

Strengthening Islamic Character through Four Integrated Mechanisms in Primary Teacher Education: A Qualitative Case Study of PGSD Students at UNM Campus V

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examines how Islamic values are internalised and sustained among Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) students at a regional Indonesian campus, addressing the gap between moral knowing and moral action and the conditions that stabilise practice.

Design/methods/approach – A qualitative case study was conducted at (Universitas Negeri Makassar) Campus V, Parepare using purposive sampling: 30 PGSD students, one Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lecturer, three lecturers involved in character initiatives, and two da'wah-organisation administrators. Data comprised participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Analysis followed Miles–Huberman procedures; trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical clearance was obtained. The study was guided by Lickona's moral knowing–feeling–action and Self-Determination Theory.

Findings – Four reinforcing mechanisms structure a pathway from knowledge to practice: (i) PAI pedagogy; (ii) campus religious activities; (iii) worship journaling; and (iv) lecturer exemplarity supported by facilities/culture. Internalised values include faith–piety, honesty–trustworthiness, a clarified distinction between discipline (temporal order) and istiqamah (cross-week steadiness), and tolerance. Enablers comprise intrinsic motivation, family/community continuity, lecturer modelling, and fit-for-purpose facilities; barriers include heterogeneous motivation, academic fatigue, misaligned home rhythms, uneven modelling, scheduling frictions, and digital distraction. Participation was more focused when ≥ 3 mechanisms operated within a week, a pattern recurrent across weeks and settings.

Research implications – Recommend a weekly cycle (class stimulus to collective engagement to reflective journaling to exemplarity/ambient cues), protected prayer-time windows, SOPs for lecturer exemplarity, facility optimisation, light peer review of journals, family briefs for commuters, digital-hygiene routines, schedule de-confliction, and recovery-time metrics

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1. Introduction

The accelerating pace of globalisation and the rapid development of information and communication technology have profoundly affected the behaviour and values of the younger generation, including university students. Research increasingly documents a tendency toward individualism, declining social awareness, and weakened participation in religious practices as consequences of modernisation pressures (Adamthwaite, 2018; Dewantara, 2020; Lieber & Weisberg, 2002; Suryana, 2021). These shifts point to an identity crisis that is particularly visible in higher



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education institutions, where students, as future professionals and educators, are expected to combine intellectual competence with moral integrity. The erosion of religious values in such contexts signals not only a personal challenge but also a structural issue for the formation of graduates who will shape future generations (Jumari et al., 2024; Singh, 2023).

National survey data underscore the urgency of this challenge. According to the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education, only about 58 percent of Indonesian students report regular participation in campus-based religious activities, and more than 30 percent admit to neglecting obligatory worship at its prescribed times. Such patterns resonate with international concerns about the weakening of moral character in university settings (Alishahi et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2019), but they also reveal a distinct Indonesian dynamic where religious identity remains a formal expectation in higher education policy. In the local context of UNM (Universitas Negeri Makassar) Campus V, a preliminary survey among Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) students revealed that only 42 percent regularly attended religious gatherings, while 38 percent reported insufficient guidance in religious practice. These numbers show that the concerns are not abstract but materialise concretely in daily student life (Chiang & Zhou, 2019; Ping-Qing, 2010).

The implications of this situation are particularly significant for teacher education programmes. As future educators, PGSD students are expected not only to master pedagogical content but also to embody religious character as role models for their pupils in elementary schools. This dual responsibility is inscribed in Indonesia's national education framework, which emphasises the cultivation of noble morals alongside intellectual development (Lickona, 1991; Lidyasari, 2014; Ridwan et al., 2024; Rosyida & Della Saputri, 2022). When future teachers themselves display fragility in religious commitment, the credibility of character education in schools becomes questionable. Universities, therefore, carry a double mandate: to educate professionals and to nurture citizens who are morally grounded and socially responsible (Gede et al., 2024; Tuhuteru et al., 2023).

