



## The Success of Fostering Religious Character to Boost the Enthusiasm of New Participants in Education

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### Abstract

**Keywords:**  
Tahfidz Al-Qur'an;  
Enthusiasm of New Students;  
Religious Character Development

The phenomenon of society's need to fulfill their children's religious character has an impact on the community's interest in enrolling their children in public schools. As a result, public schools experience a decline in the number of students. Several public schools in the Ajatappareng Region of South Sulawesi Province implement various strategies for fostering religious character to meet the community's needs. This research aims to describe the strategies undertaken by public schools in shaping the religious character of students to increase the enthusiasm of new students. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Parepare and SMP Muhammadiyah Boarding School. These two locations were selected because they have successfully increased student enthusiasm through religious character development programs. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with data collection techniques through observation, documentation, and interviews with school officials. The collected data is then analyzed using the Milens data analysis model. The schools use the trans-internalization model to shape the religious character of students by involving all teachers, staff, and parents. The division of responsibilities for character development between schools and parents is clear, as outlined in the student's memorization control book. The formation of students' character adjusts to the religious dimension, resulting in observable changes in student behavior towards improvement in akhlaq (morality). The success of religious character formation has an impact on the increase of new student applicants in the 2023/2024 school year by 100% from the previous year.

### Abstrak:

**Kata Kunci:**  
Tahfidz Al-Qur'an;  
Animo Peserta Didik Baru;  
Pembinaan Karakter Religius

*Fenomena kebutuhan masyarakat akan pemenuhan karakter religius anaknya berdampak pada minat masyarakat untuk memasukkan anaknya pada sekolah umum. Dampaknya sekolah umum mengalami penurunan jumlah peserta didik. Berbagai strategi pembinaan karakter religius dilakukan di beberapa sekolah umum yang ada di*

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*Wilayah Ajatappareng Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan untuk bisa memenuhi kebutuhan masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeksripsikan strategi yang dilakukan oleh sekolah umum dalam membentuk karakter religius peserta didik sebagai upaya untuk meningkatkan animo peserta didik baru. Penelitian dilaksanakan di SMP Negeri 1 Parepare dan SMP Muhammadiyah Boarding school pemilihan dua lokasi ini karena mereka sudah berhasil meningkatkan animo peserta didik melalui program pembinaan karakter religius. Metode penelitian yang digunakan yaitu deksriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, dokumentasi, dan wawancara dengan pihak sekolah. Data yang telah dikumpulkan selanjutnya dianalisis menggunakan model analisis data dari milens. Sekolah menggunakan model transinternalisasi dalam membentuk karakter religius peserta didik dengan melibatkan semua guru, tendik, dan orang tua. Pembagian tanggung jawab terhadap pembinaan karakter antara sekolah dan orang tua jelas karena tertuang dalam buku kontrol hafalan peserta didik. Pembentukan karakter peserta didik menyesuaikan dengan dimensi religius sehingga terlihat perubahan perilaku peserta didik yang mengarah kepada perbaikan akhlatul karimah. Keberhasilan pembentukan karakter religius tersebut berdampak pada peningkatan jumlah pendaftar peserta didik baru pada tahun ajaran 2023/2024 sebesar 100% dari tahun sebelumnya.*

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## 1. Introduction

Institutions of education serve as a second home for students to gain increased scholarly insights, improved life skills, and behavioral changes towards the better. The community holds the assumption that enrolling their children in the right educational institution is an effort so that, in the future, their offspring will become intelligent and possess good character.<sup>1</sup> The heightened concerns of society amid the prevalence of negative digital influences, such as the ease with which children mimic various undesirable behaviors from social media, result in many parents being selective in choosing the right school for their children.

The diversity of school choices within the community challenges school administrators in offering graduates competencies that align with societal expectations. The proliferation of Islamic educational institutions with a character formation concept through Quranic memorization (tahfidz Al-Qur'an) has become a marketing strategy promoted to the public<sup>2</sup>. This condition is reinforced by the various Quranic memorization programs on television broadcasts and non-formal educational institutions, solidifying the public perception that memorizing the Quran will be a fortress for their children to develop good character.

