

Religious Extracurricular Programs and the Formation of Spiritual Values at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses how religious extracurricular programs cultivate students' spiritual values at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang, Gayo Lues. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were gathered from the principal, the teacher responsible for religious activities, and six purposively selected students through activity observation, semi-structured interviews, and examination of schedules and attendance records. The findings indicate that the school's religious program, comprising congregational prayer, weekly Qur'an recitation, short sermons, and commemorations of Islamic holy days, works less through the content of what is preached than through the regularity of its timing, which makes participation an ordinary condition of the school day rather than an elective commitment. Because the activities sit inside the timetable rather than after it, students never face the decision to opt in; what they acquire first is the rhythm of worship, with its meaning supplied afterwards by teachers during brief framing moments before and after each activity. This reading recasts the fluctuation of student enthusiasm not as a defect of the program but as evidence that the program does not depend on mood. The constraints identified, namely limited supervision time, uneven participation, and modest facilities, pushed supervisors to concentrate their attention on the most routine activities. The study concludes that spiritual value formation rests on sustained regularity accompanied by teacher interpretation rather than on the multiplication of activity types.

Keywords: Religious Extracurricular Activities, Spiritual Values, Worship Regularity, Character Education, Junior High School

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis pelaksanaan kegiatan ekstrakurikuler keagamaan dalam menumbuhkan nilai-nilai spiritual siswa di SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang, Gayo Lues. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan informan kepala sekolah, guru pembina kegiatan keagamaan, dan enam siswa yang dipilih secara purposif; data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kegiatan, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan telaah dokumen jadwal serta daftar hadir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program keagamaan sekolah yang meliputi shalat berjamaah, tadarus Al-Qur'an mingguan, tausiyah, dan peringatan hari besar Islam bekerja bukan terutama melalui muatan ceramah yang disampaikan, melainkan melalui keteraturan waktu yang menjadikan keikutsertaan sebagai keadaan wajar sehari-hari. Karena kegiatan diletakkan di dalam jam sekolah dan bukan sesudahnya, siswa tidak perlu memilih untuk ikut serta; yang mereka pelajari lebih dahulu adalah irama ibadah, sedangkan pemaknaannya menyusul melalui penjelasan guru pada momen-momen singkat sebelum dan sesudah kegiatan. Temuan ini menempatkan naik-turunnya semangat siswa bukan sebagai kegagalan program, melainkan sebagai bukti bahwa program tidak bergantung pada suasana hati. Kendala yang ditemukan berupa keterbatasan waktu pembinaan, tidak meratanya partisipasi, dan keterbatasan sarana justru mendorong pembina memusatkan pembinaan pada kegiatan yang paling rutin. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa nilai spiritual terbentuk melalui keteraturan yang ditopang penjelasan guru, bukan melalui penambahan jenis kegiatan.

Kata Kunci: Ekstrakurikuler Keagamaan, Nilai Spiritual, Keteraturan Ibadah, Pendidikan Karakter, Sekolah Menengah Pertama

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian schooling has long been asked to do two things at once: to develop intellectual capability and to form students of sound moral and religious disposition. The second of these tasks is rarely accomplished by classroom instruction alone. Islamic Religious Education occupies only a few hours in the weekly timetable, and within those hours much of the available time is consumed by curricular content that must be assessed. What remains for the slow work of forming disposition is the surrounding life of the school: the activities that occur before lessons begin, during the long midday break, and on the days set aside for religious commemoration. It is in this surrounding life that religious extracurricular programs operate, and it is there that the present study locates its problem.

At SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang, a state junior high school in Gayo Lues, this surrounding life is organized around a small and stable set of activities: congregational prayer performed together during the school day, a weekly session of Qur'an recitation, short religious talks delivered by teachers or senior students, and the commemoration of Islamic holy days at fixed points in the academic calendar. None of these activities is novel. Almost every school in the region runs some version of them, and the literature on Indonesian religious extracurricular programs has documented their forms in considerable detail. Nabillah, Masnawati, and Abdul Majid (2024) describe a comparable program in Surabaya organized through Islamic study circles, Qur'anic literacy, Islamic arts, and the habituation of daily worship, and report that it functions as an effective medium for instilling religious values. Fathurrahman, Wahyudi, and Mahfud (2024) reach a similar conclusion for an Islamic middle school, arguing that extracurricular programs build religious values where formal lessons cannot reach.