Islamic values form a crucial axis in this mandate, providing a normative and practical framework for character formation. Values such as honesty (*sidq*), responsibility and trustworthiness (*amanah*), discipline, steadfastness (*istiqamah*), and tolerance (*tasamuh*) have been repeatedly emphasised in Islamic pedagogy as foundations for the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Abdullah & Abdur Rahman, 2025; Kamal, 2017; Parhan et al., 2025; Ridwan et al., 2024; Suryana, 2021). However, their internalisation cannot rely solely on formal classroom instruction. Studies note that religious character is more effectively strengthened when values are translated into everyday practices through mentoring, worship habituation, peer support, and a supportive campus culture (Alimron et al., 2023; Dewantara, 2020; Nuraini & Susiani, 2024; Nursikin & Nugroho, 2021). This requires universities to move beyond knowledge transmission and towards creating ecologies of practice in which values are made visible, livable, and sustainable (Purwanto et al., 2019; Suryana & Hilmi, 2023).

Previous studies at Muhammadiyah University of Palopo and UNISMA Malang illustrate this point clearly. Research at these institutions shows that combinations of Islamic Religious Education classes, structured mentoring, worship journals, student religious organisations, and conducive religious facilities can create a coherent environment for religious character development (Amriani., 2021; Maghfiroh & Aisyah, 2023). International scholarship on character education likewise emphasises the importance of integrated approaches, where teaching, role modelling, and community engagement are aligned to reinforce values (Abdussalam et al., 2024; Ariyani & Wahyudi, 2023; Hadiq et al., 2023). Yet, despite these advances, empirical research on the specific ways Islamic values are internalised in teacher education programmes in regional campuses remains scarce (Hakim, 2022; Jumari et al., 2024).

The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the mechanisms through which religious character is strengthened among PGSD students at UNM Campus V. Building on Lickona's tripartite framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as well as insights from Self-Determination Theory on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Bureau et al., 2021; Nishimura & Joshi, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020), the research explores how Islamic values are enacted in campus life. It pays particular attention to four domains of practice: classroom pedagogy, campus religious activities, worship journaling, and lecturer exemplarity within a supportive culture. These domains are treated not as isolated elements but as interconnected mechanisms that structure a pathway from knowledge to practice.

Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives. First, it describes the process of internalising Islamic values in campus life. Second, it identifies the specific values that are effectively embedded in student practices. Third, it analyses the enablers and barriers that affect the stability and sustainability of religious character formation. By adopting a case study approach, the research offers an empirically grounded account of how values are cultivated in the daily routines of teacher education students in an Indonesian regional campus. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights for the literature on character education and practical guidance for campus administrators seeking to design more effective programmes for religious development.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A case study was chosen because it allows for the in-depth exploration of processes, mechanisms, and contextual factors shaping the strengthening of religious character within a bounded system, namely the PGSD programme at UNM (Universitas Negeri Makassar) Campus V. Unlike ethnography, which typically requires long-term immersion, or phenomenology, which centres on individual lived experiences, the case study design is more appropriate for analysing institutional mechanisms that connect classroom learning, campus culture, and student practice in an integrated manner.

2.2. Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at UNM Campus V in Parepare, Indonesia, coinciding with the academic calendar and the rhythm of campus religious activities. The population included PGSD students, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lecturers, advisors of religious organisations, and student affairs staff. Participants were selected using purposive sampling in order to capture a range of experiences. The sample consisted of 30 PGSD students, both active and less active in religious activities, one PAI lecturer, three additional lecturers who were involved in character-related initiatives, and two administrators of the campus da'wah organisation. This composition was designed to ensure variation in perspectives across roles and levels of participation.

2.3. Data Sources and Instruments

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data included participant observation of PAI classes, mentoring sessions, communal worship, and religious gatherings; semi-structured interviews with students, lecturers, advisors, and staff; as well as documentation of syllabi, activity modules, reports, and visual materials such as photographs and videos. Secondary data comprised relevant regulations, institutional reports, and scholarly literature on Islamic values in character education. Observations were recorded in detailed field

notes, interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol focusing on experiences of value internalisation, and all interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent.

2.4. Data Collection Procedures

Three main techniques were employed. First, *participant observation* was conducted during recurring religious studies, mentoring, and communal worship, typically lasting one to two hours per session across different weeks. Second, *semi-structured interviews* were carried out with a duration ranging from 30 to 60 minutes, focusing on perceptions of religious character, mechanisms of value internalisation, and enablers and barriers encountered. Third, *document analysis* was performed on PAI syllabi, religious activity modules, and institutional reports to triangulate findings and provide historical context. All data collection was carried out with permission from participants and relevant campus authorities.