In the midst of the rampant influence of digitalization and the development of globalization, society is constantly seeking a balance between spirituality and knowledge. This is in line with the theory of modern spiritualization proposed by Gordon Melton, stating that the tendency of the New Age era is a manifestation of the resurgence of spirituality in modern society, emphasizing the need for a new

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<sup>1</sup> Imam Mohtar, *Problematika Pembinaan Pendidikan Agama Islam Pada Masyarakat* (Uwais Inspirasi Indonesia, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Akhmad Muadin, "Manajemen Pemasaran Pendidikan Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz Qur'an," *Ta'allum: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2017): 293–308.

lifestyle rather than merely a spiritual trend<sup>3</sup>. This condition suggests that society prioritizes amid the waves of globalization how religion can fortify the sustainability of their children's lives, making it an opportunity for Islamic educational institutions and Quranic memorization (tahfidz) boarding schools to meet the desires of the community.

The coexistence of Islamic educational institutions and formal schools in a community provides options for parents to enroll their children in these institutions, especially with some Quranic memorization (tahfidz Al-Qur'an) institutions employing marketing strategies that do not burden their students with educational fees<sup>4</sup>. This situation has resulted in a decrease in new students in formal schools.

The phenomenon occurring in South Sulawesi, particularly in the Ajatappareng Region, emphasizes that the proliferation of Quranic memorization (tahfidz) institutions has impacted the enthusiasm of the community to enroll their children in these institutions<sup>5</sup>. This situation is influenced by an intense desire among parents for their children to acquire good religious knowledge, as memorizing the Quran is believed to instill positive behavior in children<sup>6</sup>. Concerns arise regarding the behavior of the millennial generation amid the waves of globalization and technological advancements. If not accompanied by good moral character (akhlaq) or a strong foundation of religious knowledge, parents worry that their children will lose touch with their origins as beings created by Allah SWT and their role as living beings responsible for maintaining a balance between *hablun minannas* (relationships with humans) and *hablun minallah* (relationships with the Creator or Allah SWT)<sup>7</sup>. This is the primary reason parents are more inclined to enroll their children in schools or educational institutions with programs for the development of religious character, specifically those focused on incentivizing learning about the Quran.

The community's interest in educational institutions that address the need for religious character formation impacts the existence of formal schools unable to meet these community needs. As a result, many formal schools are experiencing a decline in student enrollment, and some even have a significant number of students only during final exams. However, these students do not pursue formal education. This situation can be an inspirational opportunity for school administrators to initiate an educational program that integrates or internalizes

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<sup>3</sup> Takdir Mohammad, "NEW SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT: Menelisik Visi Transformatif Komunitas Lia Eden Sebagai Embrio Lahirnya New Age Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Theologia* 29, no. 1 (2018): 1–24.

<sup>4</sup> Yusti Dwi Nurwendah and Jepri Nugrawiyati, "SEKOLAH PAUD BERBASIS TAHFIDZ SEBAGAI TREN BARU MASYARAKAT MUSLIM URBAN: MANIFESTASI KEGAGALAN GURU ABAD 21 DAN GLOBALISASI KESALEHAN," *The Development of Islamic Thought on Multiple Perspectives*, 2020, 394.

<sup>5</sup> Ruslan Sangaji, "LEMBAGA TAHFIDZ AL-QUR'AN DAN LIFE SKILL SANTRI: KAJIAN SOSIOLOGIS TENTANG ANTUSIASME MASYARAKAT BONE, SULAWESI SELATAN," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Malikussaleh (JSPM)* 4, no. 1 (2023): 217–29.

<sup>6</sup> Ummul Hidayatullah Syarifuddin, Munir Munir, and Hasyim Haddade, "Implementasi Literasi Al-Qur'an Dalam Pembinaan Karakter Religiusitas Peserta Didik Pada SMA/SMK Di Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang," *TARBAWI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 6, no. 01 (2021): 30–43.