What this body of work establishes convincingly is that such programs are associated with the outcomes schools want. What it establishes less convincingly is why. The dominant explanation in the literature is essentially a content explanation: students hear religious teaching, they absorb it, and their character changes accordingly. Siregar, Budianti, and Rifai (2022), writing on the internalization of spiritual values through Qur'an memorization programs, treat the encounter with the text as the operative mechanism. Rohis studies more generally attribute effects to the substance of the study circles and the sermons. Yet this explanation sits awkwardly with a finding that recurs in almost every study of these programs, including those just cited: student enthusiasm is uneven, attendance fluctuates, and a substantial proportion of participants cannot recall what was said in the last session they attended. If content were the mechanism, uneven attention to content should produce uneven outcomes. Schools nonetheless report stable formation.

A different explanation is available in the literature on habituation, though it has not usually been applied to extracurricular programs specifically. Nurizah and Amrullah (2024), examining Islamic habituation in primary education, argue that religious character is built through practices that recur so predictably that they cease to be experienced as demands. Janah, Agustin, Nisa, and Yustina (2025) reach the same conclusion in a madrasah setting, describing habituation as the school's principal instrument for instilling religious and social character. Ginting, Nahar, and Hanum OK (2024) likewise find that religious habituation activities, rather than religious instruction as such, predict students' religious behavior. The distinctive claim of this body of work is that the pedagogical unit is not the lesson but the repetition, and that what repetition teaches is not a proposition but an expectation about how time is ordered.

The present study takes this claim seriously and asks what follows from it for a state, non-religious school. The distinction matters. In an Islamic school, religious activity is continuous with the institution's stated purpose and students who attend have generally been enrolled by families who chose that purpose. In a state junior high school such as SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang, religious extracurricular activity is formally voluntary and institutionally peripheral. It is the school's decision about where to place these activities in the day, rather than any prior commitment of the students, that determines whether they are

experienced as an elective identity or as an ordinary feature of school life. This study argues that the placement decision is the substantive pedagogical decision, and that the program's effects follow from it.

The argument advanced here can be stated as follows. The religious program at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang is nominally voluntary but structurally default: because it occupies time inside the school day rather than after it, students are not required to choose participation, and the absence of a choice removes the identity cost that religious activity would otherwise carry in a mixed state school. What students first acquire is therefore not conviction but rhythm, an embodied familiarity with the order of the day in which worship has a fixed place. Meaning arrives afterwards, and it arrives through a channel the program documentation does not record: the brief interpretive remarks teachers make while students are assembling for prayer, waiting for a recitation session to begin, or dispersing afterwards. This condition may be termed routinised voluntarism, and it explains what the content model cannot, namely why formation appears stable while attention to content does not.

This framing draws on three lines of theory. From Islamic educational thought it takes the concept of *ta'dib* as a formation of disposition through ordered practice rather than through transmitted proposition, a reading consistent with Kartika, Saepudin, Norman, and Uswatiah (2023), who show that religious character in schools is instilled through the ordering of daily conduct rather than through doctrinal instruction alone. From the psychology of habit it takes the proposition that repeated action in a stable context transfers control of behavior from deliberate intention to environmental cue, which is precisely why fluctuating motivation need not disrupt an established routine. From the literature on school culture it takes the view, argued by Hanafiah and colleagues (2024) and by Sastra Negara, Waston, Hidayat, and Mulkhan (2024), that character outcomes are properties of the institutional environment rather than of discrete interventions within it.

