Enhancing Student Moral Development Through Character Education Management Based on Religious Culture in Special Education Schools: A Case Study in Cirebon, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to address the moral decline among students in the context of globalization by exploring the concept of character education management based on religious culture in special education schools in Cirebon, Indonesia. The focus is on understanding how religious culture can enhance the quality of graduates and provide a solution to the moral challenges faced by the younger generation.

Design/methods/approach — A qualitative case study design was employed to investigate the character education management at SLB Bina Mandiri, a special education school in Cirebon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis involving teachers, principals, and students. Thematic analysis was used to categorize and interpret the data, ensuring validity through triangulation and expert reviews

Findings – The study found that effective character education management based on religious culture involves strategic planning, clear organizational roles, consistent implementation, and thorough supervision. Programs such as daily Quran recitation, congregational prayers, and religious observances foster a positive school environment and significantly enhance student discipline, respect, and religious understanding. These initiatives have led to the development of students with strong moral characters and high-quality graduates.

Research implications – The findings suggest that other special education schools can adopt this model to improve their character education programs. The study highlights the importance of the principal's role in planning and organizing religious programs to ensure consistency and commitment from all school components. Future research should explore the long-term impacts and applicability of this management model in different educational contexts.

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, human life has entered a highly complex phase of globalization. One significant impact of globalization is the erosion of moral values among students, necessitating serious attention (Liastamin Anwar et al., 2023). This issue is reflected in various educational incidents in 2022, most of which involved harassment. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission indicated more than 226 cases of physical and psychological violence, including bullying, throughout 2022. This number continues to rise, causing public concern.

In response to this problem, the President of the Republic of Indonesia established character education as a component of the national education strategy to prepare the Golden Generation of 2045 with the spirit of Pancasila. Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education lays the foundation for character education within the Indonesian education system. Character education aims to build students' character so they can make good choices, maintain good habits, and apply these values in their daily lives. Thus, character education not only provides knowledge but also instills a sense of love and awareness to behave well.

According to Chairiyah (2014), strengthening character education in schools requires a strong and consistent understanding from all involved parties. Schools are not only places for learning but also venues for uniting the character of the younger generation. School culture forms the basis for implementing strengthened character education (Isnaini, 2013). A good school culture is expected to help improve students' character. Short and Gree in Sudrajat (2014) define school culture as the habits, beliefs, and standards existing in schools, which can be shaped, reinforced, and selected by teachers and school leaders. Schein (2017) adds that school culture is a model for group formation.

Character education for special needs children at an early age remains a problem in Indonesia, particularly in Cirebon Regency. This is due to the limited number of special or inclusive schools available for children with special needs (Putri et al., 2022). Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that the number of special schools in Cirebon Regency is only 17, one of which is SLB Bina Mandiri in Ciledug District, Cirebon Regency.

A good school culture can positively impact character education. Consistent with Zamroni's (2000) perspective, TIMSS findings indicate that the quality of education is influenced by non-physical factors, such as school culture, alongside physical factors like competent teachers, complete laboratory equipment, and library books. Sukadri's (2020) research reinforces this view by showing that school culture has the ability to create a conducive school environment for realizing educational quality in line with the school's vision and mission. School culture can also optimize the performance of teachers, principals, staff, and students to achieve ideal outcomes.

Numerous studies have been conducted on character education management in developing the quality of graduates. Hidayatun (2021) and Sodiq (2021) found that character education development in schools can enhance the quality of graduates better than schools that do not implement character education. Research also indicates that besides the curriculum and learning process, school habits and culture play an active role in producing quality graduates.

However, previous research still has limitations in terms of methodology, research scope, and data interpretation, especially in the context of religious character education in special schools. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the concept of character education management based on religious culture in special schools in Cirebon. Thus, this research provides an inspirational solution for principals in implementing and creating a religion-based school culture, which can enhance the quality of graduates with special needs.

