



How School Culture Shapes Religious Character: Unpacking the Hidden Mediating Power of Discipline in Indonesian Islamic Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how student discipline mediates the relationship between school culture and the development of religious character in Indonesian Islamic junior high schools. Although prior research has established correlations among these variables, the specific mechanism through which school culture shapes religious character remains insufficiently explained. This study addresses this gap by testing discipline as a behavioral pathway that translates cultural values into consistent moral actions. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed using survey data from 268 students across three private Islamic junior high schools. The analysis used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess both measurement and structural models, including mediation effects. The results show that school culture significantly predicts student discipline and religious character. Discipline also has a strong direct effect on religious character. Mediation analysis indicates that discipline accounts for more than half of the total effect of school culture on religious character, demonstrating partial mediation. These findings clarify that school culture influences character formation primarily through disciplined routines and behavioral regulation. The study contributes a mechanism-based explanation to character education literature, particularly within Islamic schooling contexts. The study concludes that discipline is a critical behavioral conduit for transforming cultural norms into internalized religious character and recommends that policymakers incorporate educative discipline indicators into school quality frameworks.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana disiplin siswa memediasi hubungan antara budaya sekolah dan pengembangan karakter religius di sekolah menengah pertama Islam di Indonesia. Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya telah menunjukkan adanya korelasi di antara variabel-variabel tersebut, mekanisme spesifik yang menjelaskan bagaimana budaya sekolah membentuk karakter religius masih belum terjabarkan secara memadai. Studi ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menguji disiplin sebagai jalur perilaku yang menerjemahkan nilai-nilai budaya menjadi tindakan moral yang konsisten. Desain penelitian kuantitatif dengan pendekatan potong lintang digunakan dengan memanfaatkan data survei dari 268 siswa di tiga sekolah menengah pertama Islam swasta. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) untuk menilai model pengukuran dan struktural, termasuk efek mediasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya sekolah secara signifikan memprediksi disiplin siswa dan karakter religius. Disiplin juga memiliki pengaruh langsung yang kuat terhadap karakter religius. Analisis mediasi menunjukkan bahwa disiplin menyumbang lebih dari setengah pengaruh total budaya sekolah

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terhadap karakter religius, yang menunjukkan mediasi parsial. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa budaya sekolah memengaruhi pembentukan karakter terutama melalui rutinitas disiplin dan regulasi perilaku. Studi ini memberikan penjelasan berbasis mekanisme bagi literatur pendidikan karakter, khususnya dalam konteks sekolah Islam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa disiplin merupakan jalur perilaku yang penting untuk mentransformasikan norma budaya menjadi karakter religius yang terinternalisasi dan merekomendasikan agar pembuat kebijakan memasukkan indikator disiplin edukatif ke dalam kerangka mutu sekolah.

Introduction

The development of students' religious character has become a central priority in global educational discourse, particularly within frameworks that emphasize holistic moral formation and value-based schooling (Lickona, 2009; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). International initiatives increasingly highlight the role of school environments in shaping students' moral dispositions through structured socialization processes and consistent behavioral reinforcement (Durkheim et al., 2008; Bandura, 1977). Within Indonesia, this priority is reflected in national policies such as the Character Education Strengthening program and the Pancasila Student Profile initiative, both of which position religious character as a foundational educational outcome. Despite these policy efforts, persistent reports of student behavioral issues indicate that character formation remains a significant challenge in practice (KPAI, 2018).

In Islamic junior high schools, school culture serves as a normative environment that embeds shared values, routines, and expectations into daily school life (Schein, 2010). This cultural environment is intended to support religious habituation and behavioral regulation. However, field conditions show that the translation of cultural values into consistent student behavior is not always effective, suggesting the presence of intervening mechanisms that require empirical clarification. Although prior studies in Indonesian contexts have demonstrated positive correlations among school culture, discipline, and religious character (Nandini et al., 2022; Wangsa et al., 2021), these studies have largely remained descriptive and have not examined the causal pathways that connect these constructs.