2.5. Data Analysis

The study employed the Miles and Huberman model of qualitative data analysis, consisting of three stages. *Data reduction* involved coding transcripts and field notes to identify categories relating to mechanisms, values, enablers, and barriers. *Data display* was achieved through narrative summaries, tables, and visual diagrams, enabling the recognition of patterns and linkages across data sources. *Verification and conclusion drawing* entailed iterative comparisons between data types, constant checking of emerging themes, and critical reflection to avoid premature closure. Where ambiguities emerged, data were re-examined and clarified through follow-up conversations with participants.

2.6. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure credibility, data triangulation was applied across interviews, observations, and documents. *Member checking* was conducted by sharing summaries of findings with selected participants for validation. *Peer* debriefing with academic colleagues helped to refine coding categories and interpretations. Dependability was enhanced by maintaining an audit trail of field notes, coding decisions, and analytical memos. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university research ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and sensitive information was treated with strict confidentiality.

3. Findings

3.1. Mechanisms for Strengthening Religious Character

Field materials gathered between September 2023 - February 2024 indicate four mutually reinforcing mechanisms that structure religious character formation at UNM Campus V: Islamic Religious Education classes, campus religious activities, daily worship habituation with journals, and lecturer exemplarity within a supportive campus culture. Observations were conducted in lecture rooms, the mosque complex, and common areas, and were triangulated with semi-structured interviews and institutional documents. The four mechanisms appear not as isolated programmes but as an integrated pathway that moves from knowledge to practice in everyday routines. As one PAI lecturer put it, "We try to make values visible in class, livable in activities, and sustainable through habit." This integrated framing was repeatedly confirmed in observation notes that recorded smooth transitions from classroom prompts to collective worship and mentoring circles.

In Islamic Religious Education classes, lessons routinely begin with brief Qur'an recitation followed by guided discussion linking the text to honesty, trustworthiness, discipline, and tolerance in student life. Observation notes from several mornings record the same sequence of practice, reflection, and modelling, for example a lecturer inviting students to greet one another properly, to queue respectfully, and to summarise one concrete action for the week. The pedagogy privileges value clarification and moral reasoning, then links these to specific behavioural commitments that can be checked in subsequent sessions. Students described the tone as demanding yet supportive. As Student 14 explained, "*PAI is not only about passing an exam, it is about why I pray on time and how I speak to people in the corridor.*"

Campus religious activities provide a second arena where values move from talk to collective enactment. Weekly study circles, the SAINS programme, and commemorations such as Maulid and Isra Mi'raj were observed to blend instruction, peer support, and opportunities for student leadership. During large events, groups rotated between organising committees and participant roles, which appeared to strengthen responsibility and cooperation. The presence of mentoring sessions in smaller groups offered a space to personalise guidance and to address obstacles to practice. As an LDK organiser stated, "*Activities are our laboratory where students test what they learn in class and find a community that keeps them steady.*"

Daily worship habituation, structured through individual journals, functions as a third mechanism that anchors practice in routine and self-regulation. The journals contain simple checklists for congregational prayers, voluntary prayers, Qur'an reading, dhikr, and periodic fasting, with short reflective prompts on intention and consistency. Observations noted that mentors occasionally reviewed journals to encourage rather than police, and several students informally compared their progress after sessions. The effect reported by participants was a clearer sense of time discipline and a more deliberate approach to worship in busy weeks. Student 3 captured the experience succinctly: "*The journal is a mirror, not a stick; it helps me see where I am slipping.*"

Lecturer exemplarity and the wider campus culture form the fourth mechanism that stabilises values in everyday micro-interactions. Observations recorded lecturers arriving early for prayers, greeting students warmly, and addressing lapses in dress and etiquette with calm reminders. Physical affordances also mattered: clean prayer rooms, well-maintained ablution areas, and visible posters with concise moral messages created gentle cues toward piety and respect. Several students linked their own consistency to what they witnessed from staff. As Student 21 remarked, "*When my lecturer quietly joins the first row and keeps promises in class, it is easier for me to keep mine.*"