<sup>7</sup> Udin Supriadi, Tedi Supriyadi, and Aam Abdussalam, "Al-Qur'an Literacy: A Strategy and Learning Steps in Improving Al-Qur'an Reading Skills through Action Research," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 1 (2022): 323–39.

religious and Islamic education activities into various school development programs<sup>8</sup>. This internalization or integration can occur in both learning and extracurricular activities, utilizing the resources available within the school or collaborating with practitioners tahfidz in providing training and coaching.

The existence of tahfidz institutions threatens formal schools; therefore, the school authorities must promptly address this situation by devising targeted strategies to regain public interest in formal education. The school's existence is not solely the responsibility of the school principal. However, it requires collaboration among all school stakeholders, including administrative staff, teachers, and the school committee, to enhance the quality of education<sup>9</sup>. The improvement in educational quality is undoubtedly linked to the school's success in attracting new students.

Schools with Quranic memorization (tahfidz Al-Qur'an) programs are becoming widespread in the community. This phenomenon is driven by technological advancements, coupled with the global resurgence of Islam, which has led to the growth and popularity of reading and memorizing the Quran. This situation has resulted in various movements for Quranic memorization, transforming from traditional practices into a new face with a more established trend concept. Since 2005, Quranic memorization programs have evolved with a more modern concept, encompassing institutional aspects, flexible and adaptive programs, and creative and innovative methods<sup>10</sup>.

The paradigm of Quranic memorization programs has shifted, becoming one of the graduation standards for students to advance to the next level of education and gain special recognition. It no longer follows the conventional path, so it is not just general subjects like mathematics, science, social studies, and language that are prerequisites. Therefore, Quranic memorization has transformed into a significant icon in education. In line with the perspective that the primary goal of Quranic memorization in schools is to shape the students' personalities, which are then reflected in their behavior and thought patterns in their daily lives.

Modern society is currently experiencing the globalization of religion, which subsequently gives rise to the mass globalization of piety, the commodification of religion, and spirituality. Turner also suggests that the development of contemporary religion cannot be separated from commercializing goods and services in the modern era. Thus, practices of piety are closely related to commercial practices and values<sup>11</sup>. The resurgence of spirituality is inevitable in modern society, leading to the proliferation of various forms of spirituality in various aspects of community life.

The efforts to address adolescent deviations that impact their morality and could harm the nation's character are carried out by strengthening the religious foundation. Forming religious character is essential to be instilled in children from an early age. It can be pursued through formal and informal education within the

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<sup>8</sup> Fitri Nur Hayati and Edhy Susatya, "Strengthening of Religious Character Education Based on School Culture in the Indonesian Secondary School.," *European Educational Researcher* 3, no. 3 (2020): 87–100.

<sup>9</sup> Yes Matheos Lasarus Malaikosa, "Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Mengimplementasikan Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah Untuk Meningkatkan Mutu Sekolah," *Idarah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 5, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Anis, "Spiritualitas Di Tengah Modernitas Perkotaan," *Jurnal Bayan* 2, no. 4 (2013): 1–15.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan S Turner and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, *The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner* (Routledge, 2016).

family or the surrounding environment. One of these efforts is implemented through Quranic memorization (tahfidz Al-Qur'an) programs, which are seen as capable of reinstilling Islamic values as contained in the Quran<sup>12</sup>. This paradigm is one of the reasons why parents choose to enroll their children in schools with Quranic memorization programs.

Students as the input of a school are fundamental in determining whether the school can operate in a given academic year. If a school cannot maintain the ratio between the number of teachers and the number of students, it signifies a lack of effort on the part of the school to restore community interest and trust. Several factors drive individuals to seek education at a particular school, including how well the school can accommodate changes in student behavior. The programs offered by the school also play a crucial role in enhancing community interest and trust, signifying that when individuals enroll in the school, they receive comprehensive educational services. This implies a focus on knowledge, spiritual balance, good moral character (akhlaq), and non-academic skills<sup>13</sup>. This should be analyzed by the school to introduce programs that balance knowledge, religious character, and non-academic skills.

