

Asymmetrically Configured Habituation: Religious Character Education in an Indonesian Islamic Elementary School in an Industrial City

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Abstract

Religious character education in Indonesian Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, MI) faces pressure from digital disruption, post-pandemic learning loss, and weakening school-family alignment, yet dominant frameworks assume character domains develop symmetrically. This study examines how religious character education is implemented in Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 1 Cilegon, a state Islamic elementary school in an industrial city, identifying the factors conditioning its effectiveness and the impact produced. A single-case design combined interviews and focus groups with 18 participants, 24 observations, and document analysis over five months, analyzed in NVivo 14 through two coding cycles using the moral knowing-feeling-acting framework. Findings show the school operates a four-layer cyclical habituation architecture, daily to annual, sustained by teacher modeling and embedded across the formal and hidden curriculum; effectiveness is moderated by school-family synchronization asymmetry, as parental work schedules constrain home mentoring; and impact is documented for behavioral indicators but only indicated, psychometrically unconfirmed, for affective-spiritual dimensions. Drawing on habituation theory and parental-involvement research, the study argues domain asymmetry is a structural default of MI schooling, not implementation failure, and proposes an Asymmetrically Configured Habituation (ACH) model with three falsifiable propositions on domain asymmetry, temporal stratification, and school-family synchronization conditionality.

Keywords: religious character education; Islamic elementary school; madrasah ibtidaiyah; habituation; school–family partnership.

Introduction

Religious character education in Indonesian Islamic elementary schools faces digital disruption, shifting family structures, and value disorientation among young students. A national study of 38,326 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students shows that post-pandemic learning loss extends beyond cognition into affective–spiritual development, impeding the internalization of religious values.¹ In the Society 5.0 era, character formation in madrasahs confronts technological, social, cultural, and institutional pressures simultaneously, and no single strategy suffices.² Teachers in elementary schools in Bengkulu Selatan report persistent discipline problems, uneven student engagement, and classroom-management difficulties tied to diverse student backgrounds and unfiltered digital access.³ Studies of religious moderation in elementary schools describe uneven implementation of religious values, attributed to limited teacher quality, pressure to prioritize academic competencies, and the growing reach of digital media.⁴

These conditions place state Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri, MIN) at the intersection of their traditional role as custodians of Islamic education and demands to form religious character in context. MIN 1 Cilegon reflects this national pattern: low interest among some students in religious activities, weak reinforcement of character at home, unfiltered exposure to social media, and no evaluation instruments that capture students' affective and spiritual development. Character education with an overly cognitive orientation has failed to counter moral decline among the young.⁵

The literature on religious character education in Islamic elementary schooling divides into four strands, each with strengths and blind spots. First, a habituation–behavioral perspective positions daily routines, congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation

¹ R Mulyana and D S Maylawati, “Exploratory Data Analysis to Reveal Learning Loss Condition in Islamic Religious Education,” *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education* 13, no. 1 (2024): 43–56, <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v13i1.26344>.

² A Zuhri et al., “How Madrasahs Build Students’ Character in Indonesia’s Society 5.0 Era: Emerging Challenges,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2026): 166–86, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v9i1.412>.

³ Tohirin et al., “Instilling Religious Values in Young Learners: A Narrative Exploration of Teachers’ Roles and Realities,” *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.58256/d3rkh879>.

⁴ M Fauyan et al., “Shaping Balanced Minds: Exploring the Integration of Religious Moderation in Indonesian Elementary Education,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 14, no. 1 (2026): 223–48, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i1.1213>.

⁵ Muassomah et al., “Believe in Literature: Character Education for Indonesia’s Youth,” *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 8, no. 6 (2020): 2223–31, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080605>.

(*tadarus*), memorization (*tahfidz*), and greeting culture as the main mechanisms for internalizing values.⁶ Habituation builds discipline and worship routines, but without moral knowing, it risks producing ritualistic compliance that does not transfer beyond the school gate. The *Second* strand, exemplary modeling, emphasizes the school principal's leadership and teachers' daily conduct as reference points for values.⁷ Its weaknesses include inconsistent modeling, teachers' limited capacity for moral reflection, and weak continuity between school and home.⁸

The *third* strand, an integrative–ecological framework, treats character formation as the product of interactions between school culture, the formal curriculum, the family, and digital media.⁹ This framework describes well, but does not explain how a school coordinates habituation, modeling, and parental collaboration within a single implementation cycle. The fourth strand, religious moderation, frames religious character as part of ethical citizenship.¹⁰ It adds a socio-political dimension to character education, but at the elementary level, it remains segmental and disconnected from daily worship practice.

This study anchors its analysis in Lickona's account of character as the integration of three domains: moral knowing (understanding values and moral reasoning), moral feeling (conscience, empathy, and attachment to the good), and moral acting (competence, will, and habit expressed in behavior). Lickona's framework suits this study for two reasons. It is the reference point for most Indonesian scholarship on character

⁶ Wasehudin et al., “The Paradigm of Character Education in Islamic Elementary School,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (2024): 368–97, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.22546>.

⁷ M A Ma'arif et al., “Shaping Students' Moderate Islamic Character at Madrasah,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024): 323–35, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i2.34029>.