This study aims to identify the concept of character education management based on religious culture in special schools in Cirebon, explore how religious culture in special schools can influence character development and the quality of graduates, and assess the impact of implementing religious culture on the quality of education in special schools. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of character education based on religious culture, serving as a model for other special schools in Indonesia in preparing high-quality graduates.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore and understand the dynamics of religious culture-based character education management in developing the quality of graduates at Bina

Mandiri Special School (SLB Bina Mandiri) in Cirebon Regency. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of 'how' and 'why' certain phenomena occur, particularly in contexts where the researcher does not have full control over events and contemporary phenomena in real life (Cohen et al., 2017).

The participants in this study are teachers, the principal, and students at SLB Bina Mandiri. The selection of SLB Bina Mandiri as the research site is based on its unique characteristics in managing religious culture-based character education and its reputation for producing high-quality graduates. Participants were purposively selected to ensure relevant and in-depth representation of the research topic.

Data were collected through three main methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, the principal, and students to gather firsthand perspectives on the implementation of religious culture in the school and its influence on students' character development. Participatory observation was carried out during daily activities at the school to understand the dynamics of interactions and religious culture practices in the educational context. Document analysis involved examining school records, curricula, and other relevant documents to corroborate findings from interviews and observations (Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques. The collected data were categorized into main themes that reflect the key concepts of this study. This process involved coding the data, identifying patterns, and interpreting findings to provide an in-depth understanding of the case under investigation. Data validity was maintained through triangulation, which involves using multiple methods and data sources to verify the consistency of findings (Sugiyono, 2019). Additionally, expert reviews were conducted to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data interpretation.

This research adheres to strict ethical research standards. Before data collection commenced, ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. All participants were fully informed about the research objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Furthermore, participant confidentiality was rigorously maintained, and the collected data were used solely for the purposes of this research.

With this comprehensive methodological approach, the study aims to provide significant insights into the management of religious culture-based character education at SLB and its impact on educational quality and graduate outcomes.

3. Results

This study, based on the management theory proposed by G.R. Terry, yielded data on the planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision of religious culture-based character education management at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug.

3.1. Planning Religious Culture-Based Character Education to Enhance Graduate Quality at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug

The planning process for religious culture-based character education at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug involves drafting a strategic plan that serves as the backbone for developing a religious culture. This involves strategic and operational management focusing on action guidelines, directions, and limitations for operational management.

According to interviews with the school principal, the development of a religious culture begins with consultations involving all school components, including teachers and quality management staff. The strategic plan is democratically formulated, considering inputs from various parties. The principal emphasized the importance of thorough planning to ensure activities are not

merely formalities but yield satisfying results. For instance, Mr. Nanu Danuhari stated in an interview:

"Character education planning starts with the 5S program (Smile, Greet, Salute, Politeness, Courtesy) where the principal, teachers, and administrative staff take turns scheduling gate guard duties to welcome students."

Table 1: Religious Culture-Based Character Education Programs at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug

No	Religious Culture-Based Character Education Program
1	Activation of School Code of Ethics
2	Scheduling Habits (5S)
3	5S Program (Smile, Greet, Salute, Politeness, Courtesy)
4	Quranic Recitation Before the First Lesson
5	Congregational Dhuha Prayer
6	Congregational Dzuhur Prayer
7	Quran Reading
8	Friday Congregational Prayer at the Mosque
9	Ramadan Short Course
10	Periodic Charity (Infak)
11	Commemoration of Islamic Holidays
12	Recitation of the 30th Juz of the Quran
13	Daily Memorization
14	Reading Yasin Surah Every Friday Morning
15	Deepening of Worship Practices
16	Practicing Adhan and Iqamat for Male Students

3.2. Organizing Religious Culture-Based Character Education to Enhance Graduate Quality at SLB Bina Mandiri Cileduq

In every educational organization, including schools, various tasks, authorities, and responsibilities must be carried out by each component at the educational unit level. The principal plays a central role in organizing and structuring the organization at the beginning of the new academic year, determining the tasks, authorities, and responsibilities of each organizational component.