Taken together, these mechanisms display a sequential and cyclical logic: cognitive anchoring in class, collective enactment in activities, personal consolidation through journaling, and cultural reinforcement via exemplarity and setting. Observations suggest that when at least three mechanisms operate consistently in a given week, student participation appears more focused and less dependent on external reminders. Where lecturer modelling was uneven, the atmosphere in adjacent classes differed in punctuality and mutual courtesy, which indicates the sensitivity of outcomes to local leadership. Participants were aware of this interdependence. As one mentor summarised, "*Teaching shows the way, activities give the road, journals keep the pace, and culture makes it normal.*" This synthesis prepares the ground for a more precise analysis of enablers and barriers in the next sub-sections.

3.2. Internalized Islamic Values

The analysis adopts a pragmatic-operational view of Islamic values as enacted dispositions that can be observed in situated practices. We translated canonical terms into behavioural indicators that anchor moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. For instance, faith and piety are treated as orientation and discipline of worship, honesty and trustworthiness as speech and task reliability, discipline and istiqamah as temporal order and long-haul consistency, and tolerance as civility in difference. Indicators were derived iteratively from classroom interactions, mentoring sessions, and worship routines, then tested against interview accounts. As one methods note states, "*Values were coded when words and deeds aligned across at least two settings*," a rule that improved reliability during cross checks.

Faith and piety emerged as the inner grammar of practice that gives meaning to routines rather than mere compliance. Observations in PAI classes showed short recitations followed by quiet moments where students wrote intentions for the week, which several later revisited after congregational prayers. In the mosque complex, students who arrived early often helped arrange prayer mats and guided peers to available rows, an unobtrusive sign of attentiveness to worship. Interviewees linked these gestures to an internal stance rather than external pressure. As Student 8 put it, "*When I set my intention in class, it becomes easier to make the prayer the centre of the day*," a formulation that connects belief, affect, and practice.

Honesty and trustworthiness were visible in academic and organisational micro situations that invite shortcuts. Classroom observations recorded students acknowledging missed references and correcting them publicly after a lecturer's prompt, while committee meetings for religious events showed punctual delivery of assigned tasks with short written handovers. Several mentors emphasised that speaking truthfully about difficulties was valued more than perfect appearances. A lecturer summarised the ethos succinctly: "*We prefer a clean no to a dirty yes*," a remark that students cited when discussing deadlines and shared budgets. This pairing of truthful speech and dependable action marked the move from verbal assent to accountable stewardship.

Discipline and istiqamah required careful distinction in both language and measurement. Discipline referred to orderly timing, neat procedures, and adherence to agreed rules, which appeared in on-time attendance for mentoring circles and consistent queueing before class prayers. Istiqamah referred to steadiness across weeks, especially during examination periods when routines are easily disrupted. Journal reviews showed that some students recovered lapsed practices within two or three days, a sign of resilience rather than perfectionism. As Student 17 reflected, "*Discipline gets me to the prayer, istiqamah keeps me coming back after I fail*," a framing that faculty mentors later adopted in feedback.

Tolerance functioned as civility in diversity and as restraint in moments of disagreement. Mixed-background groups negotiated minor differences in ritual detail by agreeing on the host mosque's practice, and they handled scheduling conflicts with soft speech and reciprocal concessions. Observation notes from the canteen recorded courteous turn-taking between visibly pious students and others with different styles, without social exclusion. Where tensions arose, mentors invited parties to restate the other's view before proposing solutions, which reduced misattribution and heat. A student leader summarised the norm: "*Respect is the minimum, care is the goal*," a phrase that captures *tasamuh* as more than mere forbearance.

3.3. Enablers of Value Internalization

We define enablers as contextual and personal conditions that make the enactment of Islamic values likely, stable, and repeatable across settings. The analysis draws on observation

notes from classrooms, mentoring circles, and the mosque complex, complemented by interview accounts and institutional documents. Enablers are not practices themselves but the soil in which practices take root. They connect the mechanisms described earlier with the values that appear in daily conduct. As one methods memo records, *"Enablers describe why a routine is easier to start, less fragile under pressure, and more likely to return after lapses."*

Internal enablers arose most clearly as intrinsic motivation, felt meaning during worship, and a growing sense of agency in moral choice. Observation notes describe students writing a single-line intention before class, then quietly revisiting it after congregational prayers, which many reported as calming and clarifying. Several participants linked this calm to a readiness to resume routines after disruption. Student 12 explained, *"I keep the practice because it gives me peace, and peace makes the next step possible."* The pattern suggests that inner reward and ownership of action strengthen the bridge from knowing to doing.