The school must promptly address the community's needs by introducing programs aligned with their expectations. As education consumers, the community deserves good educational services, and schools, as service providers, should leverage the resources at their disposal. The decision to meet the community's needs is grounded in the school head's policies and vision<sup>14</sup>. The school head's policies determine whether the school continues to hold a place in the community's heart. School competition to gain favor in the community is assessed based on the programs offered for character development and knowledge enhancement. This condition is the focus of research to explore the strategies formal schools employ in shaping students' religious character amid the proliferation of Islamic education institutions specializing in Quranic memorization (tahfidz Al-Qur'an) in the Ajatappareng region.

Character education is not limited to knowing what behaviors are good or bad; instead, it emphasizes cultivating good behavior in daily life. Targeted character education is not solely about the number of habituation programs provided to students but prioritizes transforming cultural values and life within the school<sup>15</sup>. Character is internalized in learning and requires support from a conducive environment because character development is more acquired by children in school than at home<sup>16</sup>. Behaviors acquired in school will be carried to the home and community environment, making character education a process that requires careful planning.

Students highly need a religious character to face changing times and moral degradation. To confront these circumstances, students must have

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<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Shobirin, "Pembelajaran Tahfidz Al Qur'an Dalam Penanaman Karakter Islami," *Quality* 6, no. 1 (2018): 16–30.

<sup>13</sup> Sahrul Akbar and Dian Hidayati, "Lima Pertimbangan Memilih Sekolah (Studi Kasus Di SMA Muhammadiyah Di Kabupaten Bantul)," *Journal of Education and Teaching (JET)* 4, no. 2 (2023): 140–47.

<sup>14</sup> Gunawan Wibisana, "Mewujudkan Sekolah Religius Melalui Program Tahfidz Al-Qur'an Di SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo Kabupaten Ngawi," *Jurnal Inovasi Strategi Dan Model Pembelajaran* 2, no. 1 (2022): 115–21.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin Berkowitz, "Character Education Informational Handbook & Guide" (North Carolina Dept. of Public Instruction. Available on Raleigh, NC: [http ...](http://...), 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Vivianti, "DIGITAL TEACHING AND LEARNING BERMUATAN PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER: STRATEGI MENGAJAR UNTUK DIGITAL," *Prosiding Profesionalisme Guru Abad XXI*, 2018, 127–34.

personalities and behaviors that align with the parameters of good and wrong based on religious principles. Instructors should not just command students to be obedient and apply religious teachings but also provide examples, figures, and role models<sup>17</sup>. They must actively participate in their learning activities. Thus, the crucial role of learning is implied, especially in preparing learning activities centered on engaging students more comprehensively.

## 2. Methods

Qualitative research with a descriptive research design addresses the research problem. This method is chosen because it is used to explore in-depth data about an individual, group, institution, or specific community regarding background, current conditions, or interactions<sup>18</sup>. Descriptive research presents, describes, and maps facts based on a specific perspective or framework. The empirical description matches phenomena in detail and thoroughly, revealing holistic, contextual phenomena through data collection in a natural setting, utilizing the researcher as the critical instrument<sup>19</sup>. When phenomena, conditions, variables, and ideas are described, the researcher compares them with the issues under investigation.

The main instrument in this research is the researcher, who goes directly to the field to gather information through observation, interviews, and documentary studies<sup>20</sup>. In this study, the researcher employs a person-to-person approach, meaning that throughout the research process, there will be more interaction with individuals around the research location, namely formal schools in the Ajatappareng Region. This allows the researcher greater freedom to gather detailed information and data on various aspects needed in the study.

The data sources used in the research are primary data obtained directly from the field through direct interviews with informants. Conversely, secondary data is obtained indirectly from the field in the form of manuscripts or documents<sup>21</sup>. Data collection is conducted through interview techniques with a semi-structured model involving the school principal, deputy principal for the curriculum, deputy principal for public relations, coordinator of religious character development programs, teachers, educational staff, and instructors in the religious character development program. Observation sheets guide data collection using observation techniques to observe religious character formation implementation directly. Data collection with documentation techniques was carried out by collecting detailed activity books of students' religious behavior signed by coaches and parents. Documents in the form of standard operating procedures for religious character building activities that guide teachers, coaches, and parents are used to analyze the suitability of implementation with the rules agreed upon by the school.