⁸ A H OK et al., “A Narrative Case Study: Parental Views on the Enactment of Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools,” *Journal of Moral Education*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2026.2660726>; Srijanto, Suyatno, and Ishafit, “Strengthening Character Education through Integrative Islamic Education Management: Synchronizing Teacher and Parent Roles,” *Kharisma* 5, no. 1 (2026): 152–70, <https://doi.org/10.59373/kharisma.v5i1.179>.

⁹ P Putra et al., “Digital Literacy as a Transformative Framework for Character Education: A Case Study in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah,” *Nazhruna: Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 1 (2026): 33–51, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v9i1.429>; Zuhri et al., “How Madrasahs Build Students' Character in Indonesia's Society 5.0 Era: Emerging Challenges.”

¹⁰ H Ibda et al., “Islamic Moderation in Elementary School: Strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah Curriculum in Preventing Religious Radicalism,” *Journal of Education and Learning* 18, no. 4 (2024): 1246–53, <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v18i4.21821>; M T Yani, M Hazin, and Y Hanafi, “Educational Experience Insertion Model of Religious Moderation and National Defense as Efforts to Prevent Radicalism and Communism through Islamic Religious Education Instruction,” *Artseduca* 36 (2023): 111–24, <https://doi.org/10.6035/artseduca.3610>.

education, enabling the findings to speak to the existing literature.¹¹ Its three-domain structure provides a systematic way to classify what a habituation-heavy strategy achieves and misses. The framework assumes symmetry that deliberate pedagogical design can activate the three domains with comparable intensity.¹² Whether that assumption holds in an Islamic elementary school built around ritual habituation is an empirical question.

Two additional theories bear on the status of habituation. In the Aristotelian tradition, virtue is acquired by doing: repeated right action under guidance produces stable dispositions (hexis) that precede and later integrate with mature practical reasoning.¹³ The Islamic ethical tradition makes a parallel claim. Ibn Miskawayh treats character (*khuluq*) as a state of the soul formed through disciplined repetition.¹⁴ Al-Ghazali's concept of *riyādat al-nafs*, the training of the self through sustained bodily and devotional practice, positions ritual not as empty behavior awaiting cognitive content but as constitutive of moral selfhood.¹⁵ Anthropological work on Islamic piety reaches a similar conclusion: for Mahmood, repeated embodied practice does not merely express an inner disposition but cultivates it.¹⁶ Against this stands Kohlberg's objection that habituation without reasoning produces conformity rather than morality, a "bag of virtues" worry that any habituation-centered school must answer.¹⁷ Contemporary habit science gives the debate an empirical edge: habits form through context-dependent repetition and persist through stable cues rather than conscious intention.¹⁸ This implies that the durability of a school-formed habit depends on whether its triggering context extends beyond the school. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus durable*, transposable dispositions formed through

¹¹ T Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (Bantam Books, 1991).

¹² Thomas Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 93–100.

¹³ Kristján Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education* (Routledge, 2015).

¹⁴ Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhīb Al-Akhlāq)* (American University of Beirut, 1968).

¹⁵ J M Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4 (2004): 517–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284510>.

¹⁶ S Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ L Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: Vol. 1. The Philosophy of Moral Development* (Harper & Row, 1981).

¹⁸ P Lally et al., "How Are Habits Formed: Modeling Habit Formation in the Real World," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, no. 6 (2010): 998–1009, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.674>; W Wood and D Rünger, "Psychology of Habit," *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (2016): 289–314, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033417>.

immersion in structured practice, provides the sociological vocabulary for asking whether madrasah routines generate dispositions that transfer across fields, or compliance ending at the gate.¹⁹

The *Second* theoretical concern is the family. Ecological accounts of development locate the child at the intersection of nested systems whose alignment or misalignment shapes developmental outcomes.²⁰ Epstein's model of overlapping spheres specifies school–family–community alignment as a designed achievement rather than a natural state.²¹ Whether parents engage depends less on goodwill than on role construction, sense of efficacy, and concrete invitations, time, and energy available to them.²² These resources are stratified by social class and work structure.²³ This literature provides the mechanism underlying what the present study calls school–family synchronization asymmetry, converting "parents do not follow through at home" from a complaint into an analyzable variable with identifiable determinants.

The empirical literature leaves three specific gaps. *First*, most studies inventory religious activities, habituation programs, the Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) curriculum, and extracurricular programs without tracing how schools operationalized, coordinated, and integrated them across the formal and hidden curriculum; this motivates Research Question 1. *Second*, supporting and inhibiting factors are listed in generic terms (principal support, teacher commitment, parental participation, social media influence) but are rarely mapped in relational terms, never in the context of a MIN in an industrial city whose socio-economic pressures are distinctive; this motivates RQ2. *Third*, impact is measured through attendance and memorization, rarely traced into students' affective–spiritual development; this motivates RQ3.

This study analyzes the implementation of religious character education in PAI instruction at MIN 1 Cilegon, the factors that condition its success, and its impact on

¹⁹ P Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, vol. 352 (Harvard university press, 1979).

²¹ J L Epstein, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*, 2nd ed. (Westview Press, 2011).

²² K V Hoover-Dempsey and H M Sandler, "Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education?," *Review of Educational Research* 67, no. 1 (1997): 3–42, <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001003>.

²³ A Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2011).

students' character, using Lickona's three domains as an analytic lens to ask which domains a habituation architecture activates, through what mechanisms its routines persist or erode, and under what family-side conditions school-formed dispositions transfer beyond the institution. These concerns translate into three research questions: (RQ1) How is the religious character education strategy implemented in PAI instruction at MIN 1 Cilegon? (RQ2) Which factors support this implementation and which inhibit it? (RQ3) What impact does the strategy have on students' character formation?