Family and community support functioned as the first set of external enablers, especially for students who commute or return home on weekends. Interviews frequently referenced parents who ask about prayer times or siblings who join Qur'an reading in the evening, which normalises practice outside campus. Observation notes from Monday mornings recorded small peer groups discussing how family routines helped them maintain fasting or early prayers. Student 6 noted, *"At home my mother wakes us before dawn, so it is natural to keep the rhythm at campus."* These accounts point to continuity between household habits and campus expectations.

Lecturer exemplarity and facilities formed a second set of external enablers that stabilised behaviour in public spaces. Observations repeatedly showed lecturers entering the mosque early, greeting students, and keeping appointments with visible punctuality. Clean prayer rooms, orderly ablution areas, and concise posters with moral cues reduced friction and reminded students without scolding. A PAI lecturer articulated the intended effect: *"We model what we ask for, then we remove small obstacles so students can do it with dignity."* Where such modelling and affordances were present, queues were orderly and late arrivals decreased across the term.

Synthesis of the evidence indicates a strong pathway from intrinsic motivation to habit formation when supported by family continuity and lecturer modelling, with facilities reducing the cost of compliance. In weeks where at least two external enablers were consistently present, observation notes recorded higher attendance at mentoring sessions and fewer missed journal entries. Variations across classes often tracked the steadiness of lecturer exemplarity rather than student disposition alone. A mentor summarised the interplay as follows: *"When motivation meets modelling and the place is ready, practice becomes normal instead of exceptional."* This logic map prepares the ground for analysing barriers that interrupt these pathways.

3.4. Barriers to Value Internalization

We treat barriers as conditions that hinder the translation of Islamic values into stable and repeatable conduct across settings. Evidence derives from observation notes in classrooms, mentoring circles, and the campus mosque, as well as interviews with students, lecturers, and LDK organisers. Barriers do not simply reduce participation; they also interrupt the link between moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Several field notes record moments where intentions were affirmed in class but lost in the flow of the day. As one methods memo states, *"A barrier is present when the student knows what to do, wants to do it, but fails to do it with regularity."*

Internal barriers appeared as heterogeneous dispositions, low intrinsic motivation in specific periods, academic fatigue, and limited readiness to self-regulate. Observation notes from midterm weeks describe hurried arrivals, shortened prayers, and a tendency to skip mentoring with the comment that assignments were overwhelming. Some students framed worship as an optional

add-on rather than a structuring rhythm for the day. Student 19 admitted, "*I pray when I can, but the deadlines feel louder,*" which captures the felt competition of demands. Mentors reported that once two or three sessions were missed, returning to routine required deliberate encouragement rather than simple reminders.

Family and community conditions formed a first set of external barriers when household rhythms did not align with campus expectations. Interviews with commuting students noted late-night chores, crowded living spaces, or relatives who considered campus activities unnecessary. Observation notes from early Monday sessions recorded several students who appeared sleep deprived and left quickly after prayers without engaging in discussion. Student 5 explained, "*At home there is no quiet corner, so I read later and then it is forgotten,*" indicating how material constraints weaken follow-through. In some neighbourhoods, peers discouraged visible piety as a sign of being overly strict, which reduced students' confidence outside campus.

A second set of external barriers concerned uneven exemplarity on campus, scheduling frictions, and the pull of digital media. Field notes document classes where a lecturer's late arrival or rushed exit reduced the time available for collective worship, followed by looser punctuality among students in the next period. Overlapping event schedules forced students to choose between academic tasks and religious activities without clear guidance on priorities. Several participants reported prolonged social media scrolling at night that disrupted dawn routines. As Student 23 put it, "*My phone steals the first and last hour of my day,*" a phrase that mentors recognised as a common pattern that drains attention and resolve.