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<sup>17</sup> Imam Gunawan, Hasan Argadinata, and Universitas Negeri Malang, "Dampak Pembelajaran Berkarakter Terhadap Penguatan Karakter Siswa Generasi Milenial," *Jurnal Administrasi Dan Manajemen Pendidikan* 3, no. 2019 (2020): 160–70.

<sup>18</sup> John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Radita Gora and M M S Sos, *Riset Kualitatif Public Relations* (Jakad Media Publishing, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Wahyudin Darmalaksana, "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka Dan Studi Lapangan," *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung*, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> John W Creswell and Vicki L Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Sage publications, 2017).

The collected data is tested for validity through triangulation, member checks, and expert opinions<sup>22</sup>. This ensures that the research data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation have sufficient data validity. Valid data is then analyzed using the Interactive model by Miles and Hubberman. The analysis is conducted during the data collection process and after the completion of data collection for a specific period. If the answers from the interviewees do not align with the expected data, then the researcher increases the number of respondents according to the snowball sampling technique until credible data is obtained<sup>23</sup>. The activities in data analysis include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification.

Methods are the means used by the author to answer the existing research problem. The method must clear with the location and time of the research, the population and sample of the research, the research variables and the research data. Describe the basic procedures used during the study, including selection of study subjects and observational and analytical methods. The method of your manuscript also mentions detail of your research method.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **Result**

Forming character is essential to be implemented in schools and is the collective responsibility of all parties. The character values instilled in schools aim to improve student's behavior, especially regarding religious character. Several strategic steps are needed to ensure the formation of students' religious character is well-established. Moreover, the religious character serves as a guide for parents' needs amid the moral degradation of the younger generation, and many parents choose to enroll their children in schools that can provide religious character services, such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and tahfidz institutions. This condition is expressed by the School Principal as follows:

Our school has experienced a decline in the number of applicants from the academic year 2020/2021 to the academic year 2022/2023. This phenomenon occurred because we obtained data indicating a reduced interest from parents in enrolling their children in public schools. Instead, they prefer to enroll their children in Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and even tahfidz institutions. This is due to their assumption that in public schools, the religious needs of their children are not well addressed. This situation has impacted all public schools in the city of Parepare

The situation has resulted in the school finding the right strategy to meet the community's needs so that the number of new students matches the capacity targeted by the education department. The strategy agreed upon by the school is to incorporate a tahfidz program as an extracurricular activity and other religious character-building activities that can cater to the religious needs of both Muslim and non-Muslim students. The steps taken by the school principal in implementing the program include coordinating with teachers and staff so that the planned activities can be well implemented and achieve the common goals. The vice principal in charge of public relations conveyed this:

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<sup>22</sup> Fuad Hasyim Purwono et al., *Metodologi Penelitian (Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan Mix Method)* (GUEPEDIA, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Mutiani Mutiani et al., "Membangun Komunitas Belajar Melalui Lesson Study Model Transcript Based Learning Analysis (TBLA) Dalam Pembelajaran Sejarah," *Historia: Jurnal Pendidik Dan Peneliti Sejarah* 3, no. 2 (2020): 113–22.

The principal's idea to implement a religious character development program through tahfidz and other religious activities was communicated to the teachers and education staff during a meeting. After we collectively agreed on these activities, the principal then formed an implementation team and informed us that these activities were not solely the responsibility of religious teachers but a collective responsibility

The religious character development activities agreed upon by the school include Quranic memorization (tahfidz) as an extracurricular activity, completion of Juz 30 for all Muslim students, reading one juz of the Qur'an for 15 minutes before the start of the first lesson for Muslims and reading the Bible for non-Muslims. There is also a Quranic reading and writing program for students who are not yet proficient, as well as collective chanting (dzikir) for Muslim students and Bible study for non-Muslim students every Friday. These activities are carried out systematically, involving teachers, school staff, and competent tahfidz instructors from outside the school environment. To ensure the smooth implementation of these activities, they are publicized to parents during the School Introduction Period (MPSL), and the student's activities are promoted through social media, such as Spensa Parepare | Facebook dan UPTD SMP NEGERI 1 PAREPARE (@spensaparepare) • Instagram photos and videos.