The study contributes in two ways. *First*, it provides an operational, multi-actor account of how a state madrasah in an industrial city orchestrates habituation, modeling, and home–school communication within one implementation cycle. *Second*, it uses the case to test an assumption embedded in character-education frameworks that the domains of character can be activated with comparable intensity and proposes a refinement, the Asymmetrically Configured Habituation model, formulated as falsifiable propositions

Methods

The study adopted a single-case design,²⁴ within an interpretivist orientation,²⁵ treating MIN 1 Cilegon as one unit of analysis. A single-case design suits this phenomenon because religious character formation is context-dependent, ongoing, and not amenable to experimental manipulation. We bounded the case by site (MIN 1 Cilegon), actors (the madrasah community), time (the 2024/2025 academic year), and activity (religious character formation strategies in PAI instruction and school culture). We selected the site based on three criteria: a state madrasah with a structured character-strengthening program, a location in an industrial city where diverse socioeconomic and religious backgrounds converge, and full researcher access.

We recruited participants through purposive sampling that combined criterion-based and maximum-variation strategies.²⁶ Inclusion criteria were: (a) a direct role in religious character education at MIN 1 Cilegon; (b) at least one academic year of engagement with the program; and (c) written informed consent (with parental consent

²⁴ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018).

²⁵ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018).

²⁶ M Q Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2015).

and child assent for student participants). We defined thematic saturation as three consecutive interviews yielding no new codes.²⁷ Table 1 profiles the 18 participants.

Table 1.
Participant profile

Code	Role	n	Data collection
KM	Principal	1	In-depth interview, 2 sessions
WK-K	Vice-Principal for Curriculum	1	In-depth interview, 2 sessions
WK-H	Vice-Principal for Public Relations	1	In-depth interview, 1 session
GP	PAI teachers	2	In-depth interview, 2 sessions
GK	Classroom teachers	3	In-depth interview, 1 session
OT	Parents/guardians	4	Semi-structured interview, 1 session
SW	Students (grades 4–6)	6	Focus group discussion, 2 sessions
Total		18	

We collected data over five months (August–December 2024) using three techniques. In-depth, semi-structured interviews followed a protocol drawn from prior instruments,²⁸ and covered four domains aligned with the research questions: implementation strategy, supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and observed impact. Each session lasted 45–75 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and was transcribed verbatim. The full protocol appears in Appendix A.

We conducted moderate participant observation across 24 scheduled sessions covering routine activities (congregational prayer, *tadarus*, *tahfidz*, greeting culture, the weekly Jumat Berkah almsgiving, and Jumat Evaluasi reflection programs) and incidental activities (Islamic holiday commemorations, Mawlid, Isra Mi'raj). All observations were recorded in two-column fieldnotes.²⁹ Document analysis covered the operational curriculum, PAI lesson plans, schedules of religious activities, Jumat Evaluasi records, and school–parent communication via WhatsApp groups and liaison books.

Analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification.³⁰ We coded in two cycles using NVivo 14. In the *First* cycle, two researchers independently applied descriptive and in vivo coding, using Saldaña and Cohen's kappa $\geq .80$ as the reliability threshold. In the *Second* cycle, pattern

²⁷ J Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2021).

²⁸ Wasehudin et al., “The Paradigm of Character Education in Islamic Elementary School”; Tohirin et al., “Instilling Religious Values in Young Learners: A Narrative Exploration of Teachers’ Roles and Realities”; Zuhri et al., “How Madrasahs Build Students’ Character in Indonesia’s Society 5.0 Era: Emerging Challenges.”

²⁹ R M Emerson, R I Fretz, and L L Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

³⁰ M B Miles, A M Huberman, and J Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2020).

coding organized codes into themes and sub-themes, each mapped to the three research questions. We displayed results in matrices and thematic networks for cross-participant and cross-source comparison.³¹ Lickona's moral knowing–moral feeling–moral acting framework served as the theoretical lens for classifying themes, moving the analysis beyond description into dialogue with character theory.³² Interview quotations reported below were translated from Indonesian by the authors; participant codes correspond to Table 1.

We operationalized Lincoln and Guba's four criteria as follows. For credibility, we triangulated methods (interviews, observations, documents) and sources across roles, maintained a 5-month engagement, conducted member checking with 8 key participants, and held peer debriefing sessions with 2 academic colleagues.³³ Transferability rests on a thick description of the MIN 1 Cilegon context, enabling readers to assess its applicability elsewhere. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting methodological decisions and the coding record. Confirmability was addressed through the lead researcher's reflexive journal, which recorded assumptions and positionality. All participants gave written informed consent; for students, we obtained parental consent and child assent, and participation carried no academic consequences. Participants are identified by role codes only.

Two coding cycles across 18 interviews and focus-group participants, 24 observation sessions, and institutional documents produced themes mapped to Lickona's three domains.³⁴ Table 2 summarises the thematic structure, code frequencies, and converging sources. The narrative that follows integrates cross-participant synthesis and the negative cases that emerged.

Table 2.

Thematic structure, code frequencies, and mapping to Lickona's domains					
RQ	Theme	Sub-theme	Code frequency	Converging sources	Lickona domain
RQ1	Implementation strategy	Cyclical habituation	78	KM, WK-K, GP, GK, SW, documents	Moral acting
		Teacher modeling and greeting culture	54	GP, GK, SW, OT	Moral feeling

³¹ Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

³² Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*.

