

School Culture and Its Role in Shaping Students' Religious Attitudes: A Case Study at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the role of school culture in shaping students' religious attitudes at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through classroom and school observations, in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and school staff, as well as document analysis of school policies and religious programs. The data were analyzed using NVivo software to identify emerging themes and patterns. The findings reveal that school culture plays a significant role in fostering students' religious attitudes through the internalization of religious routines, teacher role modeling, religiously grounded social interactions, and a supportive school environment. These cultural elements contribute to the holistic development of students' religious attitudes, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The study highlights that the formation of students' religious attitudes is not solely determined by formal religious instruction, but is strongly influenced by a consistently cultivated and sustainable school culture. The findings offer practical implications for schools in strengthening character education through the development of a religious school culture.

Keywords: School Culture; Students' Religious Attitudes; Character Education; Islamic Education

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran budaya sekolah dalam membentuk sikap religius siswa di SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam dengan guru, siswa, dan staf sekolah, serta analisis dokumen terkait kebijakan dan program keagamaan sekolah. Data dianalisis menggunakan perangkat lunak NVivo untuk mengidentifikasi tema dan pola yang muncul. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya sekolah yang terinternalisasi melalui pembiasaan kegiatan keagamaan, keteladanan guru, interaksi sosial yang religius, serta lingkungan sekolah yang kondusif berperan signifikan dalam membentuk sikap religius siswa secara holistik, mencakup aspek kognitif, afektif, dan perilaku. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pembentukan sikap religius siswa tidak hanya bergantung pada pembelajaran agama formal,

tetapi juga pada budaya sekolah yang dibangun secara konsisten dan berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi sekolah dalam mengembangkan budaya religius sebagai strategi efektif penguatan pendidikan karakter.

Kata-kata Kunci: Budaya Sekolah; Sikap Religius Siswa; Pendidikan Karakter; Pendidikan Islam

1. INTRODUCTION

School culture constitutes a foundational dimension of the educational process, functioning not merely as an organisational framework for school life but as a normative environment in which students' character, attitudes, and ethical orientations are formed. Within Islamic educational institutions, school culture assumes an even more strategic role, as it is expected to serve as a primary vehicle for embedding religious values that are internalised in students' daily conduct. In this sense, school culture encompasses a constellation of shared values, norms, traditions, and habitual practices manifested through communication patterns, institutional rules, routine activities, and the interactions among teachers, students, and school staff (Demirtaş, Takunyaci, & Yeşil, 2023). A strong and consistent school culture has been shown to contribute significantly to students' character formation, including religious attitudes that comprise spiritual, moral, and ethical dimensions developed through religious instruction and religious practices within the school environment (Kalkan, Altınay Aksal, Altınay Gazi, Atasoy, & Dağlı, 2020).

Schools do not merely serve as sites for the transmission of knowledge but also function as arenas for the formation of students' character and personality in accordance with Islamic values. Through a school culture imbued with Islamic principles, students are guided to habituate their lives to Islamic teachings in all aspects of daily life, including their ways of thinking, attitudes, and behavior. (Subur, Nugroho, & Qasim, 2019).

The formation of an Islamic culture in schools may be realized through various activities and habits integrated into everyday school life. For example, recitation of the Qur'an prior to the commencement of classes, congregational *ṣalāt duḥā* [optional mid-morning prayer] and *ṣalāt zuhr* (noon prayer), as well as the commemoration of Islamic holy days, are not merely ceremonial in nature but also carry substantive educational values. Furthermore, practices such as greeting others, smiling, and demonstrating politeness toward teachers and peers constitute tangible expressions of noble character in school life (Isbakhi, 2018).

