

Moral Formation as Institutional Practice: Everyday Ethical Internalization in Primary Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine Islamic Religious Education in a public primary school as an institutional space for everyday moral formation rather than merely a curricular activity. It seeks to understand how ethical values are internalized through routine pedagogical practices and social interactions in primary Islamic religious education.

Method: The research employs a qualitative case study approach conducted in a public primary school in Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of instructional documents related to Islamic Religious Education. The data were analyzed using thematic interpretation to identify patterns of moral instruction, habituation, and ethical meaning-making embedded in daily learning practices.

Findings: The findings indicate that moral formation in primary Islamic Religious Education occurs through continuous and repetitive practices that integrate instruction, habituation, and role modeling. Ethical values are not transmitted solely through formal teaching of religious texts but are gradually internalized through daily routines, teacher-student interactions, and implicit moral cues within the classroom environment. This process reflects an institutionalized form of ethical internalization, where moral norms become normalized as part of everyday school life rather than as explicit moral directives.

Significance: This study contributes to religious studies by reframing primary Islamic Religious Education as a site of lived religious practice and ethical formation. Rather than evaluating curricular effectiveness or learning outcomes, it conceptualizes classroom religiosity as an institutional practice through which moral subjectivity is routinely produced and stabilized. The findings provide conceptual insights into moral formation within educational institutions, offering relevance for scholars interested in religion, ethics, and institutional practice in diverse cultural contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Religious education at the primary level has traditionally been approached as a pedagogical activity centered on curriculum delivery and measurable learning outcomes. Within religious studies, however, scholars increasingly argue that education functions as a formative space where moral dispositions are shaped through institutional routines, as reflected in philosophical discussions on ethical virtue formation by (Kim et al., 2024). Islamic Religious Education in public schools is often expected to transmit moral values, yet its practical operation frequently emphasizes doctrinal comprehension rather than ethical internalization. This tendency reduces moral education to formal instruction and

overlooks how everyday practices contribute to ethical normalization. Research on teachers' lived roles by (Pratiwi et al., 2023; Rossouw & Frick, 2023) demonstrates that moral values are often embedded implicitly through classroom interaction. Such findings suggest that moral learning extends beyond explicit religious content. Primary schools therefore play a critical role as early institutional environments where ethical orientations begin to stabilize. This perspective highlights the urgency of examining Islamic Religious Education as an institutional practice rather than a purely instructional activity.

In Indonesia, Islamic Religious Education is institutionally mandated within public primary schooling, embedding religious instruction into students' daily routines. Studies on character education by Athanassoulis, (2024); Lu, (2025) indicate that moral development is closely linked to habituation rather than isolated moral lessons. Despite this, much existing research remains prescriptive, focusing on what moral education should achieve instead of how it is enacted in practice. Analyses of Islamic elementary education by Alavi, (2024); Zheng et al., (2022) emphasize character paradigms but rarely interrogate the mechanisms through which ethical norms are internalized. Classroom rituals, teacher modeling, and implicit behavioral expectations form a moral environment that operates continuously. These elements often escape scholarly attention because they appear ordinary and unremarkable. Yet it is precisely this ordinariness that allows moral norms to become taken for granted. Understanding these processes is therefore essential for advancing the study of religion as lived practice.

The rationale for this study emerges from a growing shift in religious studies toward examining religion as a set of everyday practices rather than abstract doctrines. Discourse-oriented research by Saada, (2023) shows that religious values are frequently embedded implicitly within educational materials and practices. Islamic Religious Education classrooms thus function as moral spaces where ethical meanings are rehearsed through routine interaction. However, many educational studies separate pedagogy from ethics, limiting analytical depth. By focusing on daily classroom practices, this study seeks to capture how ethical meanings are produced through repetition and socialization. This approach resonates with contemporary scholarship that emphasizes practice-based analysis of religion. It also allows moral formation to be examined without reducing it to assessment outcomes. Consequently, the study addresses a conceptual need within both religious studies and educational research.