³³ Yvonna Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage publications, 1985).

³⁴ Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education."

		Formal–hidden curriculum integration	41	KM, WK-K, GP, documents	Moral knowing
RQ2	Supporting factors	Leadership and worship infrastructure	47	KM, WK-K, WK-H, GP	
	Inhibiting factors	Social media exposure and school–home asymmetry	52	GK, OT, GP, SW	
RQ3	Impact on character	Observable behavioral indicators	36	Observation, GK, OT	Moral acting
		Reported affective indicators	19	OT, SW, GK	Moral feeling

Implementation Strategy (RQ1)

1. Cyclical habituation across four temporal layers (moral acting)

The dominant strategy across all participant groups is religious habituation organized in four nested cycles. The daily cycle comprises morning *tadarus*, Dhuha prayer, congregational Zuhur prayer, recitation of the *Asmaul Husna*, daily supplications, and a standardized greeting culture. The weekly cycle operates through Jumat Berkah (collective almsgiving) and Jumat Evaluasi (behavioral reflection); the monthly cycle through Islamic holiday commemorations; and the annual cycle through Ramadan and Eid al-Adha programs. The principal frames habituation as institutional policy rather than the sole responsibility of PAI teachers: "Forming religious character is not the responsibility of the PAI teacher alone but of the whole madrasah community; we build the habituation program into the school culture so that religious values take root in students' everyday lives" (KM). Triangulation across interview transcripts, the official activity schedule, and the liaison book confirms that habituation is a verified routine, not policy on paper alone.

The four cycles perform different functions rather than duplicating one another. The daily cycle supplies the high-frequency, cue-bound repetition through which habits consolidate. The weekly cycle adds a reflective feedback loop (Jumat Evaluasi) and extends ritual into prosocial action (Jumat Berkah). The monthly and annual cycles re-dramatize the meaning of daily routines through collective celebration, restoring salience that repetition tends to erode. The architecture thus couples automatization with periodic re-signification. No single participant articulated this functional differentiation as design theory; it emerged from comparing the schedule documents with participants' accounts of what each activity is "for." This pattern suggests that the

madrasah has evolved, rather than engineered, a structure whose logic outruns its actors' explicit rationale.

2. Teacher modeling and greeting culture (moral feeling)

Teachers function as reference points for values through daily example. One classroom teacher noted: "A teacher's example matters enormously; students imitate what they see far more readily than they follow what they are told" (GK-01). Observation confirmed handshake greetings upon students' entry through the gate, the use of kinship terms (kakak/adik, older/younger sibling) among students, and consistency in language between senior and junior teachers. Students internalize these patterns and connect them to positive affect toward religious activity: "I enjoy joining *tadarus* and Dhuha prayer with my friends; these activities make me more diligent in worship and more respectful toward teachers" (SW-03).

3. Integration of the formal and hidden curriculum (moral knowing)

The Vice-Principal for Curriculum described how religious values run across subjects: "Religious character values are not taught only in PAI; they run through all learning activities and school programs, through the formal curriculum as well as the hidden curriculum" (WK-K). Lesson-plan analysis shows religious values appearing in spiritual-attitude competencies. Integration through the hidden curriculum (classroom atmosphere, the grammar of interaction, opening rituals), however, remains implicit and dependent on individual teachers' initiative.

4. Negative case: tension over the consistency of modeling

The data did not converge fully. Three participants (GK-02, GP-02, SW-04) reported that modeling consistency varies across teachers and classrooms; some teachers do not translate the habituation policy into classroom practice. This variation is absent from official school documents and constitutes a point of tension addressed in the Discussion.

Its analytic significance is twofold. *First*, it shows that the weakest link in the architecture is the domain that cannot be scheduled: rituals can be timetabled and supervised. Still, exemplary conduct depends on individual teachers' dispositions, and the school has no comparable mechanism for standardizing it. *Second*, students themselves detect the inconsistency (SW-04), indicating that children at this age already compare teachers. This observation complicates the assumption, common in

the habituation literature, that elementary students are passive absorbers of modeled behavior.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors (RQ2)

1. Supporting factors: leadership, infrastructure, and collective commitment

Three supporting factors appeared consistently. *First*, the principal's leadership positions religious character as an institutional priority, evidenced in curricular time allocation, the Jumat Evaluasi agenda, and direct involvement in supervision. *Second*, worship infrastructure and ambient reminders (*Asmaul Husna* boards, audio prompts for daily supplications) allow habituation to run without additional logistical burden. *Third*, teachers frame their commitment as an ethic of service rather than an administrative task: "The program's success is supported by teacher commitment, the principal's backing, and parents' involvement in reminding children to practice good habits at home" (GK-03).

2. Inhibiting factors: social media exposure and school–home asymmetry

Two principal inhibitors emerged. The *First* is social media exposure that presents content and peer norms at odds with madrasah values. The *Second* is the asymmetry between school and family: religious programs are consistently taught at the madrasah, but are not always continued at home. A PAI teacher explained: "The challenges we face include the influence of social media and the limited supervision by some parents at home, which sometimes means that good habits formed at school do not carry over into the family environment" (GP-01). Communication through WhatsApp groups and liaison books is designed to close this gap, but its effectiveness depends on parents' digital literacy and available time.