However, although many schools endeavor to instill religious values, not all succeed in achieving the desired outcomes. A critical issue that arises concerns how school culture can effectively shape students' religious attitudes (Kurniawan, Asrial, Aprizal, Maison, & Zurweni, 2022). Questions remain as to whether the values upheld by the school, the role of teachers as role models, regularly implemented religious

activities, and social interactions among students play a decisive role in the formation of students' religious attitudes (Rusakova, Morozova, & Gabdrakhmanova, 2017)

This research is necessary because many schools today face significant challenges in instilling religious values amid rapid social and cultural change (Hu, Hu, & Wang, 2021). Phenomena such as declining religious discipline among students, diminished respect for teachers, increasing individualistic behavior, and the negative influence of digital media indicate a gap between the religious knowledge taught in schools and the religious attitudes manifested in students' everyday behavior (Chotimah, Kurnisar, Ermanovida, & Juainah, 2021).

In this context, school culture plays a highly strategic role. School culture is not limited to rules or policies but encompasses all customs, traditions, and the overall atmosphere created within the school environment. Schools that are able to cultivate a religious culture through activities such as *tadarus* (Qur'anic recitation), congregational prayers, the practice of offering greetings (*salām*), the use of polite language, and exemplary conduct by teachers have been shown to be more effective in fostering students' religious attitudes in a natural and sustainable manner (Fatimah & Usman, 2017).

School culture plays a crucial role in the sustained internalization of religious values. It comprises customs, norms, values, and traditions within the school environment and is reflected in the behavior of teachers, students, and the entire school community (Ismail, Khatibi, & Ferdous Azam, 2022). Schools with a strong religious culture typically integrate activities such as Qur'anic recitation, *ṣalāt duḥā*, congregational prayers, the Commemoration of Islamic Holy Days (*Peringatan Hari Besar Islam/PHBI*), as well as the use of polite language and behavior in daily interactions. Through these activities, students are not only taught religious concepts theoretically but are also trained to practice Islamic teachings in real-life contexts (Rambe, 2022).

Empirical realities indicate that not all schools are able to build a culture that consistently supports the formation of religious attitudes. Some schools conduct religious activities merely in a formal and routine manner without ensuring the internalization of values within students (Jessiman et al., 2022). As a result, such activities do not have a significant impact on students' behavioral change. Moreover, the lack of exemplary conduct among some educators and weak supervision of religious practices further impede the development of a strong Islamic culture in schools (Wilson Heenan, De Paor, Lafferty, & Mannix McNamara, 2023).

To address these issues, this study employs a case study approach. The case study will be conducted at a school selected as the research subject (Naqiyah, Hamzati, & Rahayu, 2022). Data will be collected through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and school staff, as well as document analysis covering school policies, religious programs, and instructional materials used in religious education (Al-Azri et al.,

2019). Observation will enable researchers to examine how school culture is implemented in daily practice. Interviews will provide in-depth perspectives on how students internalize and embody religious values. Document analysis will assist in understanding policies and programs that support the formation of students' religious attitudes (Maroungkas, Troussas, Krouska, & Sgouropoulou, 2024).

Based on preliminary observations and informal interviews with several teachers and students at Senior High School SMA (Senior High School) Nurul Islam Bekasi, it was found that although the school possesses a religious vision and implements various religious activities, students' religious attitudes have not yet been formed in a comprehensive and consistent manner. Teachers reported a decline in students' politeness and sense of responsibility, such as in the way they speak to teachers, dress appropriately, and maintain classroom cleanliness. Yet, these values constitute essential components of the Islamic culture that the school seeks to instill (Suliswiyadi, 2019).

Previous studies emphasized the importance of school culture in fostering students' character and moral development. However, research that specifically explores how school culture influences students' religious attitudes remain limited. This study offers novelty by examining specific elements of school culture that directly contribute to the formation of students' religious attitudes (Laar, Shi, & Ashraf, 2019). By focusing on a single school as a case study, this research provides a detailed and in-depth portrayal of the internal dynamics shaping students' religious attitudes (Hamdi, Rizal, & Hikmah, 2023).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of school culture in shaping students' religious attitudes at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to the development of theory on character and religious education within the context of school culture. In addition, this study aims to offer practical recommendations for schools in creating a culture that supports the holistic and sustainable development of students' religious attitudes (Hawlitschek, Henschel, Richter, & Stanat, 2024).