A clear gap in the literature concerns the limited investigation of discipline as a mediating mechanism. Existing research tends to treat discipline either as an independent variable or as a component of school culture, rather than as a behavioral conduit that may transmit cultural influences into character outcomes (Hayes et al., 2017). This gap restricts theoretical understanding of how school environments shape moral action and limits practical insights for designing effective character education programs.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the mediating role of student discipline in the relationship between school culture and religious character in Indonesian Islamic junior high schools. Specifically, the study tests whether discipline functions as the behavioral pathway through which cultural values are internalized and expressed in students' religious conduct.

The study offers two key scientific contributions. First, it provides a mechanism-based explanation of character formation by empirically validating discipline as a partial mediator, thereby advancing theoretical integration across sociological, psychological, and character education perspectives. Second, it generates practical implications for Islamic schools by demonstrating that structured, value-oriented disciplinary routines are essential for translating cultural norms into consistent religious behavior. These contributions strengthen both the conceptual clarity and applied relevance of character education within religious schooling contexts.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational cross-sectional design to examine the predictive relationships among school culture, discipline, and religious character in Indonesian Islamic junior high schools. This design was selected because it allows the simultaneous testing of multiple latent constructs and their causal pathways, which is essential for addressing the research question concerning the mediating role of discipline. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was chosen as the analytical approach due to its suitability for complex mediation models, its predictive orientation, and its robustness to non-normal data. These methodological characteristics align with the study's objective to test both direct and indirect effects within a theoretically grounded structural model.

The population consisted of 812 students enrolled in grades 7 to 9 across three private Islamic junior high schools in Cianjur Regency. Schools were selected purposively based on three inclusion criteria: a minimum B accreditation rating, documented implementation of religious character programs, and the availability of student discipline records. Students were included if they were officially registered in the selected schools and present during data collection. A two-stage sampling procedure was implemented, beginning with purposive school selection followed by proportional random sampling of students using class rosters and random number generation. This process yielded 268 valid respondents, a sample size that meets the 10-times rule for PLS-SEM and provides adequate statistical power. The demography of participants is presented on Table 1 below.

Table 1. School Profiles and Selection Criteria

School	Predicate	Number of Students	Featured Religious Programs	Selection Criteria
SMP NU Shofiyatul Huda	B	100	[Example: Daily Quran memorization, congregational prayers]	1. Minimum B accreditation 2. Religious character programs 3. Availability of discipline records
SMP S Cokroaminoto Sukaresmi	B	520	[Example: Integrated Islamic ethics education]	1. Minimum B accreditation 2. Religious character programs 3. Availability of discipline records
SMP Sinar Parahyangan	B	192	[Example: Weekly student-led religious sermons]	1. Minimum B accreditation 2. Religious character programs 3. Availability of discipline records
TOTAL	-	812	-	-

Data were collected through structured paper-based questionnaires administered during school hours, with a response rate of 91.8 percent. Data collection occurred during March-April 2024 via structured paper questionnaires administered during school hours, yielding a 91.8% response rate (268 of 292 distributed). Missing data (<1%) were handled using regression imputation after confirming missing completely at random patterns. The data instrument is developed through following framework.

Table 2. Instrument Development and Measurement Details

Construct	Primary Source	Dimensions (# of Items)	Sample Item	Response Scale
School Culture	Schein (2010)	Values (4), Norms (4), Trust (4), Habits (4)	"School traditions reflect Islamic values."	1-5 Likert
Discipline	Tu'u (2004)	Time Management (4), Rule Compliance (4)	"I complete assignments on time."	1-5 Likert
Religious Character	Wibowo (2013)	Obedience (4), Tolerance (4), Application (4)	"I respect others' worship practices."	1-5 Likert

Missing data below one percent were treated using regression imputation after confirming that the missingness pattern met the assumption of missing completely at random. Data analysis followed a two-stage PLS-SEM procedure using SmartPLS 4. The first stage involved evaluating the reflective measurement model through assessments of outer loadings, average variance extracted, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio.