3. Negative case: uneven parental support

Interviews with parents ($n = 4$) revealed marked variation. Two parents reported active engagement in religious parenting at home; the other two acknowledged limited capacity owing to work in Cilegon's industrial sector. This asymmetry indicates that school–family collaboration functions as a moderating factor rather than a precondition that can be assumed.

Impact on Students' Character (RQ3)

Impact is reported with explicit calibration to the strength of evidence: dimensions supported by repeated behavioral observation are classified as

documented; dimensions resting on participant reports alone are classified as *indicated*.

1. Observable behavioral indicators (documented)

Three behavioral indicators were confirmed through triangulation of observation, attendance records, and classroom teachers' reports: (a) increased worship discipline, with students joining congregational prayer and *tadarus* without repeated prompting; (b) the establishment of handshake greeting as the default interaction pattern; and (c) active participation in weekly religious activities (Jumat Berkah, children's preaching). Because these indicators can be observed and counted, the impact claim rests on consistent evidence.

2. Reported affective indicators (indicated)

Affective indicators, such as greater confidence, empathy, and spirituality, were reported by some participants and partially confirmed by guardians: "After taking part in the school's religious activities, my child has become more disciplined in prayer, more respectful toward us, and has begun reading the Qur'an regularly at home" (OT-02). These claims require caution because (a) they rest on subjective reports, (b) they have not been tested with a standardized affective instrument, and (c) not all guardians confirmed changes of comparable intensity.

Empirical limits of impact reporting

Impact reporting in this study faces three structural constraints. *First*, the madrasah's evaluation instruments (Jumat Evaluasi and teacher supervision) serve as mechanisms for behavioral reflection rather than tools for quantifying character change. *Second*, existing evaluations are dominated by cognitive and behavioral orientations; the affective–spiritual dimension lacks an adequate rubric. The affective findings above should therefore be understood as preliminary indications requiring verification through designs more sensitive to affective–spiritual development.

Synthesis of Findings

Three cross-cutting patterns ground the Discussion. *First*, Lickona's three domains operate in mutual support at MIN 1 Cilegon, but not with equal intensity: habituation (moral acting) is the most intensive dimension, while hidden-curriculum integration (moral knowing) is the least consistent. The code-frequency gradient in Table 2 (78 for cyclical habituation, 54 for modelling, 41 for curriculum integration) is treated here not

as a quantitative measure of importance frequencies in qualitative coding are at most heuristic but as a convergent trace of the same asymmetry that appears independently in the observational data and in the negative cases: the school talks most, and most confidently, about what it schedules, and least about what it leaves implicit. *Second*, supporting and inhibiting factors are interdependent rather than additive: infrastructure and leadership are effective only insofar as they are not undercut by school–home asymmetry, so the same supporting factor yields different outcomes for different students depending on the family's position on the synchronization gradient. *Third*, documented impact is evident in observable behavior, while claims about the affective–spiritual dimension await adequate measurement. The impact evidence is therefore strongest where the strategy is most intensive, which raises the interpretive question taken up below of whether the strategy produces character or produces observable compliance.

Discussion

This section reads the MIN 1 Cilegon findings against Lickona's moral knowing–moral feeling–moral acting framework, taking explicit positions of confirmation, extension, or qualification with respect to the existing literature.

The Three-Domain Configuration in a Habituation Strategy (RQ1)

The findings confirm Lickona's proposition that character formation requires the integration of all three domains.³⁵ Cyclical habituation at MIN 1 Cilegon operates primarily in the moral acting domain, consistent with Tohirin et al.,³⁶ who report the effectiveness of habituation among elementary teachers in Bengkulu Selatan, and with Wasehudin et al.,³⁷ who place cultural habituation at the center of character education in an Islamic elementary school in Banten.

The findings extend this literature in two respects. *First*, habituation at MIN 1 Cilegon is not a single program but a four-cycle architecture in which the cycles perform complementary functions. Habit research explains why this matters: habits consolidate through repetition in stable cue contexts and decay when cues weaken, or salience fades.³⁸

³⁵ Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*.

³⁶ Tohirin et al., “Instilling Religious Values in Young Learners: A Narrative Exploration of Teachers’ Roles and Realities.”

³⁷ Wasehudin et al., “The Paradigm of Character Education in Islamic Elementary School.”

³⁸ Lally et al., “How Are Habits Formed: Modeling Habit Formation in the Real World”; Wood and Rünger, “Psychology of Habit.”

A daily-only regime provides repetition but not renewal of meaning; the weekly reflection of Jumat Evaluasi and the monthly and annual commemorations periodically re-signify what the daily routine is for, thereby coupling automatization with the maintenance of meaning. Prior Indonesian studies describe habituation as a list of activities without temporal structure; the present case suggests that temporal stratification, rather than program count, is the variable that protects habits from erosion.

This also reframes the classical worry about habituation. In both the Aristotelian and the Islamic ethical traditions, habituation is not the opposite of understanding but its developmental precursor: repeated guided practice produces the dispositional raw material that later reasoning organizes.³⁹ Al-Ghazali's *riyāḍat al-naḥs* makes the same point in devotional terms: the training of the self proceeds through disciplined bodily practice,⁴⁰ and Mahmood's ethnography of piety shows that repeated ritual not only expresses religious disposition but also produces it.⁴¹ Read through these lenses, the density of ritual at MIN 1 Cilegon is not a pedagogical shortcut awaiting cognitive supplementation; it is a coherent formation strategy with deep roots in the tradition the school inhabits.

