation for interpersonal interaction has created a school environment conducive to the development of Islamic character. Furthermore, the diversification of religious subjects – including Aqidah Akhlak (moral theology), Tarikh (Islamic history), Al-Qur'an Hadith, Arabic, Muhammadiyah studies, and practical worship – provides a rich and coherent theoretical basis for reinforcing daily spiritual practices. What distinguishes this model from previous approaches is its seamless integration of spiritual development into the vocational school framework – an area often overlooked in character education research. Unlike models that isolate character education within religious instruction alone, this approach operationalizes character values across the entire school ecosystem, aligning rituals, curricula, teacher roles, and school culture into a unified strategy. The findings contribute theoretically to the discourse on Islamic character education, particularly in vocational school contexts, and offer a replicable and context-sensitive framework for Islamic-based institutions. The success of this program confirms that embedding spiritual values within vocational education is not only viable but also enhances students' overall personal and professional formation producing graduates who are both devout and career-ready.

Future research is encouraged to broaden the scope by involving various types of

Islamic vocational schools across different regions and educational models, including public, private, pesantren-based, or boarding institutions. Longitudinal studies could also be beneficial in assessing the enduring impact of Dhuha prayer-based character internalization. In addition, further exploration of the role of general subject teachers, family participation, and community collaboration is recommended to enrich the ecosystem of Islamic character formation and ensure the sustainability of such initiatives.

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