Synthesising the evidence, barriers tend to break the pathway from motivation to habit at two points: they raise the cost of starting and they make recovery after lapses less likely. Variations across classes often mapped onto the steadiness of lecturer modelling and timetable clarity rather than student character alone. Where family or neighbourhood signals conflicted with campus norms, students required stronger mentoring and peer support to maintain practice. Observation notes suggest that simple environmental aids, such as protected time slots and explicit micro-routines, helped soften the impact but did not remove the underlying pressures. A mentor concluded, "*When the day is noisy and the models are mixed, even sincere intentions thin out,*" which points to the need for targeted mitigations in programme design.

4. Discussion

In line with literature highlighting the impact of modernization on the decline of social awareness and the strengthening of individualistic tendencies among university students (Adamthwaite, 2018; Dewantara, 2020; Lieber & Weisberg, 2002; Singh, 2023; Suryana, 2021), this study reaffirms the urgency of reinforcing religious character, particularly in teacher education programs. Starting from the research objective of mapping the mechanisms of internalizing Islamic values at UNM Campus V, the findings indicate that character reinforcement does not operate through a single intervention, but through a combination of four mechanisms—Islamic Religious Education (PAI) coursework, religion-themed campus activities, habituation of worship with a journal, and lecturers' role modeling within a supportive culture—that are interlinked to form a pathway from knowledge to practice. These findings are consistent with Lickona's framework of moral knowing–feeling–action (Lickona, 1991) and are supported by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the internalization of motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bureau et al., 2021; Nishimura & Joshi, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The four mechanisms operate according to a logic that is both sequential and cyclical: a cognitive anchor in the classroom (knowing), collective enactment in activities (feeling–belonging), personal consolidation through the journal (self-regulation—action), and stabilization through role modeling and

environmental arrangement (normative cues). When at least three mechanisms run consistently within a week, student participation appears more focused and less dependent on external reminders; conversely, inconsistency in lecturers' role modeling is immediately reflected in the discipline of adjacent classes. This pattern enriches Lickona's knowing→doing transition model by adding a "self-regulation bridge" (the journal) as a connector that minimizes intention loss amid activity pressures (Ridwan et al., 2024; Rosyida & Della Saputri, 2022).

The findings align with studies in Indonesian Islamic higher education that emphasize an integrated approach—learning, mentoring, religious organizations, and facility support—as prerequisites for value internalization (Alimron et al., 2023; Amriani., 2021; Nuraini & Susiani, 2024; Purwanto et al., 2019). They are also consonant with the international character literature that foregrounds the alignment of instruction, role modeling, and community (Abdussalam et al., 2024; Ariyani & Wahyudi, 2023; Chiang & Zhou, 2019). However, in contrast to some studies that place classrooms and facilities as the primary engine, this research shows the distinctive role of worship journaling as a "mirror, not a stick": a low-cost tool that strengthens self-monitoring without creating a repressive impression, thereby increasing the likelihood of practice recovery after a pause (Parhan et al., 2025; Ridwan et al., 2024). In addition, the operational distinction between discipline (orderliness of time/procedure) and istiqamah (steadfastness across weeks) provides a conceptual nuance that is often overlooked in measuring worship routines—discipline leads to the first act, istiqamah ensures continuity after momentary failure (Kamal, 2017; Suryana & Hilmi, 2023).

The observed internalization pathway confirms SDT's thesis: the worship journal fosters a sense of autonomy through intention setting and self-reflection; mentoring and collective activities build relatedness that sustains perseverance; lecturers' role modeling and environmental affordances (a clean musholla [prayer room], orderly queues, brief moral cues) lower the cost of compliance, strengthening perceived competence (Jumari et al., 2024; Nursikin & Nugroho, 2021; Ok et al., 2023). Nevertheless, heterogeneity of intrinsic motivation—especially during exam weeks—indicates that autonomy needs to be combined with situational scaffolding (for example, schedule arrangement and micro-routines) so that the bridge from intention to habit is not fragile (Hadiq et al., 2023; Maghfiroh & Aisyah, 2023).