Second, however, the integration of the three domains is not symmetric, and the asymmetry has a structural explanation rather than being an implementation failure. Moral acting dominates because it is the only domain the institution can schedule: rituals can be timetabled, supervised, and audited. Moral feeling depends on modeling, which is carried by individual dispositions that the school cannot standardize; hence, the negative case of inconsistent exemplarity. Moral knowing remains implicit because it lives mainly in the hidden curriculum,⁴² the layer of classroom atmosphere and interactional grammar that transmits values without anyone deciding to teach them, and that therefore varies with each teacher's initiative. In Bourdieu's terms, the school reliably produces a practiced habitus but has no comparably reliable technology for producing reflective articulacy about it.⁴³

³⁹ Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhīb Al-Akhlāq)*; Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*.

⁴⁰ Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education."

⁴¹ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

⁴² P W Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

⁴³ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

Here, the case presses on theory. Lickona's framework, like Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental critique from the opposite direction, tacitly assumes that a school can choose its domain configuration through instructional design.⁴⁴ The MIN 1 Cilegon data suggest instead that the configuration is partly imposed by the technology of schooling itself, what can be scheduled versus what depends on persons, and partly by developmental constraints on explicit moral reasoning at elementary age.⁴⁵ Asymmetry, in other words, is the default condition; symmetry would be the achievement requiring explanation. Lickona's framework needs adaptation in this respect for madrasah contexts.

The Ecology of Support and Inhibition: School–Family Synchronization Asymmetry (RQ2)

The pattern of supporting and inhibiting factors corroborates Zuhri et al., who argue that character formation in madrasahs in the Society 5.0 era depends on the interaction among technology, family, leadership, and institutional culture.⁴⁶ The three supporting clusters identified here, visionary leadership, worship infrastructure, and teacher commitment, align with findings from Madrasah Amanatul Ummah,⁴⁷ and an Islamic elementary school in Banten.⁴⁸

This study, however, reconceptualizes the school–family relationship as a moderating factor rather than an item on a list of inhibitors, and locates the mechanism of that moderation. Sriyanto et al.,⁴⁹ propose an integrative–synchronous model using WhatsApp as the school–home bridge; OK et al.,⁵⁰ show that parents' perspectives shape their engagement at home. The data from MIN 1 Cilegon indicate that synchronization is not binary but graded, and that the structure of local industrial work shapes the gradient. Two of the four parents interviewed reported limited capacity for religious mentoring because of industrial work rhythms, a variable largely absent from the Islamic character-education literature, which is anchored in urban or pesantren contexts.

⁴⁴ Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: Vol. 1. The Philosophy of Moral Development*.

⁴⁵ Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*; D Narvaez, “Integrative Ethical Education,” in *Handbook of Moral Development*, ed. M Killen and J G Smetana (Erlbaum, 2006), 703–32.

⁴⁶ Zuhri et al., “How Madrasahs Build Students’ Character in Indonesia’s Society 5.0 Era: Emerging Challenges.”

⁴⁷ Ma’arif et al., “Shaping Students’ Moderate Islamic Character at Madrasah.”

⁴⁸ Wasehudin et al., “The Paradigm of Character Education in Islamic Elementary School.”

⁴⁹ Sriyanto, Suyatno, and Ishafit, “Strengthening Character Education through Integrative Islamic Education Management: Synchronizing Teacher and Parent Roles.”

⁵⁰ OK et al., “A Narrative Case Study: Parental Views on the Enactment of Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools.”

The parental-involvement literature explains why this gradient exists and why exhortation does not close it. In Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, involvement follows from parents' role construction, their sense of efficacy, and, decisively, their available time and energy, which shift work in heavy industry directly consumes.⁵¹ Lareau's class analysis adds that involvement practices are stratified: the concerted-cultivation style that school-home programs implicitly presuppose is a class-specific resource, not a universal parental default.⁵² Epstein's overlapping-spheres model draws the design consequence: overlap between school and family is produced by deliberate, differentiated practice, not assumed.⁵³ Read through Bronfenbrenner, the problem is a mesosystem problem; the school-microsystem and the family-microsystem are misaligned for a structurally identifiable subset of children, and the habit-theoretic implication follows:⁵⁴ a routine cued by the madrasah environment will decay in a home that supplies neither the cue nor the supervising adult.⁵⁵

The frequently repeated claim of "school-home synergy",⁵⁶ therefore, needs qualification on both theoretical and empirical grounds: synergy is contingent on families' socio-economic structures. In an industrial city, it cannot be assumed; it must be engineered around parents' actual time budgets and literacy, for instance, through asynchronous, low-burden involvement formats rather than programs that presuppose an available parent at fixed hours.

Impact: Between Observed Behavior and Affective Claims (RQ3)

Calibrating impact reporting into *documented* versus *indicated* categories has theoretical consequences. The observable behavioral indicators, worship discipline, greeting culture, and participation in weekly activities, are consistent with Ibda et al., on the effectiveness of habituation in shaping MI students' religious behavior.⁵⁷

Claims about the affective-spiritual dimension (confidence, empathy, inner spirituality) occupy a different epistemic status, and the difference must be confronted

⁵¹ Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, "Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education?"

⁵² Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*.

⁵³ Epstein, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*.