The second stage assessed the structural model by examining path coefficients, effect sizes, coefficient of determination, predictive relevance, and model fit using the standardized root mean square residual. Mediation was tested using bootstrapped indirect effects and the variance accounted for criterion. To ensure data quality, the study implemented procedural controls for common method bias, including anonymity and scale counterbalancing, and statistical controls such as full collinearity variance inflation factor testing and the marker variable technique. Measurement invariance across schools was examined using the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models procedure, confirming both configural and compositional invariance. This analytical sequence ensures that the findings are valid, reliable, and aligned with contemporary reporting standards for PLS-SEM in educational research.

Results and Discussion

Results

Outer Model

The assessment of the reflective measurement model confirms the validity and reliability of all constructs. As presented in Table 1, Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (ρ_a) for all constructs exceed 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency. The high values are theoretically acceptable given the specific, normatively coherent nature of the constructs within the homogeneous context of Islamic schools. All Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are above 0.80, confirming strong convergent validity. Full collinearity VIF values are below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

Table 3. Outer Model Reliability and Validity

Variable	Dimension	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	AVE	VIF
School Culture	Values	0.895	0.922	0.927	0.808	1.892
	Norms	0.890				1.834
	Trust	0.898				1.901
	Habits	0.917				2.105
Discipline	Time	0.974	0.949	0.950	0.951	3.124
	Actions	0.976				3.215
Religious Character	Obedience	0.959	0.959	0.962	0.927	2.845
	Tolerance	0.963				2.967
	Application	0.963				

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) with bootstrapped confidence intervals (see Table 3). All HTMT values are significantly below the 0.85 threshold, and their 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals do not include 1. This confirms that the constructs of school culture, discipline, and religious character are empirically distinct, which is crucial for testing their unique relationships in the structural model.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) with Confidence Intervals

Construct	School Culture	Discipline	Religious Character
School Culture	1.000		
Discipline	0.313 [0.245, 0.381]	1.000	
Religious Character	0.136 [0.085, 0.187]	0.455 [0.392, 0.518]	1.000

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The results of the structural model analysis are presented in Table 5. School Culture has a positive and significant effect on Discipline ($\beta = 0.313$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. The effect size for this path ($f^2 = 0.138$) is medium. A significant direct effect of School Culture on Religious Character was also found ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.007$), supporting H2, albeit with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.024$). Discipline shows a strong, positive effect on Religious Character ($\beta = 0.455$, $p < 0.001$) with a medium-to-large effect size ($f^2 = 0.220$), supporting H3.

Table 5. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coeff. (β)	t-statistic	p-value	f^2	Supported?
H1	School Culture → Discipline	0.313	6.116	0.000	0.138	Yes
H2	School Culture → Religious Character	0.136	2.697	0.007	0.024	Yes
H3	Discipline → Religious Character	0.455	8.346	0.000	0.220	Yes

Predictive Power and Model Fit

The model explains 29.3% of the variance in Discipline ($R^2 = 0.293$) and 33.5% of the variance in Religious Character ($R^2 = 0.335$), indicating a moderate level of explanatory power. Practically, this means that approximately one-third of the differences in students' levels of religious character can be attributed to the combined influence of school culture and discipline within this model, leaving substantial room for other influential factors such as family environment and individual predispositions. The predictive relevance, assessed via the Q^2 statistic, is confirmed ($Q^2 > 0$ for both endogenous constructs). The model demonstrates a good fit to the data, with a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.056 for the estimated model, which is well below the recommended threshold of 0.08.

Mediation Analysis

The indirect effect of School Culture on Religious Character through Discipline is significant ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.001$). The Variance Accounted For (VAF) value is 51.1%, indicating a partial mediation and supporting H4 (see Table 6). This means that just over half of the total influence of school culture on religious character is transmitted through the mechanism of discipline.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis Results

Pathway	Indirect Effect (β)	t-statistic	p-value	VAF	Conclusion
S. Culture → Discipline → R. Character	0.142	4.892	0.000	51.1%	Partial Mediation

Discussion

This study provides a mechanism-based explanation for religious character formation by empirically testing a mediation model. The findings validate the central premise that discipline acts as the primary behavioral conduit, translating the latent values of school culture into students' internalized religious character. This discussion interprets the key results by integrating them into a coherent theoretical synthesis, moving beyond descriptive reporting to substantive analysis of effect sizes, model implications, and the nature of the mediation.