Consistent with national concerns over the thinning of students' religious commitment, the elementary teacher context shows that the credibility of character education in primary schools depends on the example of prospective teachers on campus (Gede et al., 2024; Lickona, 1991; Tuhuteru et al., 2023). On the other hand, our findings challenge the implicit assumption that "strong motivation is sufficient": irregularity in lecturers' role modeling, scheduling frictions, and digital distractions have been shown to break the intention–action chain even when religious attitudes are already endorsed in class (Hakim, 2022; Rahim, 2024). Thus, the theoretical contribution of this research lies in (i) modeling the package effect of the four mechanisms as an ecology of practice; (ii) articulating the role of the journal as a mediation of self-regulation between knowing–action; and (iii) conceptual clarification of discipline vs. istiqamah as two dimensions of moral habit that are different yet interrelated.

4.1. Practical Implications

Based on the findings, strengthening religious character requires an integrated program design that operates in an explicit weekly cycle: cognitive stimulation in class followed by collective engagement (halaqah/SAINS), then personal reflection through the journal, and concluded with feedback based on lecturers' role modeling and environmental cues. To reduce the costs of activity transitions, the academic calendar needs to provide protected time slots of around 10–15 minutes around prayer times. Consistency of lecturers' example should be standardized as standard operating procedures—with simple indicators such as punctuality, consistency in congregational

prayer, courteous communication, and follow-through on class commitments—which are integrated into performance evaluation without a punitive tone, so that normative cues remain stable across classes. The physical environment also needs to be optimized through the cleanliness of worship areas, adequacy of wudu (ablution), queue management, and brief, functional moral posters; in principle, reduce friction and multiply gentle reminders.

At the level of individual practice, the worship journal must be positioned as a formative tool—“a mirror, not a stick.” Light peer review mechanisms and periodic mentoring check-ins can preserve its reflective character, while the metrics emphasized are not merely daily streaks, but post-lapse recovery speed as an indicator of habit resilience. Outside the campus, continuity of rhythm between home and campus needs to be built through parental engagement, especially for commuter students, for example through monthly briefs that explain the worship rhythm and tips for maintaining consistency. At the same time, digital distractions need to be mitigated through digital hygiene education—such as a “quiet hour” one hour before and after sleep and placing devices out of reach at Subuh (Fajr)—as well as habit locking with time-cue-based micro-routines. Finally, curation of academic and religious schedules must avoid overlapping priority agendas, accompanied by transparent priority protocols, so that students are not prompted to make random choices that disrupt the intention–action sequence.

4.2. Limitations

First, the single-case study design at UNM Campus V limits generalization across institutions. Second, the data collection period intersects with a particular academic rhythm; patterns in other months may differ. Third, the focused sample size (30 students and a number of lecturers/mentors) and purposive sampling technique open the possibility of representation bias. Fourth, observational data and worship journals are potentially exposed to social desirability bias and the observer effect. Fifth, this research does not track long-term outcomes (e.g., sustainability of *istiqamah* after graduation) nor quantitative indicators of character change.

4.3. Recommendations for Future Research

To strengthen generalization, subsequent research needs to conduct comparative cross-campus studies—public–private as well as regional–metropolitan—to assess the transferability of the four-mechanism package within different institutional ecologies. A longitudinal mixed-methods approach is recommended to track the dynamics of discipline and *istiqamah* across semesters, combining in-depth interviews and quantitative measurement of intrinsic motivation (SDT framework), self-regulation, and habit strength. At the same time, staged causal evaluation can be designed through a quasi-experiment or stepped-wedge design to test the marginal effects of each mechanism—for example, adding a journal or strengthening SOPs for role modeling—on worship compliance and trustworthy behavior.

Innovation space is also open to digital nudging interventions aligned with the “mirror, not a stick” principle, such as adaptive reminders, lock-screen prompts, or lightweight commitment devices. Given the strong influence of the home, family partnerships need to be explored further to find campus–family communication models that are most effective for commuter students and those facing material constraints. Finally, success measurement should not rely solely on streaks; developing a “recovery time” indicator after a lapse as a complementary metric will help capture the dimension of resilience in religious habits that has so far escaped monitoring.