Another rationale lies in the limited attention given to primary schools as ethical institutions. Research on hidden curricula by Rine et al., (2022); Taghavi & Segalla, (2023) demonstrates that ethical identities are shaped implicitly within higher religious education contexts. These findings suggest that similar mechanisms may operate at earlier educational stages. Nevertheless, primary education remains underrepresented in institutional analyses of moral formation. Most studies prioritize adolescents or university students, leaving early ethical socialization insufficiently explored. This gap obscures how moral subjectivity begins to take shape. Examining primary Islamic Religious Education therefore offers insight into foundational stages of ethical

development. Such an investigation contributes to understanding how institutions shape morality over time.

Existing literature on Islamic education frequently focuses on integrating religious values into formal curricula. Research by Subiyantoro et al., (2026) highlights attempts to combine religious and humanistic dimensions, yet the analysis remains programmatic rather than process-oriented. Alsuhaymi & Atallah, (2025) examine ritual prayer as a tool for identity formation, emphasizing intentional religious acts rather than routine classroom interaction. Studies on teachers' roles by Tohirin et al., (2025) underline pedagogical agency in value transmission. However, these works often frame moral education as deliberate instruction. Parental influence studies such as Chofifah et al., (2025) shift attention away from institutional schooling. Cultural analyses by Zulkarnain et al., (2025) focus on symbolic representations of Islamic values. Collectively, these studies acknowledge moral education but insufficiently theorize institutional routine. This pattern reveals a conceptual limitation within the field.

Further scholarship addresses character education and ethical formation in Islamic contexts. Safrilsyah et al., (2024) associate character education with prosocial behavior, yet their emphasis remains outcome-driven. Wasehudin et al., (2024) discuss paradigms of character education in Islamic elementary schools, focusing primarily on policy frameworks. Studies on Islamic boarding schools by Muhammad et al., (2025) propose moral-pedagogical models that differ structurally from public primary education. Philosophical work by Didikin & Shumilova, (2025) offers ethical grounding without institutional empirics. Hidden curriculum analysis by Obaid et al., (2024) provides insight into implicit moral formation at advanced educational levels. Discourse studies by Widodo et al., (2025) concentrate on textual representation rather than lived practice. Together, these studies reveal a lack of micro-level institutional analysis of everyday moral formation in primary Islamic education.

Despite extensive research on Islamic education and moral development, little attention has been given to how ethical values are internalized through routine institutional practices in primary school settings. Existing studies prioritize curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, or moral outcomes while overlooking everyday interactions. The role of habituation and repetition in stabilizing moral norms remains underexplored. Primary Islamic Religious Education is rarely conceptualized as an ethical institution. This absence limits understanding of how moral subjectivity is formed at an early stage. Moreover, pedagogy and ethics are often treated as separate analytical domains. As a result, everyday classroom life remains theoretically marginal. This gap necessitates a practice-oriented institutional approach.

This study aims to examine Islamic Religious Education in a public primary school as an institutional practice of moral formation. It seeks to analyze how ethical values are internalized through routine classroom activities. The focus is placed on everyday pedagogical interaction rather than formal moral instruction alone. The study does not evaluate learning effectiveness or curricular outcomes. Instead, it explores how moral meanings are normalized through repetition and social engagement. It assumes that ethical formation occurs gradually rather than instantaneously. By adopting this

perspective, the study reframes primary Islamic education within religious studies. The research contributes a micro-institutional understanding of lived religious ethics.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine Islamic Religious Education as an institutional process of moral formation in a primary school context. A qualitative approach was chosen because ethical internalization unfolds through everyday routines and interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement, as emphasized in practice-oriented institutional analysis by Obaid et al. (2024). The case study design allowed close engagement with naturally occurring classroom practices rather than experimental intervention. The focus was placed on process rather than outcome, aligning with arguments by Widodo et al. (2025) that religious meaning is produced through lived practice. The school was treated analytically as a moral micro-institution where ethical norms are normalized through repetition. This design avoided evaluating instructional effectiveness or curricular success. Instead, it examined how moral expectations were enacted and stabilized. Such an approach ensured coherence between research design and theoretical claims.