Parental and community support for character development activities is evident in the increased interest of prospective new students for the academic year 2023/2024 and their active cooperation with the school to control students' religious character when they are at home and in the community. This suggests that the religious character development program, implemented for 2 years, has significantly impacted the restoration of parents' trust in public schools. One factor that instills confidence in parents regarding the program is their involvement in monitoring their child's memorization activities through control cards provided by the school. Additionally, there is a point addition system for all subjects for those who have met the memorization targets. The increase in the enthusiasm of new students during the implementation of religious character development activities is directly expressed by the school principal as follows:

In the academic year 2022/2023, the number of new student applicants was only 305, and all were accepted to meet the school's capacity. However, after implementing a religious character formation program with various systematic activities, the number of applicants increased by 100% to over 600, while the school's capacity is only 320

The school's policy to implement religious character formation activities has effectively addressed community needs. The school principal directly coordinates the program and has received support from the school community and the Parepare government. The success in restoring the school's existence as a favorite institution, which had experienced a decline in the number of students, was achieved in the academic year 2023/2024 with 620 applicants compared to the 2022/2023 academic year which only reached 305 applicants and this shows that 100% increase from the previous year.

## Discussion

The strategic steps taken by both public schools to implement the religious character development program begin with analyzing the community's needs for the expected educational services. This analysis is necessary to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the resources available when implementing the program<sup>24</sup>. This condition needs to be identified so that a leader or school principal can think about several tactical steps that can be applied when facing challenges in implementing the program.

The strategic steps taken in each activity of the religious character development program are as follows:

No	Religious Activities	Implementation Strategies
1	Tahfidz Qur'an	Islamic studies teachers monitor students' memorization and consistently conduct review sessions.
		The memorization coach is an experienced individual in providing guidance.
		A reward is given as an additional 10 points for all subjects when the memorization aligns with the target before the class teacher compiles the final grades.
		Students enrolled in the memorization program are not charged any fees.
		The school collaborates with the parents of the students or community members who desire to contribute to the operation of the memorization program.
		Incentives for the memorization coach come from the School Operational Assistance (BOS) fund according to the standard output costs for extracurricular activity honorarium.
		Students cannot participate in other extracurricular activities after joining the memorization program.
		Memorization is conducted every day after the completion of regular class hours for approximately 3 hours.
		The Islamic studies teacher will assist students who join the memorization program but still have weak Quranic recitation skills to improve their reading.
2	Completion of Juz 30 (Khatam Juz 30)	The policy of the school principal for grade VII is to memorize 20 short surahs, for grade VIII to memorize 10 surahs, and for grade IX to memorize 7 surahs.
		Other teachers and class teachers assist the Islamic studies teacher in submitting students' memorization. Rewards are given, adding 10

<sup>24</sup> Vicki Park and Amanda Datnow, "Co-Constructing Distributed Leadership: District and School Connections in Data-Driven Decision-Making," *School Leadership and Management* 29, no. 5 (2009): 477–94.