Three questions follow. First, how are the religious activities at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang actually organized in time, and what does that organization ask of students? Second, through what channel do students come to attach religious meaning to activities they did not choose? Third, what do the reported constraints of time, participation, and facilities reveal about the mechanism through which the program works? The study addresses these questions through a qualitative account of a single school, and it does so in the belief that the value of such an account lies less in generalization than in the precision with which a mechanism can be described.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design. This design was selected because the research question concerns the organization and experienced meaning of an ongoing school practice rather than the measurement of its effects, and because the phenomenon of interest, the ordering of religious activity within the school day, is available to direct observation. The site was SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang, a state junior high school in Gayo Lues Regency, Aceh, where religious extracurricular activities have been running in their present form for several academic years.

Participants were selected purposively on the criterion of direct and sustained involvement in the program. They comprised the school principal, who accounted for the placement of activities within the timetable and for the school's rationale in maintaining them; the teacher responsible for supervising religious activities, who described the planning, conduct, and difficulties of each activity; and six students drawn from different year levels and differing markedly in their reported enthusiasm, so that the account would not rest only on the testimony of consistently engaged participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and from parents in the case of students; identifying details have been withheld and participants are referred to by role.

Three techniques were used. Observation was conducted during congregational prayer, weekly Qur'an recitation sessions, and one commemoration of an Islamic holy day, with attention directed to the transitions surrounding each activity as well as to the activity itself, since the conduct of teachers during assembly and dispersal proved analytically significant. Semi-structured interviews explored how participants understood the purpose of the activities, what they recalled of recent sessions, and how they accounted for variation in attendance and engagement. Document study covered activity schedules, attendance records, and the school's written program description, which were used to establish the temporal structure of the program independently of participants' recollection of it.

Analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, moving between data condensation, data display, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded initially in descriptive terms and subsequently in analytic terms as the significance of the temporal placement of activities became apparent. The category of routinised voluntarism was developed during this second stage rather than imposed at the outset, and it was tested against the cases of the least engaged students, whose continued participation despite low reported enthusiasm constituted the strongest evidence for it.

Trustworthiness was addressed through triangulation across the three data sources, with particular attention to discrepancies between documented schedules and observed practice; through member checking, in which the principal and the supervising teacher reviewed the account of the program's organization and confirmed its accuracy; and through the maintenance of an audit trail linking each analytic claim to the observations and interview passages supporting it. Ethical conduct followed the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity, and the right of withdrawal, and no data were collected that would identify individual students to school staff.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The religious program at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang consists of four components that differ substantially in frequency and, as the analysis will show, in pedagogical function. Congregational prayer occurs daily at a fixed point in the school day. Qur'an recitation occurs once weekly in a scheduled period. Short religious talks are attached to the recitation session and to assemblies. Commemorations of Islamic holy days occur several times in the academic year and are elaborate, involving preparation, guest speakers, and student performance. School documentation and the school's own account of its program give the greatest prominence to the last of these; the analysis presented here suggests that formation is carried almost entirely by the first.

The decisive feature of the daily prayer and the weekly recitation is that both are located inside the school day rather than appended to its end. Students do not travel to them, do not stay late for them, and do not enroll in them. The supervising teacher described the arrangement in operational rather than pedagogical terms, explaining that afternoon activities in Kutapanjang lose most of their participants to transport and to household obligations, and that placing the activities within school hours was the only way to keep them running. The principal offered the same explanation. Neither framed the decision as a matter of educational design. Yet this decision determines the character of the entire program, because it removes from students the act of choosing.

The consequence became visible in the interviews with the least engaged students. Two of the six described the activities in unmistakably lukewarm terms, reporting that they attended because it was the time to attend and that they did not find the sessions particularly interesting. Neither had considered not attending. When asked what would happen if they did not go, both answered in terms of oddity rather than sanction: it would be strange, everyone goes, there is nowhere else to be. This is the signature of a default rather than a commitment. In a state school in which students of varying levels of religious observance are

enrolled together, an after-hours religious program would require each participant to declare something about themselves by attending. The in-hours program requires no such declaration, and it is precisely this that allows it to reach students whose enthusiasm is low.