Participants

Participants included Islamic Religious Education teachers and primary school students who were routinely involved in classroom activities. Teachers were selected due to their central role in modeling ethical behavior, a role highlighted in pedagogical ethics research by (Grande et al., 2024). Students were included to observe how moral norms were received and gradually internalized through daily interaction. Participant selection followed purposive sampling to ensure relevance to institutional moral practice. The school represented a typical public primary school implementing Islamic Religious Education as a compulsory subject. Observations included students from multiple grade levels to identify consistent ethical patterns. All participation followed institutional permission and ethical consent procedures. This participant configuration enabled analysis of moral formation as a relational process.

Instruments

Data collection employed classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to capture both explicit and implicit moral practices. Classroom observation served as the primary instrument because moral habituation occurs through routine behavior, a methodological stance supported by (Djazilan et al., 2024). Semi-structured interviews with teachers explored pedagogical intentions and ethical interpretations. Informal interviews with students provided insight into moral expectations as experienced in everyday learning. Document analysis included lesson plans and instructional materials, consistent with educational discourse approaches discussed by (Cleland et al., 2023). The combination of instruments enabled triangulation across practice, perception, and formal framing. Each instrument focused on process

rather than declarative moral claims. This strategy strengthened analytical depth and credibility.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed a thematic interpretive approach to identify patterns of ethical internalization within routine classroom practices. Observational and interview data were transcribed and coded inductively, following qualitative ethical analysis principles outlined by (Locke et al., 2022). Initial coding captured recurring actions, verbal cues, and behavioral expectations. Codes were then clustered into themes representing stages of moral habituation. Document data were analyzed to examine alignment between formal instructional goals and observed practices, reflecting hidden curriculum analysis discussed by (Park et al., 2023). Analytical memos were used to refine conceptual categories. The analysis emphasized continuity and repetition rather than isolated events. This approach enabled moral formation to be understood as an institutional process.

Table 1. Data Sources, Analytical Focus, and Conceptual Output

Data Source	Analytical Focus	Conceptual Output
Classroom observation	Routine interaction and repetition	Moral habituation patterns
Teacher interviews	Pedagogical interpretation	Ethical role modeling
Student interviews	Perceived expectations	Internalization of norms
Document analysis	Formal instructional framing	Institutional moral alignment

Table 1 illustrates how each data source contributed to distinct analytical and conceptual outcomes. Classroom observation provided access to everyday moral practices, while interviews added interpretive depth. Document analysis contextualized these practices within formal institutional expectations. Together, these sources enabled tracing the movement from routine action to ethical internalization.



Figure 1. Methodological Process of Ethical Internalization Analysis

Figure 1 visualizes the analytical logic guiding this study. Rather than treating morality as a static outcome, the figure illustrates how ethical meanings emerge through repeated institutional practices. This processual representation clarifies how empirical observations were translated into conceptual claims. It reinforces the alignment between methodological approach and theoretical framing. The figure serves as an analytical map rather than a presentation of results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results indicate that Islamic Religious Education in the observed primary school operates as a continuous moral environment rather than a discrete instructional

activity. Classroom observations reveal that ethical expectations are embedded in routine practices such as opening rituals, teacher language, and behavioral correction. Moral cues are conveyed implicitly through repetition rather than explicit moral instruction. Teachers consistently model ethical conduct through tone, gesture, and everyday decision-making. Students respond to these cues by gradually adjusting behavior without direct moral explanation. This suggests that moral learning occurs through habituation rather than cognitive transmission alone. Ethical norms become familiar through daily enactment. These findings position moral formation as an institutional process embedded in ordinary classroom life.

A second result concerns the role of repetition in stabilizing ethical expectations. Recurrent classroom routines create predictable moral structures that guide student behavior. Observations show that students anticipate ethical expectations before explicit reminders are given. This anticipatory behavior indicates internalization rather than compliance. Teacher consistency reinforces moral norms across different situations. Over time, repetition transforms external guidance into internal reference points. Ethical behavior becomes part of classroom normalcy. Moral regulation thus shifts from external enforcement to self-regulation. This pattern highlights repetition as a key mechanism of ethical internalization.