		<p>points for students who can complete memorization according to the target for all subjects before the class teacher compiles the grades.</p> <p>Students whose memorization is not completed according to the target will not receive their report cards.</p> <p>The memorization submission time is flexible depending on the student's time and the availability of teachers.</p> <p>The policy of the school principal for grade VII is to memorize 20 short surahs, for grade VIII to memorize 10 surahs, and for grade IX to memorize 7 surahs.</p>
3	Completion of Al-Qur'an (Khatam Al-Qur'an)	<p>Every day before the learning sessions commence, 15 minutes are dedicated to reading the Qur'an, accompanied directly by the first subject teacher.</p> <p>All classes are required to carry out the activity of reading the Qur'an before the lessons begin.</p> <p>The Qur'an is photocopied and distributed to each student a few pages at a time, allowing each level to complete the reading of the Qur'an collectively.</p> <p>For non-Muslim students, it is also mandatory to read their respective books for 15 minutes before the start of the lessons. Non-Muslim books are also distributed in the form of leaflets for joint reading.</p> <p>Every day before the learning sessions commence, 15 minutes are dedicated to reading the Qur'an, accompanied directly by the first subject teacher.</p>
4	Reading and writing the Qur'an (BTQ)	<p>The Islamic studies teacher is directly responsible for the program.</p> <p>The program is intended for students whose ability to read and write the Qur'an is still low.</p> <p>The activity takes place after the completion of the learning sessions. Competent teachers in reading and writing the Qur'an also participate in running the program.</p> <p>The mentoring activities are carried out for approximately 2 hours.</p> <p>The Islamic studies teacher is directly responsible for the program.</p>
5	Group Remembrance	<p>Conducted every Friday morning in the first and second weeks of each month.</p> <p>All Muslim school members simultaneously participate in the activity.</p> <p>Non-Muslims engage in religious activities of reading and writing the Al-Kitab in a classroom.</p>

Systematic religious character formation is included in the habituation category because it is carried out regularly, which in the end will form habits that

arise from within each individual without coercion<sup>25</sup>. Character formation that is well-organized through scheduled habituation, based on the research results, will impact the formation of students' habits<sup>26</sup>.

The steps of religious character formation implemented by the school align with Krathwol's theory at the stage of trans-internalization. In this phase, all parties actively support the program's implementation by considering the many positive impacts that will be felt by students and schools in general, motivating students to remain enthusiastic about receiving guidance<sup>27</sup>. The support from internal and external parties for program implementation is consistent with previous research conducted in elementary schools, indicating that collaboration among all parties is a supporting factor for the successful execution of programs<sup>28</sup>. Character formation is not solely the school's responsibility; parents also ensure its success<sup>29</sup>.

The school's effort to instill habits in students to understand the teachings of their respective religions is an attempt to familiarize them with religious activities. The younger generation, whose activities are greatly influenced by the development of information technology, when not accustomed to religious activities, is feared to no longer have concern for religious activities<sup>30</sup>. A person will engage in something when the habit is already established, and they will feel that something is missing when they do not engage in activities that have been established. This is done by students at SMP Negeri 1 Parepare routinely every morning before the first subject hour begins, they complete reading the Qur'an one juz for 15 minutes for Muslims and reading the Bible for non-Muslims by being coordinated by the class leader even though the teacher is not present.

The habituation of religious activities implemented for 2 years in the school has impacted students' behaviour. They are always easily directed to behave well, especially regarding respecting older people and constantly bowing according to the Bugis *Mappate'be* culture when passing in front of teachers. This behavior is familiarized to students so that they can preserve the culture because it is a form of respect for elders that can be observed directly. The habit of *mappatabe* is a behaviour that must be carried out by all students as a form of respect for teachers, education personnel, or elders in the school environment. Moreover, because students are engaged in character development activities after classes in the form of extracurricular activities which are carried out until the afternoon at school, students focus on self-development and knowledge so as to reduce deviant behavior carried out by teenagers their age. Cultivating positive

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<sup>25</sup> Rahma Nurbaiti, Susiati Alwy, and Imam Taulabi, "Pembentukan Karakter Religius Siswa Melalui Pembiasaan Aktivitas Keagamaan," *EL Bidayah: Journal of Islamic Elementary Education* 2, no. 1 (2020): 55–66.

<sup>26</sup> GUNAWAN WIBISANA, "MEWUJUDKAN SEKOLAH RELIGIUS MELALUI PROGRAM TAHFIDZ AL-QUR'AN DI SMP NEGERI 1 JOGOROGO KABUPATEN NGAWI," *STRATEGY: Jurnal Inovasi Strategi Dan Model Pembelajaran* 2, no. 1 (2022): 115–21.

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Mushfi El Iq Bali and Susilowati Susilowati, "Transinternalisasi Nilai-Nilai Kepesantrenan Melalui Konstruksi Budaya Religius Di Sekolah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 16, no. 1 (2019): 1–16.