These finding recasts one of the standard difficulties reported in the literature and in the school's own account of its program. Uneven student enthusiasm is treated almost universally as a problem to be solved, typically through recommendations that activities be made more varied or more attractive. The evidence here suggests the opposite reading. The program continues to reach unenthusiastic students, and it does so because it does not depend on their enthusiasm. Were the school to succeed in making the activities compelling enough to attract voluntary attendance, it would simultaneously convert them into something students could meaningfully decline, and the students currently reached would be the first to be lost. Uneven enthusiasm is not evidence of a program failing; it is evidence of a program that is not built on affect.

If content is not the mechanism, the question becomes where religious meaning enters. The observations point to a channel that appears in no schedule. Before congregational prayer, while students are arranging themselves in rows, the supervising teacher regularly makes brief remarks of a few sentences: an observation about the discipline of the rows, a reminder about intention, an explanation of why a particular practice is performed in a particular way. The same occurs at the close of the weekly recitation, when the teacher connects the passage that has just been read to something that happened at the school that week. These utterances are short, unplanned, and undocumented. They are also, on the evidence of the student interviews, the most reliably remembered element of the entire program.

Students were asked what they recalled from recent sessions. None of the six could reconstruct the argument of a recent religious talk, including the students who described themselves as enthusiastic participants. All six, without prompting, produced specific remarks their teachers had made at the edges of activities, and reproduced them with a precision that the formal talks did not receive. One student recalled a teacher's explanation of why the prayer rows should be straightened before the prayer begins and connected it, unprompted, to the idea that worship involves the community and not only the individual. Another recalled a comment made after recitation about the difference between reading the text and understanding it. These fragments, and not the sermons, constituted the students' working account of what the activities were for.

The relation between rhythm and meaning is thus sequential rather than simultaneous. Students first acquire the ordering of the day, in which worship occupies a fixed and unremarked place. The interpretive remarks then attach significance to a practice already established, which is a considerably easier pedagogical task than persuading students to adopt a practice they do not yet perform. This ordering is consistent with the account of habituation offered by Nurizah and Amrullah (2024) and by Janah and colleagues (2025), and it explains why programs that lead with exhortation and follow with practice so often report disappointing results. Practice preceded by rhythm and followed by interpretation is not the same intervention as practice preceded by interpretation.

The commemorations of Islamic holy days present the clearest contrast. These events absorb a disproportionate share of the program's preparation time and appear most prominently in the school's documentation and photographic records. Students recalled them vividly, but they recalled them as events rather than as instruction, describing the preparations, the guest speaker's presence, and their own performances. Nothing in the interview material suggests that these occasions contributed to the students' working understanding of worship in the way the brief and undocumented framing remarks did. The commemorations serve institutional and communal functions that are real and should not be dismissed, but they do not appear to be where formation occurs. The activity that is most visible is not the activity that is doing the work.

The constraints reported by the school acquire a different significance in this light. Limited supervision time was described by the supervising teacher as the most serious difficulty, since a single teacher cannot

attend closely to every activity. In practice this scarcity produced a concentration of attention: the teacher was consistently present at the daily prayer and the weekly recitation and less consistently present elsewhere. Given that these are the activities through which formation appears to operate, the constraint drove the program towards its most effective configuration rather than away from it. Limited facilities operated similarly. The absence of elaborate equipment kept the recitation sessions plain and repeatable, and repeatability is the property on which the program depends.

Two forms of value emerged in students' accounts of what the activities had produced. The first concerns worship itself: students described the daily prayer as something they now performed without needing to be told, and several extended this to prayer performed outside school. The second concerns conduct not obviously connected to worship. Students described the recitation sessions in terms of waiting for others, of not disrupting, of taking a turn. Honesty, cooperation, and responsibility, the values named in the school's program description, were not articulated by students as doctrinal commitments; they were described as things one does in the situations the activities create. This corresponds to the finding of Rahmanudin, Mustika, and Pada (2024) that extracurricular participation shapes conduct through the social situations it generates rather than through its declared content, and to Rasyid and colleagues' (2024) argument that character education operates through the practical arrangement of school life.