Teacher–student interaction emerged as a central site of moral formation. Teachers rarely articulate moral rules in abstract terms. Instead, moral expectations are communicated through situational responses. Praise, correction, and silence function as ethical signals. Students learn acceptable behavior through interpretive engagement. This interactional process allows moral meaning to remain context-sensitive. Ethical understanding is shaped relationally rather than prescriptively. The classroom thus functions as a moral interaction space. Moral formation unfolds through lived engagement rather than formal instruction.

Document analysis reveals alignment between formal instructional goals and observed practices. Lesson plans emphasize values such as discipline, respect, and responsibility. However, these values are operationalized implicitly in classroom routines. Ethical objectives are embedded in pedagogical structure rather than stated outcomes. This alignment reinforces moral continuity. Formal documents legitimize everyday ethical practice. Instructional materials support institutional consistency. Moral education thus operates across explicit and implicit layers. This dual structure strengthens ethical normalization.

Table 2. Observed Moral Formation Processes in Classroom Practice

Observed Practice	Ethical Function	Institutional Effect
Opening rituals	Moral orientation	Behavioral readiness
Teacher modeling	Ethical exemplification	Norm stabilization
Repetitive routines	Moral habituation	Internalization
Interactional correction	Situational ethics	Self-regulation

Table 2 summarizes how specific classroom practices function ethically. Each practice contributes to moral formation by reinforcing norms through repetition and interaction. The table illustrates how ordinary pedagogical actions generate institutional

moral effects. It clarifies the empirical basis for conceptual claims about ethical internalization.



Figure 2. Empirical Flow of Moral Formation in Primary Islamic Religious Education

Figure 2 visualizes the empirical process identified in the results. It demonstrates how moral formation unfolds sequentially through everyday practice. The figure clarifies the movement from observable routines to internalized ethics. It supports the interpretation of moral formation as a process rather than an outcome.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the view that Islamic Religious Education in primary schools operates as a form of lived ethical practice rather than a purely instructional activity. This interpretation aligns with practice-oriented approaches in religious studies that conceptualize morality as emerging through routine institutional engagement, as discussed by Obaid et al. (2024). Rather than relying on explicit moral discourse, ethical values in the observed classrooms were normalized through repeated interaction and everyday pedagogical routines. This supports arguments by Didikin and Shumilova (2025) that ethical virtues are formed through continuous social practice rather than abstract moral reasoning alone. The results challenge curriculum-centered models that frame moral education as content transmission. Instead, they demonstrate how ethical subjectivity is shaped through institutional continuity. Primary education thus emerges as a critical site of early moral stabilization. This finding extends religious studies scholarship into the domain of elementary education.

The central role of repetition identified in this study resonates with habituation-based theories of moral development. Character education research by Sافرilsyah et al. (2024) emphasizes that moral behavior is cultivated through consistent practice rather than episodic instruction. The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating how repetition operates structurally within institutional routines. Predictable classroom practices create moral expectations that students internalize over time. This process reduces dependence on explicit moral enforcement, a pattern also noted in Aristotelian approaches to moral habituation discussed by (Athanasoulis, 2024). Ethical norms become embedded in the rhythm of daily school life. Such institutional repetition transforms external guidance into internal moral reference points. This underscores the importance of routine as a moral mechanism.

Teacher modeling emerged as a decisive mechanism of moral formation, supporting pedagogical ethics literature that emphasizes educators as ethical exemplars. Research by Tohirin et al. (2025) highlights the formative influence of teachers' everyday conduct on students' moral understanding. In this study, teachers rarely articulated moral

rules abstractly, yet their behavior consistently communicated ethical expectations. This aligns with ethical role-modeling frameworks discussed by Grande et al. (2024), which emphasize enacted morality over declarative instruction. Students learned ethical norms by interpreting teachers' responses to concrete situations. Moral authority was thus exercised relationally rather than normatively. This challenges transmission-based pedagogies that rely on verbal moral instruction. The classroom functioned as an ethical community shaped by lived example.