Through an in-depth case study approach, this research seeks to uncover patterns and relationships that may not have been adequately identified in prior studies. Accordingly, it is expected to provide new insights for academics and educational practitioners and to serve as a foundation for developing more effective policies aimed at fostering students' religious attitudes through positive and inclusive school environments (Hooper & Hallam, 2021).

2. METHOD

This study employs a case study approach focusing on Nurul Islam Bekasi as the research site in order to explore how school culture influences the formation of students' religious attitudes (Martens, Hansart, & Su, 2019). A qualitative research design is

adopted, enabling the researchers to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi was selected due to its distinctive school culture, characterised by an explicit Islamic vision, formal institutional policies, and structured religious programmes. The case study approach thus allows for a comprehensive examination of how religious values are constructed, enacted, and sustained through everyday school practices.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis ([Chiang, Lee, Chu, Han, & Hsiao, 2020](#)). Observations were conducted on daily interactions at Senior High School Nurul Islam Bekasi, routine school activities, and the implementation of institutional values and norms. These observations focused on everyday interactions, routine practices, and the enactment of school norms and values. The observation process was carried out weekly over a four-month period, resulting in a total of 16 observation sessions.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a structured format with 2 (two) teachers, 6 (six) students, and 1 (one) member of the school staff in order to obtain diverse perspectives on how students instill and internalize religious values ([El Khoury, Noufi, Ahmad, Akl, & El Hayek, 2019](#)). Document analysis involved a review of school policies, religious programs, and school activity reports used in religious education to understand the institutional policies and programs that support the development of students' religious attitudes ([Sommer, Figueroa, Kwauk, Jones, & Fyles, 2017](#)).

To analyze the collected data, this study utilized NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program that assists in organizing, managing, and analyzing qualitative data. NVivo enables researchers to code data systematically and to identify emerging themes and patterns within the dataset ([Roca-Campos, Duque, Ríos, & Ramis-Salas, 2021](#)). The analysis began with importing interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents into NVivo. Subsequently, the data were coded according to predefined categories, namely religious values, the role of teachers, religious activities, and social interactions ([Li, Matahari, Dai, Zhang, & Liu, 2022](#)).

Through NVivo, researchers were able to conduct text searches, identify relationships among categories, and visualize data in the form of charts or diagrams to facilitate interpretation ([Bufoni, de Sousa Ferreira, & Oliveira, 2017](#)). This analytical process supported the identification of specific elements of school culture that contribute significantly to the formation of students' religious attitudes. The results of the analysis were then systematically organized to provide a comprehensive account of how school culture influences students' religious attitudes ([Turhan Damar, Ordin, & Erkin, 2024](#)).

To ensure the collection of in-depth, comprehensive, and valid data, this study employed a triangulation approach that combined multiple data collection techniques and sources. This triangulation strategy was implemented to enhance the validity of the

findings and to minimize subjectivity (Evren et al., 2022). Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing data derived from observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on religious activities within the school, such as congregational prayers, morning Qur'anic recitation, and other Islamic activities, in order to capture authentic practices of religious culture. In-depth interviews were used to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and meanings attributed by teachers and students to these activities. Document analysis was subsequently conducted on school regulations, vision and mission statements, religious work programs, and student activity reports to obtain written evidence supporting the empirical findings.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Referring to previous studies, it can be concluded that school culture at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi plays a significant role in fostering students' religious awareness and moral character through habituation, value internalization, and role modeling. This finding demonstrates consistency between the empirical evidence of this study and the global literature, emphasizing the close relationship between school culture, religious practices, and character formation.

Daily activities at SMA Nurul Islam reflect a deep commitment to religious values and character education. Each morning begins with congregational prayers attended by all students, teachers, and school staff, thereby creating an atmosphere of togetherness and discipline (Suri & Chandra, 2021). Following the prayer, students engage in guided recitation led by an *ustaz* or *ustazah* (Islamic religious teacher), enabling them to deepen their understanding of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* (Kolkailah, 2023).