<sup>28</sup> Mutiara Shinta and Siti Quratul Ain, "Strategi Sekolah Dalam Membentuk Karakter Siswa Di Sekolah Dasar," *Jurnal Basicedu* 5, no. 5 (2021): 4045–52, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v5i5.1507>.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Irsan Barus and Nur Afni, "Peran Orang Tua Dalam Mendidik Anak," *Journal Of Islamic Primary Education* 1, no. 1 (2021): 33–48.

<sup>30</sup> Nurbaiti, Alwy, and Taulabi, "Pembentukan Karakter Religius Siswa Melalui Pembiasaan Aktivitas Keagamaan."

habits among students impacts their behaviour to consistently exhibit good behaviour, ultimately demonstrating virtuous behaviour<sup>31</sup>.

The religious character of students is formed when they are at the stage of the religious dimension, starting from religious beliefs (ideological dimension) through Islamic religious education in class as mandated by the curriculum; religious practices (ritualistic dimension) carried out by habituating them to read the Koran for 15 minutes before the start of the class; religious feelings (experiential dimension) implemented by the students' desire to memorize the Quran voluntarily; religious knowledge (intellectual dimension) is evident from their awareness to submit their memorization, even though it is undeniable that some of them start submitting their memorization because of the point targets, but it is a form of habituation for them with the goal of what they have memorized will be beneficial during the implementation of prayer and in their daily life to build virtuous attitudes; when the students' activities in daily life are already based on the influence of religion (intellectual dimension), then parents' expectations for a balance between formal knowledge and the religious knowledge of students are well-formed<sup>32</sup>. The achievement of the religiosity dimension in students can be seen from their behaviour which is not easily tempted to commit despicable acts, such as taking something that is not their right. Feeling guilty when not performing the five daily prayers, reciting the Koran, and fasting. Respecting elders and not breaking the rules, always behaving honestly, and being trustworthy. The religious dimension of students is the goal of forming religious character, and through the habituation of students' religious activities, it is hoped that they can have virtuous behavior.

During the two years of implementing the religious character development program, students have achieved several accomplishments in Tahfidz activities. Students' good behavior is reflected in their respect for teachers and discipline in attending school. The motivation of students to memorize the Quran has increased because there is an additional 10 points to all subjects when the memorization target is met compared to before the policy was implemented. Most students are only able to deposit a minimum of 3 memorised short letters Quran each semester, but after the policy is enforced and the targets of short letters Quran are set for each level, they are competing to meet the memorising target and collecting them according to the time set.

The involvement of parents in the formation of religious character and many achievements made by students from the tahfidz Quran program both at the national and local levels clear evidence for the community that the religious character development program implemented at school has an impact on the balance of formal and religious knowledge of students. This has led to an increase in the number of applicants for new students in the 2023/2024 academic year.

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<sup>31</sup> Hayati and Susatya, "Strengthening of Religious Character Education Based on School Culture in the Indonesian Secondary School."

<sup>32</sup> Salamiah Sari Dewi, S Sutrisno, and Abd Madjid, "THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF RELIGIOSITY AND TEACHERS' EFFICACY IN THE CHARACTER EDUCATION IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC INTEGRATED SCHOOL," *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies* 5, no. 3 (2020).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The school analyzes external needs and internal resources to understand the strengths of the resources available in implementing the religious character development program. The program is then socialized to teachers, school staff, and parents. The strategic steps taken by the school principal in implementing the program include appointing a program coordinator and establishing reward and punishment policies to motivate students to participate actively in all aspects of the religious character development program. The strategy for religious character formation is implemented in the school according to the agreed-upon schedule in meetings with the coordinating team. Teachers and parents are involved in the program, and their involvement is manifested by providing signatures in the students' memorization control book. An additional 10 points are given in all subjects when the memorization targets are achieved. The school principal requests a monthly progress report on students' memorization and directly monitors the activities. Religious guidance is provided for both Muslim and non-Muslim students. Students in the Tahfidz program cannot participate in other extracurricular activities. The success of this religious character formation has resulted in an increased interest of new students for the academic year 2023/2024.

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