The vice principal and students are the forefront in implementing the development of religious culture in the school. Based on interview results, the principal structured a clear organization and assigned specific roles to individuals to support the character education program. The principal also ensured that every individual understood their responsibilities, as explained in the following interview:

"In organizing the structure, we clearly divide the tasks. The vice principal and religious teachers play crucial roles in overseeing and implementing religious programs. Each organizational component has specific responsibilities to ensure the programs run smoothly."

Implementing Religious Culture-Based Character Education to Enhance Graduate 3.3. Quality at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug

The implementation of religious culture development policies at SLB Bina Mandiri Cileduq involves various programs and activities carried out systematically and consistently. These programs aim to integrate religious values into students' daily lives, shape strong character, and enhance graduate quality. The following are detailed findings on the implementation of religious culture-based character education at this school:

5S Program (Smile, Greet, Salute, Politeness, Courtesy):

This program is conducted daily with the principal, teachers, and staff taking turns scheduling gate guard duties to welcome students. This aims to instill politeness and respect between students and educators.

b. Quranic Recitation Before Lessons:

Every morning before lessons begin, students are required to read short surahs from the 30th Juz together. This program not only enhances Quranic reading skills but also instills spiritual values in students.

Congregational Dhuha and Dzuhur Prayers:

Dhuha and Dzuhur prayers are conducted congregationally at school. Besides reinforcing worship, this activity teaches the importance of time discipline and togetherness.

d. Ramadan Short Course:

> During Ramadan, the school organizes a short course involving various religious activities such as sermons, religious discussions, and worship practices. This aims to deepen religious understanding and strengthen students' spirituality.

Periodic Charity (Infak):

The school conducts periodic charity programs involving all students. This activity teaches the importance of sharing and caring for others.

Commemoration of Islamic Holidays:

Every Islamic holiday, such as the Prophet's Birthday and Isra Mi'raj, is celebrated with activities that enhance students' knowledge about Islamic history and values.

Daily Memorization and Reading Yasin Surah Every Friday:

Students are required to memorize short surahs and read Yasin Surah every Friday morning. This helps students memorize the Quran and improve their reading skills.

Based on interviews with the principal and teachers, these programs are implemented with full support from all teaching staff and school management. The principal emphasized the importance of consistency and commitment in carrying out each program:

"We always ensure that every program is implemented consistently and with full commitment from all staff. Support from all parties is crucial for the success of these programs."

Effective implementation of these programs has brought positive changes to students, as evidenced by improved discipline, respect, and better religious understanding. A teacher expressed in an interview:

"These programs are very effective in shaping students' character. They become more disciplined, respect teachers and their peers, and have a better understanding of religion."

Supervising Religious Culture-Based Character Education to Enhance Graduate Quality at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug

Supervision is carried out to ensure that religious culture development activities proceed according to plan. The principal is responsible for overseeing the activities and conducting regular evaluations. All implementing actors oversee the activities, identify any issues, and take corrective actions if deviations are found.

The principal stated in an interview:

"Everyone is responsible for their tasks, including the principal who must supervise the activities. So, the principal not only delegates but also monitors."

The results indicate that the planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision of religious culture-based character education at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug are well-executed and structured. The implemented programs effectively reflect the religious values instilled in students, positively impacting character development and graduate quality. The implementation of religious culture also enhances educational quality at the school, as indicated by the active involvement of all school components in every planned and executed program.

Furthermore, interviews with the principal and field observations show that the implementation of religious culture-based character education not only directly impacts students but also creates a conducive and harmonious school environment. Programs like congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, and other religious activities create an atmosphere filled with positive values, motivating students to behave better. This demonstrates that religious culture-based character education management can be an effective model for improving educational quality and shaping students' noble character. Additionally, good organization ensures that every school member understands their role and responsibilities, creating strong synergy in achieving educational goals.