⁵⁴ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*.

⁵⁵ Wood and Rünger, "Psychology of Habit."

⁵⁶ Sriyanto, Suyatno, and Ishafit, "Strengthening Character Education through Integrative Islamic Education Management: Synchronizing Teacher and Parent Roles."

⁵⁷ Ibda et al., "Islamic Moderation in Elementary School: Strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah Curriculum in Preventing Religious Radicalism."

rather than smoothed over, because it opens a rival explanation of the behavioral findings themselves. If the only well-evidenced changes are in scheduled, supervised, countable behavior, a skeptic in the Kohlbergian line can read the case as documenting institutional compliance rather than character: students behave religiously where the institution cues and watches them.⁵⁸

Two pieces of evidence push against a purely compliance reading without defeating it. Guardians independently reported unprompted religious practice at home (OT-02), which is behavior outside the institutional cue structure, and students articulated affective attachment to the routines rather than mere obligation (SW-03). On the virtue-ethical account, moreover, early-stage character is expected to look like guided compliance, habituated action that precedes its own full rationale,⁵⁹ So observable compliance at age 10–12 is not evidence against formation. But the honest conclusion is that the present design cannot adjudicate between habituated virtue-in-formation and cue-bound conformity; only evidence of transfer beyond the school's cue environment can do so, and that evidence is here indicative rather than systematic.

The measurement problem is therefore substantive rather than administrative. Mulyana and Maylawati warn, based on data from 38,326 MI students, that post-pandemic learning loss in Islamic Religious Education is affective–spiritual as well as cognitive, and that available evaluation instruments are not sensitive to this dimension.⁶⁰ Fauyan et al. find that religious moderation education in elementary schools operates primarily through implicit, embedded practices with unstandardized evaluation.⁶¹ The systematic evidence base for character education more broadly rests on studies that specify outcomes and measure them against comparison conditions;⁶² by that standard, most claims of "character transformation" in the Indonesian literature, which Muassomah et al. criticize on other grounds, are unfalsifiable.⁶³

⁵⁸ Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: Vol. 1. The Philosophy of Moral Development*.

⁵⁹ Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhīb Al-Akhlāq)*; Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*.

⁶⁰ Mulyana and Maylawati, "Exploratory Data Analysis to Reveal Learning Loss Condition in Islamic Religious Education."

⁶¹ Fauyan et al., "Shaping Balanced Minds: Exploring the Integration of Religious Moderation in Indonesian Elementary Education."

⁶² Marvin W Berkowitz and Melinda C Bier, "What Works in Character Education," *Journal of Research in Character Education* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2007).

⁶³ Muassomah et al., "Believe in Literature: Character Education for Indonesia's Youth."

The present findings sharpen the point: Jumat Evaluasi functions as a reflection mechanism, not as a psychometric instrument of character change, and this study limits its impact claims to what its evidence can bear. Future research should develop affective–spiritual instruments sensitive to Islamic contexts, along the lines begun by Putra et al., in combining systematic observation with quantitative scoring, with transfer beyond the school's cue environment as the criterion variable.⁶⁴

Theoretical Contribution: The Asymmetrically Configured Habituation Model

The study proposes an Asymmetrically Configured Habituation (ACH) model as a development of Lickona's framework for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in industrial cities. The model starts from the observation that the three domains, moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral acting, do not operate symmetrically in this context, and from the analysis above of why: the dominance of moral acting is jointly produced by the schedulability of ritual, the person-dependence of modeling, the implicitness of the hidden curriculum, and developmental limits on explicit moral reasoning at elementary age. Three testable propositions follow, each stated with its mechanism:

1. Domain asymmetry. In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, moral acting is the dominant domain, and moral knowing and moral feeling occupy subordinate positions, because institutional technology can standardize ritual but not exemplarity or reflective articulacy. The proposition fails if madrasahs are found in which supervision and curriculum design produce comparable intensity across domains.
2. Temporal stratification. The resilience of habituation against erosion is determined by its temporal stratification, the coupling of high-frequency repetition with lower-frequency re-signification, not by the number of programs. The proposition fails if single-cycle regimes with many programs exhibit the same durability as multi-cycle regimes with few programs.
3. Conditional synchronization. The transfer of school-formed habits beyond the school is contingent on the degree of school–family synchronization, which is itself conditional on families' socio-economic structure (time budgets, work rhythms, involvement resources). The proposition fails if habit transfer proves insensitive to family-side cue and supervision conditions.

⁶⁴ Putra et al., “Digital Literacy as a Transformative Framework for Character Education: A Case Study in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.”

Table 3.
ACH compared with adjacent frameworks

Framework	Core assumption	What it explains well	What ACH adds or corrects
Lickona's three domains (Lickona, 1991, 1996)	Domains can be activated with comparable intensity by design	Normative completeness of character	Asymmetry as the structural default; symmetry as the explanandum
Cognitive-developmental critique (Kohlberg, 1981)	Habituation without reasoning yields conformity	The compliance rival explanation	Habituation as a developmental precursor, testable via transfer
Integrative–synchronous model (Sriyanto et al., 2026)	School–home synergy is attainable through communication channels	Coordination mechanics	Synergy is conditional on socio-economic structure, not on channels
Relational–ecological accounts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Zuhri et al., 2026)	Character emerges from interacting systems	Breadth of context	Specifies the mesosystem variable (synchronization) and its determinants
Virtue-ethical habituation (Ibn Miskawayh, 1968; Kristjánsson, 2015)	Guided repetition forms proto-virtue	The formative status of ritual	Institutional and temporal conditions under which repetition holds