The religious culture implemented through daily activities and teachers' role modeling functions as a hidden curriculum that indirectly shapes students' religious character, in line view that effective character education requires the integration of moral values across all aspects of school life (Tadege, Seifu, & Melese, 2022).

Memorization of the Qur'an also constitutes an integral part of the daily routine. Students take turns reciting verses prior to class sessions under the guidance of patient and attentive religious teachers. Teachers at SMA Nurul Islam act not only as instructors but also as moral exemplars in their daily conduct. They consistently demonstrate politeness, discipline, and compassion, qualities that students are expected to emulate (Ansong et al., 2024).

Interactions between teachers and students occur within a climate of mutual respect and support. Teachers are readily available to provide guidance and advice, both academically and spiritually. Overall, the school environment is highly conducive to learning and personal development (Dillard, Lumut, Padgett, Tan, & Kennedy, 2021). Extracurricular activities such as group discussions, sports, and the arts are likewise

imbued with religious values, including cooperation, mutual assistance, and respect for others ([Hamidah & Duncik, 2024](#)).

The findings of this study also empirically confirm the theory of teacher religiosity developed and subsequently supported. According to this theory, teachers' levels of religiosity significantly influence their pedagogical behavior, moral commitment, and the emotional climate of the classroom. At Senior High School Nurul Islam Bekasi, teachers with high levels of religiosity consistently exemplify acts of worship, demonstrate honesty, and show compassion toward students. This, in turn, creates a learning environment that nurtures faith, discipline, and noble character among students ([Abdel-Khalek, Bakhiet, Osman, & Lester, 2023](#)).

Within an atmosphere enriched by positive activities and supported by all components of the school community, SMA Nurul Islam has succeeded in creating an environment conducive to the holistic development of students' religious attitudes. Students are encouraged not only to achieve academic success but also to become individuals of noble character grounded in Islamic teachings. This finding aligns with conclusions drawn in several prior studies ([Toding, Mädamürk, Venesaar, & Malleus, 2023](#)).

Islamic Studies subjects often constitute the core of the educational experience in such schools ([Kimanen, 2023](#)). Students frequently perceive that Islamic Studies instruction should be more relevant and closely connected to their daily lives in order to enhance their educational satisfaction ([Abdalla, Chown, & Memon, 2020](#)). In the United States, Islamic schools such as Al-Noor Academy in Massachusetts and Universal Academy of Florida emphasize high-quality education grounded in strong Islamic principles. These schools not only prioritize academic achievement but also focus on building strong Islamic character and identity. They further highlight the importance of ethnic diversity among students while fostering unity in faith ([Alaboudi, 2022](#)). Core principles of Islamic education include the teaching of the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, *sīrah* (the biography of the Prophet Muhammad), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *akhlāq* (ethics). The primary objective is to prepare students for success in both worldly life and the hereafter, with a strong emphasis on Islamic moral and ethical values ([Leena Haniffah, Sharaf Shaiban, & Ahmed, 2023](#)).

Consistent with the findings of [Abdalla, Chown, and Memon \(2020\)](#), several students in Bekasi likewise expressed a desire for Islamic Studies learning to be more closely aligned with real-life contexts, particularly in addressing modern challenges such as the use of technology, social interaction, and moral responsibility in the digital era. Accordingly, teachers at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi play a crucial role in linking Qur'anic values, *ḥadīth*, and moral teachings to students' everyday lives, ensuring that religious education is not merely theoretical but also formative of Islamic behavior and personality.