School culture has a positive and significant direct effect on discipline.

The analysis confirms Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that school culture exerts a positive and significant direct effect on student discipline ($\beta = 0.313$, $p < 0.001$). With a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.138$), this path establishes the essential first link in the mediation model. It empirically validates that the ecosystem of shared values, norms, and practices (Schein, 2010) actively constructs a social environment that fosters rule adherence and self-regulation (Tu'u, 2004). This finding aligns with global meta-analytic research affirming that a positive, well-structured school climate is one of the most consistent systemic predictors of prosocial student behavior, reduced misconduct, and improved academic engagement (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). The strength of this relationship underscores that discipline is not merely an administrative imposition but a cultural product, nurtured by the pervasive social and normative structures of the school (Berkowitz, 2011). The predictive power of school culture, explaining 29.3% of the variance in discipline ($R^2 = 0.293$), indicates it is a substantial, though not exclusive, driver within the student's ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

Theoretically, this finding is powerfully explained through an integrated synthesis of Durkheim's moral socialization and Bandura's social learning theory, further refined by contemporary organizational psychology. From a Durkheimian perspective (Durkheim et al., 2008), school culture functions as a collective conscience, providing the normative

authority and shared moral expectations that legitimize rules and transform them from arbitrary edicts into socially endorsed obligations. This process of normative embedding, where institutional values become internalized guides for behavior, is a cross-cultural constant in educational socialization (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Concurrently, Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) elucidates the precise behavioral mechanism: the culture provides consistent, observable role models (teachers, peers) and structured daily routines that facilitate observational learning, imitation, and reinforcement. Students learn discipline by witnessing and participating in a culturally scripted performance of orderly behavior, a process central to character development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). This theoretical integration is supported by research on institutional logics the socially constructed frameworks that shape cognition and behavior within organizations (Thornton et al., 2012). In schools, a strong cultural logic that prioritizes order, respect, and collective responsibility makes disciplined behavior appear as the natural and legitimate course of action, thereby reducing the cognitive load associated with rule compliance and making it a habitual response.

This universal socio-cognitive mechanism is vividly animated, intensified, and uniquely specified within the context of Indonesian Islamic junior high schools. Here, the internalization of discipline is not a secular exercise but is profoundly driven by structured religious habituation framed as spiritual duty ('ibadah). Rituals such as obligatory congregational prayer (sholat berjamaah), with its strict temporal discipline, and the rigorous practice of Qur'an memorization (tahfiz), operationalize abstract values of obedience (taat), patience (sabar), and consistency (istiqamah) into daily, tangible practice (Mu'min et al., 2025). This process exemplifies enacted or experiential learning, where values are comprehended and internalized through direct, repeated action rather than passive reception (Kolb, 2014). Furthermore, the deliberate integration of local wisdom values (e.g., mapalus denoting mutual cooperation in North Sulawesi, huyula reflecting communal solidarity in Gorontalo) into school life aligns disciplinary expectations with deeply rooted, culturally resonant frameworks (Dali et al., 2025; Lonto & Winoto, 2025). This practice of cultural synergy enhances the legitimacy and motivational pull of school rules by connecting them to a student's broader ethnic and communal identity (Gay, 2018). This contextual specification demonstrates how universal theories are locally adapted; the "model" (the pious teacher or elder) and the "norm" (Islamic akhlak and local adat values) become inseparably fused, creating a potent, affectively charged context for internalization that differs from generic secular models (Hofstede et al., 2010). The effectiveness of this approach is corroborated by studies on collective school ethos, showing that institutions with a coherent, value-saturated environment are more successful in promoting normative behavior (Parker, 2017)