The interactional dimension of moral learning observed in this study parallels hidden curriculum research across educational contexts. Studies by Park et al. (2023) and Rossouw and Frick (2023) demonstrate that ethical norms are often embedded implicitly within institutional environments. The present findings confirm that similar mechanisms operate in primary Islamic education. Moral cues were communicated through interactional signals such as praise, correction, and silence. These cues functioned beneath formal curricular objectives, reinforcing ethical expectations without explicit articulation. Such dynamics illustrate how morality is embedded in ordinary practice rather than formal policy. This supports institutional analyses by Rine et al. (2022) that view ethics as constitutive of organizational life. The study extends hidden curriculum theory into early religious education.

In comparison with prior Islamic education studies focusing on curriculum integration, this research offers a distinct conceptual contribution. Research by Subiyantoro et al. (2026) and Widodo et al. (2025) emphasizes textual and curricular representation of values, whereas the present study foregrounds lived ethical processes. By shifting analytical focus from content to practice, the study clarifies why moral education outcomes cannot be reduced to curricular design alone. Ethical internalization requires institutional continuity, repetition, and relational engagement. This perspective complements character education paradigms discussed by Wasehudin et al. (2024) while extending them empirically. The study bridges educational research and religious studies by situating moral formation within everyday institutional life. This conceptual reframing constitutes the study's primary novelty. It positions primary Islamic Religious Education as a foundational site of ethical subject formation.

Implications

The findings imply that Islamic Religious Education should be understood as an institutional moral environment rather than a standalone subject. Educational policymakers may need to reconsider how moral education is evaluated. Teachers play a crucial ethical role beyond content delivery. Institutional routines deserve greater attention in curriculum design. Moral education assessment should consider process, not only outcomes. Religious education research can benefit from practice-oriented approaches. This perspective broadens analytical horizons. It enhances dialogue between education and religious studies.

Limitations

This study is limited to a single primary school context. Findings cannot be generalized statistically. The qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth. Student

perspectives were interpreted contextually. Observations capture routine practice but not long-term outcomes. Cultural specificity may shape ethical interpretation. Future studies may compare multiple institutions. Despite these limits, the study offers conceptual insight.

Suggestions

Future research should examine moral formation across different school types. Comparative studies may reveal institutional variation. Longitudinal research could trace ethical internalization over time. Mixed methods may enrich understanding. Greater attention to student agency is needed. Institutional ethics should be studied beyond curriculum documents. Cross-cultural analysis would extend relevance. These directions can deepen understanding of lived religious ethics.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education in primary schools functions as an institutional practice of moral formation rather than a mere instructional subject. Moral values are internalized through everyday routines, repetitive interaction, and consistent teacher modeling embedded in classroom life. Ethical formation emerges gradually as students engage with normalized expectations rather than explicit moral directives. The findings demonstrate that moral learning operates through habituation and relational interaction within a stable institutional environment. This process highlights the significance of ordinary pedagogical practices in shaping moral subjectivity. By examining primary Islamic education as lived ethical practice, the study reframes moral education beyond curriculum and assessment frameworks. The research contributes a micro-institutional perspective to religious studies by emphasizing process over outcome. Overall, the study affirms that moral formation in education is sustained through institutional continuity and everyday practice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Muhammad Ghufon Burhanudin conceived the research idea, designed the study, and led the data collection process. He was primarily responsible for classroom observation, data interpretation, and the development of the conceptual framework. Muhammad Ghufon Burhanudin also drafted the initial manuscript and integrated revisions across all sections of the article. Rif'an Humaidi contributed to the refinement of the research design and supported data analysis through critical review of emerging themes. He provided substantial input to the theoretical discussion and strengthened the alignment between empirical findings and conceptual arguments. Rif'an Humaidi also reviewed and edited the manuscript to improve academic coherence and clarity. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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