This study identifies several key points that serve as supporting elements of school culture and its role in shaping students' religious attitudes, as presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes Identified from NVivo Analysis

Main Theme	Subtheme
School Values	a. Adaptive Learning b. Collaborative Learning c. Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Learning Curriculum)
Role of Teachers	a. Active Learning b. Guidance and Counseling
Social Interaction	a. Playing with Peers b. Learning
Religious Activities	a. Religious Holiday Celebrations b. Tadarus (Collective Qur'anic Recitation)
Qur'an Memorization	a. Qur'anic Recitation b. Conducive Learning Environment
School Environment	Teacher-led Training

a. Interview Distribution Map

[Figure 1](#) below illustrates the relationships among religious activities, social interaction, the school environment, and the roles of teachers and the curriculum in shaping students' religious attitudes. The findings concerning the dominant role of teachers and religious activities reinforce the theoretical proposition that the formation of religious character does not occur instantaneously, but rather through a continuous and contextual process. A school culture that supports Islamic values, strengthened by teacher role modeling and structured religious activities, functions as a primary foundation for developing students' holistic religious attitudes encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

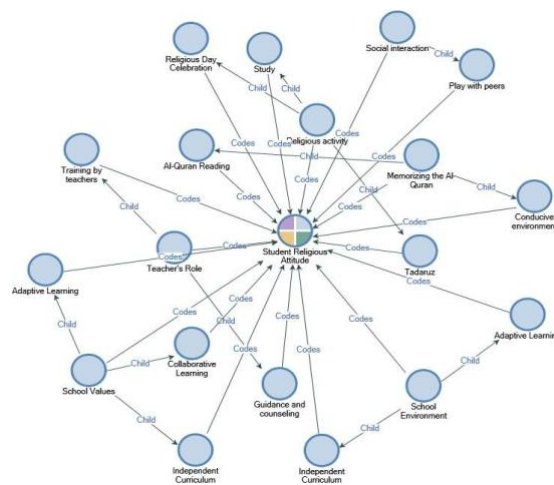


Figure 1. Interview Distribution Map

Based on [Figure 1](#), it can be concluded that religious activities such as Qur'anic reading, *tadarus*, and Qur'an memorization constitute integral components of structured religious practices embedded within school culture. These activities assist students in internalizing essential spiritual and moral values. A conducive school environment, including positive social interactions, is likewise critical in shaping students' religious attitudes. Religious values are reinforced and practiced daily through interactions with peers and teachers within a supportive atmosphere ([Zaneb & Armitage-Chan, 2023](#)).

Teachers, as role models, exert a significant influence on the formation of students' religious attitudes. Through guidance, instruction, and exemplary conduct, teachers are able to instill strong ethical and moral values in students. Schools that articulate clear values and implement them consistently enable students to understand and adopt religious attitudes. These values encompass norms, traditions, and habitual practices embedded in everyday school life ([Marshel & Ratnawulan, 2020](#)).

An independently designed and adaptive curriculum allows instructional materials to be adjusted to students' needs, including religious education content aimed at developing students' spiritual and moral understanding ([Latifa, Fahri, Subchi, & Mahida, 2022](#)). Social interactions among students, such as playing with peers and engaging in collaborative activities, provide opportunities to practice religious values in authentic contexts, thereby shaping character and attitudes grounded in religious principles. In addition, training and guidance provided by teachers within religious activities help students develop more mature and focused religious attitudes ([Hamadeh et al., 2024](#)). Collectively, these elements operate synergistically within school culture to form and strengthen students' religious attitudes.

b. Word Frequency Visualization (Word Cloud)

[Figure 2](#) below presents a word cloud depicting key terms related to education and religious attitudes within the context of Islamic schooling. Prominent terms such as "religious," "Islam," "teachings," "learning," and "values" reflect a primary focus on religious instruction and the development of students' religious attitudes. Additionally, terms such as "memorization," "teachers," "students," and "activities" indicate the important roles played by teachers, students, and various religious activities in the learning process and the formation of religious character ([Köşker & Özgen, 2018](#)). This word cloud visualizes the essential elements of religious school culture and illustrates how these elements interact to create a conducive educational environment ([Gangopadhyay, Jacob, & Jayanth, 2020](#)).

c. Word Frequency

The findings above are further supported by the frequency of words that emerged during the interviews. The 20 (twenty) most frequently occurring words are presented in [Table 2](#) below.