However, the relationship between culture and discipline is not automatic or uniformly positive. Its efficacy is critically mediated by the quality of implementation, relational trust, and leadership. A school culture that successfully promotes discipline is typically characterized by collective teacher efficacy the shared belief in the faculty's ability to positively influence students (Bandura, 1997) and authentic administrative leadership that clearly communicates, models, and consistently upholds shared norms (Leithwood et al., 2008). Crucially, discipline fostered within a positive, trusting culture is perceived by students as more legitimate and fair, which promotes voluntary compliance and internalization (procedural justice), as opposed to compliance driven by fear of punishment (Tyler, 2006). This distinction is vital; a punitive culture may secure superficial order but fails to build the self-regulation and personal investment that defines true discipline (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). The moderate explanatory power of the model for discipline ($R^2 = 0.293$) appropriately acknowledges that while school culture is a

fundamental driver, it operates within a wider ecology. Individual differences in temperament, family socialization practices, and broader societal factors also play significant, concurrent roles in shaping a student's disciplinary demeanor (Jeynes, 2019). Therefore, the school's cultural scaffold is most effective when it is in harmony with, rather than in opposition to, these other influential systems.

In conclusion, confirming H_1 robustly demonstrates that a coherent, value-laden school culture provides the indispensable normative architecture and behavioral script for cultivating student discipline. It creates the "rules of the game" and supplies the daily rehearsals for playing it well. This finding, while consistent with international literature on organizational climate and social learning, gains unique depth and texture from its contextualization within Indonesian Islamic education, where religious doctrine, spiritual practice, and local wisdom converge to form a powerful socializing milieu. By empirically establishing this foundational link, H_1 creates the essential precondition for the study's core theoretical contribution: it positions culturally cultivated discipline not as an end in itself, but as the vital behavioral conduit and translational mechanism through which the school's spiritual and ethical aspirations are realized in the tangible formation of religious character.

School culture has a positive and significant direct effect on religious character.

The analysis confirms Hypothesis 2, demonstrating a positive and significant direct effect of school culture on religious character ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.007$). However, the exceptionally small effect size ($f^2 = 0.024$) provides a critical, nuanced insight: while a cohesive school culture establishes a necessary normative foundation, its capacity to directly foster the deep internalization of complex religious character is inherently constrained. This finding aligns with meta-analytic research in character education, which consistently shows that while school-level factors are significant, their direct effects on specific moral and ethical internalization are often modest compared to the enduring influence of individual predispositions and familial socialization (Berkowitz, 2011; Jeynes, 2019).

Theoretically, this limited direct pathway can be understood through the lens of social-cognitive theory and ecological systems. School culture functions as a pervasive normative microsystem, providing constant exposure to religious values through symbols, rituals, and teacher discourse (Bandura, 1995; Wang & Degol, 2016). This environment facilitates observational learning and sets collective expectations. However, the transformation of these observed norms and abstract values into internalized, self-regulating character traits requires more than exposure. It necessitates a process of active integration and habitual practice, where values are not merely recognized but consistently enacted and personally owned (Grusec & Hastings, 2014; Nucci, 2001). The small effect size suggests that school culture successfully creates the "script" for religious character but is insufficient, on its own, to ensure students internalize and autonomously perform that script in the absence of structured reinforcement.

This modest direct effect robustly underscores the complex ecological reality of adolescent character development (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The school is one influential agent within a dynamic mesosystem of competing and interacting forces. The formative influence of the family microsystem particularly parental religiosity, modeling, and daily practice often establishes a more primary and affectively charged foundation for religious identity (Fritsch et al., 2003; Martin, 2008). Furthermore, the broader digital chronosystem and peer networks present alternative value systems and authorities. Therefore, the school's cultural message, while potent within its walls, is filtered and interpreted through these pre-existing cognitive and affective schemas. In the specific context of Indonesian Islam, this complexity is intensified by a plurality of religious authorities, where students navigate guidance from school officials, family, local kyai, and

digital media, making the internalization of a monolithic religious character particularly challenging (Sriwahyuni, 2023).

Importantly, this finding highlights a vital contextual specification of universal character education models. In secular educational settings, school climate and culture may demonstrate stronger direct correlations with generalized prosocial behavior and civic attitudes (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). In contrast, within religious education systems, the desired outcome religious character is intrinsically tied to transcendental belief (iman) and spiritual devotion, encompassing dimensions of sacred obligation and personal piety. The leap from cognitive assent and affective attachment to consistent behavioral enactment in this domain appears to depend more critically on the mechanism of disciplined spiritual practice (Halstead, 2007). Research in the psychology of religion indicates that religious commitment and identity are often solidified through regular ritual participation and behavioral commitment, which reinforce belief systems more powerfully than passive exposure to a religious atmosphere (Mahoney et al., 2003). Thus, the school culture may effectively create a spiritually evocative environment and a sense of belonging, while the disciplined practice of prayer, fasting, and ethical conduct serves as the essential "pedagogy of embodiment" that translates environment into enduring virtue.