Overall, this study indicates that the internalization of Islamic values among prospective teacher students is better understood as the result of an ecology of practice that synergizes instruction, community, self-regulation, and normative cues—not merely an accumulation of

knowledge or intention. Its theoretical and practical contributions open the way for more precise and sustainable program designs, while marking the limits that need to be addressed by subsequent research. The existing references (Abdullah & Abdur Rahman, 2025; Abdussalam et al., 2024; Alimron et al., 2023; Amriani., 2021; Ariyani & Wahyudi, 2023; Bureau et al., 2021; Dewantara, 2020; Lickona, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Suryana, 2021) provide a strong footing that an integrated, self-regulation-centered approach is a promising direction for strengthening religious character in teacher education.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the strengthening of the religious character of Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) students at UNM Campus V is most appropriately understood as an ecology of practice that synergizes four mechanisms—Islamic Religious Education (PAI) coursework, campus religious activities, worship habituation based on a journal, and lecturers' role modeling within a supportive culture. The four form a pathway that is both sequential and cyclical from knowing to doing, with the worship journal serving as a self-regulation bridge that minimizes the loss of intention amid activity pressures. This synthesis is in line with the moral knowing–feeling–action framework and is reinforced by Self-Determination Theory principles regarding autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Three research questions are answered explicitly. (1) The internalization process proceeds through cognitive anchoring in class, collective enactment in activities, personal consolidation through the journal, and stabilization through role modeling and environmental affordances. (2) The values internalized are evident in faith–taqwa as a worship orientation; honesty–trustworthiness in speech and reliability in tasks; the operational distinction between discipline (orderliness of time/procedure) and *istiqamah* (steadfastness across weeks); and *tasamuh* as courteousness in difference. (3) The main enablers include intrinsic motivation, family/community support, lecturers' role modeling, and adequate facilities; whereas the salient barriers are heterogeneity of motivation, academic fatigue and limitations of self-regulation, misalignment of home–campus rhythms, inconsistency of role modeling, scheduling frictions, and digital distractions.

These findings can be applied directly through an integrated program design based on a weekly cycle: cognitive stimulation (class) → collective engagement (*halaqah*/SAINS) → personal reflection (journal) → feedback of role modeling and environmental cues. Operational implementation includes: protected time of 10–15 minutes around prayer times; lecturers' role-modeling standard operating procedures (SOPs) (punctuality, congregational prayer, courteous communication, follow-through) integrated into performance evaluation without a punitive tone; optimization of worship facilities and brief moral cues; positioning the worship journal as a formative tool “a mirror, not a stick” with light peer review and mentoring check-ins; strengthening the continuity of home–campus rhythms through periodic parent briefs; mitigation of digital distractions (a quiet hour before–after sleep, placing devices out of reach at Subuh [Fajr]); curation of academic–religious schedules to avoid overlap, accompanied by priority protocols; and monitoring metrics that assess not only streaks but also post-lapse recovery speed.

This study has limitations: a single-case design at UNM Campus V that limits generalization; a data collection period that may not represent other months; a relatively small purposive sample; the potential for social desirability and the observer effect in observations and journals; and the absence of long-term tracking and quantitative indicators of character change. Therefore, interpretation of the findings needs to consider context and caution in transferability.

Implications for further research include comparative cross-campus studies (public–private; regional–metropolitan) to test the transferability of the four-mechanism package; longitudinal mixed-methods to trace the dynamics of discipline–*istiqamah* across semesters along with measurements of

intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and habit strength; staged causal evaluation through quasi-experiment or stepped-wedge to estimate the marginal effects of each mechanism; exploration of digital nudging consistent with the “mirror, not a stick” principle; strengthening family partnerships for commuter students and those facing material constraints; and developing a recovery-time metric as a complement to streaks.

Overall, the main contribution of this study is the modeling of the four-mechanism package as an ecology of practice that unites instruction, community, self-regulation, and normative cues; offering an implementation toolkit that is precise and sustainable; while simultaneously marking the limitations that must be addressed by the next research agenda.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Lukman formulated the research problem. Nur Hilaliyah supervised the conceptual and methodological framework. Muthmainnah conducted the data analysis. Amri Rahman developed the literature review and theoretical framework. Mujahidah wrote the global context and comparative analysis. Khaerunnisa refined the manuscript and references.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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