Table 2. Word Frequency

Word	Length	Frequency
<i>Alim</i> /Pious	9	48
Islam	7	33
Teachings	9	29
Learning	8	21
School	6	21
Interviewer	11	20
Also	4	18
Attitude	9	16
Values	6	16
Help	4	14
Understanding	10	14
Activities	10	12
Teacher	8	12
Celebrating	11	11
Making	5	11
Recitation	11	11
Memorizing	12	10
Practicing	5	9
Environment	11	9
Everyday	8	9

The results of this study reinforce the understanding that Religious Attitude Theory and the School Culture Framework overlap in explaining how a strong school culture imbued with Islamic values functions as an effective instrument for fostering students' religious attitudes. SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi serves as a concrete example of how these theories are implemented through institutional policies, learning practices, and teacher role modeling in everyday school life.

The word frequency data derived from the interviews support the analysis regarding the importance of specific elements of school culture at Senior High School Nurul Islam Bekasi. The frequent occurrence of the word "*alim*" 48 (forty-eight) occurrences and "Islam" 33 (thirty-three) occurrences underscores those Islamic teachings constitute the primary priority of the school. These teachings encompass activities such as Qur'an memorization and the comprehension of Islamic doctrines, which are integral components of the school curriculum. The role of teachers is also strongly emphasized, as reflected in the word "teacher" appearing 12 (twelve) times,

indicating that teachers not only deliver instruction but also provide guidance and strong moral exemplars in daily life, thereby reinforcing religious values.

The school's commitment to instilling moral and ethical values is reflected in the words "values" and "attitude," each appearing 16 (sixteen) times. This indicates a deliberate effort to develop students' religious attitudes encompassing spirituality, morality, and ethics. The importance of routine activities supporting the formation of students' religious attitudes is further highlighted by the frequency of words such as "activities" and "recitation," which appeared 12 (twelve) and 11 (eleven) times, respectively (Islamic, Supriyono, Ishaq, & Dayati, 2024).

Routine religious activities such as Qur'anic reading, the celebration of Islamic holy days, and *tadarus* (collective Qur'anic recitation) are regularly conducted to assist students in applying religious teachings in their daily lives (Luthfiyah, Suciani, & Ruslan, 2022). A conducive environment and positive social interactions are likewise crucial, as indicated by the appearance of the word "environment" 9 (nine) times. Harmonious interactions between students and teachers are intentionally designed to support the development of religious attitudes. An adaptive learning approach and an emphasis on deep understanding constitute key focuses at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi, as reflected in the frequent occurrence of the words "learning" 21 (twenty-one) times and "understanding" 14 (fourteen) times (Vilà, Aneas, Freixa, & Schmidlin, 2022).

This approach enables the adaptation of teaching methods to meet individual students' needs, thereby ensuring optimal development in both religious and academic dimensions. Overall, these data demonstrate that SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi possesses a strong school culture that effectively supports the formation of students' religious attitudes through elements such as in-depth religious instruction, a significant teacher role, the internalization of moral values, regular religious activities, and a friendly, conducive, and adaptive educational environment (Gambarkan Adi Pristina, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that school culture plays a significant role in shaping students' religious attitudes at SMA Nurul Islam Bekasi. The formation of a religious culture is realized through structured religious activities, teacher role modeling, and a school social environment that consistently supports students' religious practices. Through these mechanisms, students' religious attitudes are developed not only at the level of knowledge but also across affective dimensions and everyday behavior.

This study confirms that school culture constitutes a strategic variable in character education, particularly in the context of fostering religiosity among Muslim adolescents. The findings reinforce prior scholarship that conceptualizes character as an outcome of school socialization processes mediated through values, norms, and exemplary conduct. Moreover, this research contributes empirical insights to the field of Islamic education by

clarifying how the interaction among school actors, religious activities, and the social environment can operate synergistically to shape students' religious habitus.

From a practical perspective, this study underscores the importance of strengthening religious programs grounded in role modeling and habituation as effective strategies for fostering religiosity in schools. To enrich these findings, future research may undertake comparative studies across different schools, examine the influence of external variables such as family roles and digital media, or employ quantitative instruments to more precisely map the level of students' internalization of religious values.

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