The limited direct effect also invites consideration of measurement and temporal factors. School culture, as a broad perceptual construct, may influence more immediate attitudes and school-specific behaviors more directly. In contrast, deep religious character comprising integrity, tolerance, and steadfast application of faith is a mature developmental outcome that likely emerges from the cumulative, long-term interaction of cultural exposure, disciplined habituation, and personal reflection. Cross-sectional designs may capture only a fraction of this complex, iterative process. Longitudinal studies are needed to trace how school culture's influence unfolds and potentially intertwines with disciplinary practices over time to solidify character (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006).

In conclusion, supporting H_2 affirms that a positive, value-laden school culture provides the indispensable normative bedrock and identity-affirming milieu for religious character development. It creates the "moral ecology" within which character can grow. However, the minimal effect size decisively indicates that its primary role is not to directly implant deep character. Instead, it functions to establish legitimizing conditions, provide consistent role models, and create a motivational framework that makes the school's value system credible and attractive. This sets the stage for the more potent, behaviorally-grounded processes of disciplined practice. Consequently, the significant mediation through discipline (H_4) is not merely a statistical artifact but reveals the core pedagogical mechanism the structured, repetitive exercise of virtue through which the school's cultural potential is authentically translated into the student's enduring religious character.

Discipline has a positive and significant effect on the religious character of students.

The analysis robustly confirms Hypothesis 3, demonstrating a strong, positive, and statistically significant direct effect of student discipline on religious character ($\beta = 0.455$, $p < 0.001$). With a medium-to-large effect size ($f^2 = 0.220$), this pathway is the most substantial relationship within the structural model. This finding provides definitive empirical validation for the central proposition that disciplined practice functions not as a peripheral support mechanism but as the primary behavioral engine for converting abstract religious values and cognitive understanding into stable, internalized character.

Theoretical synthesis offers a powerful explanation for this relationship. The finding strongly aligns with Lickona's (2009) tripartite model of character education, which

posits that moral action is the essential component for cementing moral knowing and feeling into enduring virtue. This process is mechanistically underpinned by contemporary psychological research on habit formation and self-regulation. Disciplined routines such as punctual prayer or adherence to ethical codes serve as repeated "moral repetitions" that, through consistent performance, shift behavior from conscious effort to automatic disposition, a core principle of the psychology of habit (Wood & R nnger, 2016). This cultivation of automaticity in virtuous action is facilitated by enhanced executive function and effortful control, key outcomes of structured discipline that enable individuals to override impulses and align behavior with long-term values (Blair & Raver, 2015). The strength of this relationship is consistent with broader evidence identifying self-discipline as a critical predictor of positive life outcomes (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005)

Within the specific context of Indonesian Islamic junior high schools, this universal mechanism is activated and sanctified through religious habituation. Discipline (*kedisiplinan*) is operationalized as an integral part of worship (*'ibadah*) and self-cultivation (*tarbiyyat al-nafs*). The rigorous temporal discipline of congregational prayer (*sholat berjamaah*), the structured diligence of Qur'anic memorization (*tahfiz*), and the adherence to Islamic comportment provide daily, tangible arenas for character forging. This practice embodies the Islamic pedagogical principle that righteous action (*'amal*) both expresses and reinforces faith (*iman*) (Halstead, 2007). The quantitative results thus provide robust support for established qualitative insights regarding the role of habituation in Islamic character education (Amini & Hidayat, 2023).