4. Discussion

This study aims to develop a strategic management plan to foster a religious culture at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug, a specialized school. This objective aligns with the broader goal of integrating character education rooted in religious values to enhance the overall quality of graduates. The strategic management and operational management in developing a religious culture are closely intertwined, involving action guidelines, directives, and operational boundaries (Putri et al., 2022).

The strategic management plan is pivotal, focusing on meticulous program planning and operational activities. This planning ensures the effective use of resources, the establishment of strategies, policies, procedures, and standards to achieve specific goals (Mukti & Harimi, 2021). The planning phase is comprehensive, encompassing strategic plans that guide the development of a religious culture within the school environment.

The organizational structure at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug is designed to clarify various tasks, authorities, responsibilities, and activities. This structure ensures that all duties are appropriately delegated among staff members (Putri et al., 2022). The involvement of all components, including the vice-principal and students, in implementing the religious culture development program supports previous findings on the importance of clear organizational roles in successful program implementation.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is based on G.R. Terry's management theory, emphasizing the importance of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising in character education management. The principal's role is crucial in structuring the organization and assigning responsibilities at the beginning of the academic year. This structured approach ensures that every component of the organization functions efficiently to achieve the school's goals.

Given the complexity of educational management, interpreting these findings requires caution. While the structured and strategic approach at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug has shown positive results, the unique context and specific needs of the students must be considered. The success observed here might not be directly replicable in different educational settings without adjustments to address local conditions and challenges.

The successful implementation of character education programs based on religious values has significant implications for both theoretical and practical aspects of educational management. Theoretically, it supports the notion that a well-structured and strategic approach can enhance the effectiveness of character education. Practically, it offers a model that other schools can adapt to foster a positive and cohesive school culture.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of religious culture-based character education on students' behavior and academic performance. Additionally, studies could investigate the applicability of this management model in different educational contexts, including public schools and other specialized institutions, to determine its broader relevance and adaptability.

The findings from SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug illustrate that a comprehensive management plan encompassing strategic planning, clear organizational roles, and consistent implementation can significantly enhance character education. This aligns with existing literature on the importance of structured management in educational settings. The integration of religious values into daily school activities fosters a positive environment conducive to student development.

This study's limitations include its focus on a single specialized school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data from interviews and observations could introduce subjectivity. Future research should incorporate quantitative measures and a broader range of schools to validate these findings.

Further research should examine the effectiveness of similar strategic management plans in diverse educational settings. Practically, schools should consider adopting and adapting the strategic planning and organizational structure demonstrated at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug to enhance their character education programs. This approach can potentially lead to improved student outcomes and a more cohesive school culture.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of strategic and well-organized management in developing a religious culture within educational institutions. The positive results at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug highlight the potential benefits of such an approach, providing a valuable model for other schools aiming to integrate character education into their curricula.

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of strategic management in developing a religious culture for character education at SLB Bina Mandiri Ciledug. The findings indicate that effective planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision can enhance students' character and graduate quality. Programs such as congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, and periodic charity successfully create a conducive school environment rich with positive values, shaping students into morally upright and disciplined individuals.

The practical implications of this research are significant. First, other schools can adopt and adapt this model of religious culture-based character education management to improve their educational quality. Second, the active role of the principal in planning and organizing religious programs is crucial for ensuring the consistency and commitment of all school components.

This study also highlights several limitations, such as focusing on a single school and using qualitative data, which may carry subjectivity. Therefore, further research is needed to test this model in various educational contexts and use quantitative approaches to validate these findings.

Overall, this study offers a valuable contribution to the field of character education management, providing an inspirational model that can be implemented in other schools to produce high-quality graduates with strong character. It also affirms that religious culture-based character education can be an effective solution to address moral challenges among students in this era of globalization.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Hasan Sarip conceived the presented idea. Ahmad Munajim, Toto Sukarnoto, Asro'i, and Agus Sugiyatno developed the theory. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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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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