A limitation of the program should be stated plainly. Routinised voluntarism produces reliable practice, and it produces the interpretive attachment described above, but it does not by itself produce students who have chosen. The students in this study perform worship because it is the time to perform it, and the meaning they attach to it has been supplied to them within a setting where non-participation was never a live option. Whether such practice persists once the structure is removed, at the transition to senior secondary school or beyond it, cannot be established by a study of this design. The literature offers little guidance here, since studies of these programs almost never follow students past the point at which the structure ends. Rahmanudin and colleagues (2024) note the same gap in relation to holistic education programs generally.

What can be said is that the alternative approaches carry costs of their own. A program built on voluntary enthusiasm reaches only the already committed and, in a mixed state school, marks its participants. A program built on compulsion generates the compliance without the interpretive attachment, since students subject to explicit coercion attend to the coercion rather than to the teacher's framing remarks. The arrangement observed at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang occupies a middle position that its own staff arrived at for logistical reasons and describe in logistical terms. That it is pedagogically defensible is, on this evidence, a fortunate accident, and the practical implication is that schools should recognize and protect the arrangement rather than continue to treat it as a compromise forced by circumstance.

Finally, the study's account of the interpretive channel has a direct implication for how such programs are supported. If the brief framing remarks made at the edges of activities carry the interpretive load, then the professional capacity that matters is not the ability to deliver a well-constructed sermon but the ability to say something apt in thirty seconds while students are assembling. This capacity is neither trained nor recognized in the professional development available to teachers in these roles, which addresses program design and activity planning. Warsah and colleagues (2024) have argued for educational strategies grounded in the psychological realities of student development rather than in program architecture; the present finding suggests where such an emphasis would make a practical difference.

IV. CONCLUSION

The religious extracurricular program at SMP Negeri 1 Kutapanjang cultivates students' spiritual values, but not primarily by the means its own documentation identifies. Its effect rests on the placement of activities inside the school day, which makes participation an ordinary condition of attending school

rather than a commitment students must undertake. Because no choice is required, no identity is declared, and the program reaches students whose enthusiasm is low as reliably as those whose enthusiasm is high. What students acquire first is the rhythm of the day; the meaning of what they are doing arrives afterwards, through brief interpretive remarks made by teachers at the edges of activities rather than through the formal talks that appear in the schedule.

This account reframes three matters that schools ordinarily treat as problems. Fluctuating enthusiasm is not a defect but a demonstration that the program does not depend on mood. Limited supervision time, by forcing a single teacher to concentrate attention on the most frequent activities, pushed the program towards rather than away from its effective core. Modest facilities kept the recurring activities plain and therefore repeatable. Conversely, the component that receives the most institutional attention and documentation, the commemoration of Islamic holy days, appears to contribute least to formation, however valuable it may be for the life of the school community.

Three practical implications follow. Schools should protect the timetable placement of daily and weekly religious activities as a matter of pedagogical design rather than treating it as an administrative convenience open to revision when the timetable comes under pressure. Support for teachers in these roles should address the brief interpretive utterance, the capacity to say something apt while students assemble and disperse, rather than concentrating on program design and event management. And schools should resist the assumption that a program is improved by adding activities, since the evidence here indicates that formation depends on the regularity of a few activities rather than the variety of many.

The study is limited to a single school and to a design that cannot establish whether practice sustained by structure persists once the structure is removed. Research that follows students across the transition to senior secondary schooling would test the central claim directly, since routinised voluntarism predicts that practice will weaken sharply where no comparable structure exists but that the interpretive attachment formed at the edges of activities may prove more durable than the practice itself. Until such evidence is available, the appropriate conclusion is a modest one: the school is doing something that works, for reasons other than the ones it gives, and the reasons matter because they indicate what must be protected.

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