A critical nuance emerging from the literature is that the quality and philosophy of discipline are paramount in determining its efficacy for character internalization. The significant path coefficient should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of authoritarian or purely punitive approaches. A robust international evidence base distinguishes between restorative, educative discipline and punitive, exclusionary discipline. Restorative practices, focused on accountability, relationship repair, and community reintegration, are more effective at fostering internalized prosocial values and positive school climate (Gregory et al., 2016). Conversely, harsh, exclusionary discipline correlates with negative outcomes, including increased alienation and behavioral issues (Novak, 2018). In this study's context, discipline most conducive to building religious character is likely value-congruent and restorative, explicitly linking behavioral expectations to underlying religious principles, thereby fostering internal motivation as explained by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Finally, while the direct effect is potent, it operates within a broader ecological system. The model's explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.335$) appropriately acknowledges that school-based discipline intersects with other key influences. Its impact can be significantly amplified or vitiated by the family microsystem, where congruent expectations and reinforcement are crucial (Amini & Hidayat, 2023), and by the peer culture and teacher modeling within the school mesosystem (Miyono & Rosidin, 2017). This underscores that the disciplinary engine, while powerful, does not operate in a vacuum.

In conclusion, confirming H_3 elevates discipline from a simple mediator to a transformative crucible for character formation. It is through structured, repetitive, and reflective disciplined practice that latent cultural and religious values are forged into personal character. This mandates a paradigm shift in educational practice: discipline must be strategically designed not merely as a managerial tool but as a core pedagogical curriculum for ethical and spiritual development. For Islamic educational settings, this finding underscores that the pathway to profound religious character is intrinsically linked to consistent, meaningful, and restorative disciplined action.

Discipline mediates the relationship between school culture and the religious character of students

The analysis conclusively confirms Hypothesis 4, establishing that student discipline acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between school culture and religious character. This finding is quantified by a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.001$) and a Variance Accounted For (VAF) value of 51.1%, denoting a substantial partial mediation. This result is the cornerstone of the study's theoretical contribution, moving the discourse beyond identifying simple correlations to illuminating the specific processual mechanism the "how" through which a school's cultural environment primarily shapes moral development. It empirically validates that discipline is not merely a co-product of a positive culture or an independent variable, but rather the essential behavioral conduit that actively translates the school's latent normative framework into students' internalized religious character (Lickona, 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Theoretical interpretation of this mediation model benefits from an integrated framework combining social cognitive theory, institutional logic, and character education models. The partial mediation aligns perfectly with Bandura's (1986) model of triadic reciprocal causation, which posits a dynamic interaction between personal factors, behavior, and environment. In this case, the school culture (environment) fosters disciplined routines (behavior), which in turn cultivate the cognitive schemas and affective commitments that constitute religious character (personal factors). This process provides the operational pathway for Lickona's (2009) tripartite character model, where disciplined practice constitutes the crucial "moral action" component that solidifies "moral knowing" and "moral feeling" into stable virtue. From an institutional sociology perspective, school culture establishes a dominant institutional logic a set of culturally rooted rules and assumptions that define what is legitimate and valuable (Thornton et al., 2012). Discipline represents the enacted, everyday practices that embody this logic. The mediation effect demonstrates that the cultural logic of, for example, "piety through submission to divine will," only becomes ingrained in the student's habitus when it is routinely performed through the disciplined acts of punctual prayer, respectful conduct, and scriptural study. This bridges the macro-level culture with the micro-level behaviors of character formation (Sanderse, 2012).

Within the specific ecosystem of Indonesian Islamic junior high schools, this mediating mechanism is vividly operationalized and spiritually charged. The school culture, saturated with Islamic values (akhlak karimah) and often integrated with local wisdom (kearifan lokal like mapalus or huyula), provides the sacred narrative and normative blueprint. However, it is the structured, repetitive disciplinary technology of religious habituation that executes this blueprint. Programs such as mandatory congregational prayer (sholat berjamaah), disciplined Qur'an memorization (tahfiz), and adherence to Islamic etiquette are not merely rules for order; they constitute the core behavioral curriculum through which abstract principles are practiced, embodied, and internalized. This mediation quantifies a central tenet of Islamic educational philosophy: that faith (iman) is substantiated and perfected through consistent righteous deeds (amal saleh), and that such deeds require disciplined cultivation (tarbiyah) (Halstead, 2007). The VAF of 51.1% powerfully indicates that over half of the school culture's influence on character is channeled through this pathway of enacted piety, underscoring the pedagogical primacy of practice in this context.