The decisive difference from the integrative–synchronous and relational–ecological accounts is that ACH does not treat synergy as an initial condition but as a conditional achievement, and it names the conditions. The decisive difference from Lickona is the reversal of the symmetry assumption. Because each proposition specifies the observations that would refute it, the model is open to falsification through the comparative and longitudinal designs outlined below. Its scope conditions should also be stated: ACH is proposed for state Islamic elementary schools in industrial socio-economic contexts; whether it extends to pesantren-based schooling, where the residential setting collapses the school–home distinction, or to affluent urban madrasahs, where parental time budgets differ, is an empirical question the model deliberately leaves open.

Practical Implications

The implications differ by stakeholder. Madrasah principals should design habituation as a temporal architecture spanning all four cycles; investment in a single cycle produces habituation vulnerable to erosion. Supervision should also address the consistency of moral feeling, not only the more readily observable moral acting. PAI and classroom teachers should make the hidden curriculum explicit interaction patterns, classroom language, and opening rituals a source of moral knowing; the findings show

that moral knowing in MI remains largely implicit, and character formation would be strengthened if the cognitive–reflective dimension received deliberate space in daily instruction. The Ministry of Religious Affairs should develop character-evaluation instruments sensitive to the affective–spiritual dimension, beyond worship attendance and memorization; without such instruments, policy-level reporting will continue to capture only observable behavior and miss the internal dimension that religious character education aims to cultivate. Parents in industrial-sector households should be accommodated through school–home collaboration designed around their actual time constraints; conventional parenting programs that assume uniform availability are inadequate in this context.

Limitations and Future Research

Four limitations must be stated. *First*, the single-case design limits transferability to madrasahs across geographic or institutional contexts; the ACH model is, at this stage, propositional and unvalidated in a broader sample. *Second*, five months of fieldwork does not permit longitudinal tracing of character change, although character formation operates over long time horizons. *Third*, claims about the affective–spiritual dimension rest on participants' subjective reports and have not been tested with standardized psychometric instruments; their status is *indicated*. Fourth, students' perspectives were obtained through focus group discussions, in which group pressure may suppress critical responses.

Four research agendas follow. *First*, a comparative multi-case study of MI in industrial, educational, and rural settings would test Proposition 3 on the conditionality of school–family synchronization. *Second*, a longitudinal study of at least three academic years would trace character trajectories from lower to upper grades and test the durability of cyclical habituation. *Third*, the development and validation of an affective–spiritual instrument for religious character, sensitive to Islamic contexts, and that proportionally covers Lickona's three domains, could be integrated into the existing Jumat Evaluasi practice. Fourth, a mixed-methods study combining qualitative data with quantitative measurement of the three ACH propositions on a larger MIN sample would establish whether the model is robust as a reference framework for religious character education in Indonesian Madrasah Ibtidaiyah or must be restricted to more specific contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation and impact of religious character education at MIN 1 Cilegon through a single-case design. Three findings emerged. *First*, the religious character education strategy operates as a layered habituation system sustained by teacher modeling and by integration into the formal and hidden curriculum; what works is the coordination of programs within a temporal architecture, not any single program in isolation. *Second*, the system's effectiveness depends on families' socio-economic conditions: in an industrial city such as Cilegon, parental working hours compress time for religious mentoring at home, and the school cannot fully compensate for that deficit. *Third*, character change is documented for observable behavioral indicators, while findings on the affective–spiritual dimension remain indicated; the available evidence bounds the study's claims.

Read together, these findings position the case not as a descriptive report on one madrasah but as a correction to the symmetry assumption in classical character-education frameworks. The asymmetry of the three domains is argued here to be structurally rooted in what schooling can schedule, what depends on persons, and what elementary-age children can reflectively articulate, rather than a local implementation failure. This structural origin explains why asymmetry recurs across the literature, even in schools judged successful. Religious character education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah operates in unequal space: across the domains of character, across actors within the school, and across families' socio-economic contexts. That inequality is not a weakness to be concealed for an institutional success narrative; it is the starting point for character education that is realistic and empirically accountable. The decisive test of such education is not the density of ritual inside the school but the transfer of school-formed dispositions beyond the school's cue environment. That test requires instruments, designs, and school–family arrangements that Indonesian madrasah education has yet to build.

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Ethical Statement

This study was conducted with official research permission granted by the Director of the Graduate Program at Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin State Islamic University, Banten, via Research Permit Letter No. 385/Un. 17/D/PP. 0.09/03/2026, dated May 25, 2026, addressed to the Principal of MIN 1 Cilegon.

All participants were informed of the research objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Written and verbal consent were obtained before data collection, and the identities of all participants (students, teachers, and school staff) have been anonymized or coded throughout the manuscript to protect confidentiality. The study involved no physical or psychological risks beyond those of routine educational observation and interviews, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

Author Contributions

Bahyati: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing—original draft. Wasehudin: Supervision, Validation, Writing—review & editing. Ilzamudin: Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. Eneng Muslihah: Supervision, Validation, Writing—review & editing. Bidayatul Inayah: Data curation, Visualization, Writing, review & editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, or professional relationships influenced the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of the findings presented in this manuscript.

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