The partial nature of the mediation (VAF = 51.1%, not 100%) is itself rich with theoretical and practical implications. It confirms that while discipline is the primary pathway, it is not exclusive. The remaining direct effect of school culture on religious character ($\beta = 0.136$) suggests other parallel, unmeasured mechanisms are also at work.

These alternative pathways likely include: (1) Direct Social Identity and Belonging: A strong, cohesive school culture can directly strengthen a student's religious-social identity and sense of belonging to a moral community, which reinforces character independently of specific disciplinary performances (Leary & Tangney, 2011; Tajfel et al., 2001). (2) Emotional and Relational Internalization: The ethic of care and virtuous relationships modeled by teachers and peers within the cultural milieu may directly instill empathy, trust, and respect through emotional attachment and modeling, a process distinct from rule-based behavioral regulation (Noddings, 2012). (3) Cognitive Apprenticeship in Ethical Reasoning: Beyond behavioral habituation, the culture may facilitate a cognitive apprenticeship where students learn to deliberate, critique, and apply ethical principles in complex situations through dialogic pedagogy and guided reflection (Berti et al., 2021; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

A critical discussion must also address the qualitative nature of the mediating discipline. The model's positive mediation implicitly assumes the discipline is perceived as legitimate and value-congruent. A wealth of comparative research starkly differentiates the outcomes of restorative, educative discipline from punitive, exclusionary discipline. Restorative practices, focused on repairing harm, fostering accountability, and reintegrating students, are shown to promote the internalization of prosocial values and strengthen school community (Fronius et al., 2019; Gregory & Cornell, 2009). In contrast, harsh, authoritarian discipline can erode trust, incite resistance, and undermine moral development, potentially negating or even reversing the intended mediating effect (Gottlieb et al., 2024). Therefore, the efficacy of discipline as a mediator is heavily contingent on its implementation it must be experienced by students as a fair and integral part of the school's moral fabric, not as an arbitrary or oppressive force (Tyler, 2006). In the Indonesian Islamic context, this translates to discipline framed as a form of spiritual cultivation (*riyadhah ruhiyah*) rather than mere punishment.

In conclusion, the confirmation of H_4 provides a sophisticated, mechanism-driven explanation that significantly advances the theoretical understanding of character formation in faith-based educational settings. It demonstrates that the school culture-religious character relationship is fundamentally processed through the active, daily engine of disciplined practice. This elevates discipline from a managerial tool to the status of the essential pedagogical bridge the set of repetitive, value-saturated actions that transmute the school's cultural script into the lived reality of a student's character. For educators and policymakers, this underscores a profound practical implication: strategically developing a positive, restorative, and value-explicit disciplinary system is not merely about maintaining order, but about optimizing the primary channel through which a school's deepest spiritual and ethical aspirations are realized in the hearts, minds, and habits of its students. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to trace the strengthening of this mediation over time and qualitative methods to explore student perceptions of the discipline-character link.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that discipline plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between school culture and students' religious character in Indonesian Islamic junior high schools. School culture was shown to positively influence both discipline and religious character, while discipline exerted a strong direct effect on religious character. Mediation analysis confirmed that more than half of the total influence of school culture on religious character is transmitted through discipline, indicating that disciplined routines and behavioral regulation serve as the primary

pathway through which cultural values are internalized and expressed in students' moral actions.

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference, and by its reliance on self-reported survey data that may be subject to social desirability bias. The sample was also confined to three private Islamic junior high schools, which may limit generalizability to other educational settings. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to strengthen causal claims, incorporate multi-informant or observational data to reduce bias, and expand sampling to include public schools or diverse regional contexts to enhance external validity.

Building on these findings, future studies could explore additional mediating or moderating variables such as teacher modeling, peer norms, or family religious practices to develop a more comprehensive model of character formation. Practically, the results highlight the importance of integrating structured, value-oriented disciplinary practices into religious habituation programs. Theoretically, the study advances a mechanism-based understanding of how school culture shapes moral outcomes, reinforcing the role of discipline as a behavioral conduit that links institutional values to students' internalized religious character.

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