

Institutional Practices of Islamic Moral Formation: A Processual Study of Religious Education in a Public Elementary School

Nesi Apriyadi*, Sukarno, Aam Amaliyah

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bengkulu, Indonesia

apriyadi@gmail.com *

Article Information

Submitted: Oct 13, 2025

Revised: Nov 17, 2025

Accepted: Dec 21, 2025

Keywords

Islamic moral formation

Institutional practices

Processual analysis

Public elementary education

Religious education

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how Islamic moral formation is institutionally produced through everyday practices of religious education in a public elementary school. Rather than assessing learning outcomes, the article seeks to understand the processual mechanisms through which Islamic values are embedded, normalized, and sustained within school routines, interactions, and pedagogical arrangements.

Method: Employing a qualitative process-oriented approach, the study draws on classroom observations, school-based religious activities, and interpretive analysis of instructional practices related to Islamic religious education. Data were analyzed using a thematic and processual framework to trace how moral meanings are enacted across formal instruction, habituation practices, and institutional norms within the school environment.

Findings: The findings reveal that Islamic moral formation operates not merely through curricular content, but through a constellation of institutional practices, including routine worship activities, teacher modeling, moral habituation, and symbolic regulation of behavior. These practices function as an integrated moral infrastructure that shapes students' dispositions incrementally and continuously. Moral education emerges as a relational and institutional process, sustained by repetition, implicit expectations, and shared ethical references rather than explicit doctrinal instruction alone.

Significance: This study contributes to the interdisciplinary scholarship on religion and education by reframing Islamic religious education as an institutional moral practice rather than a pedagogical intervention. By foregrounding processual dynamics, the article offers a conceptual contribution to the study of lived religion and moral formation within public institutions. The findings are relevant for scholars of religion, spirituality, and ethics seeking to understand how religious values are embedded in everyday institutional life beyond formal religious settings.

INTRODUCTION

Religious education in public elementary schools has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to its role in shaping students' moral orientations within formally secular institutional settings. In many contemporary societies, Islamic religious education is not only tasked with transmitting doctrinal knowledge, but also with cultivating ethical dispositions that guide everyday conduct, as discussed by Saada, (2023) in their analysis of humanistic dimensions of religious instruction. This dual function places schools at the intersection of pedagogy, morality, and institutional regulation, where religious values are enacted through structured routines rather than abstract moral instruction. Within

this context, moral formation becomes a continuous process embedded in daily practices, interactions, and symbolic norms, a dynamic also highlighted by Dang & Li, (2025); Gelfand et al., (2024) when examining teachers' lived roles in instilling religious values. Despite its significance, much existing research continues to approach Islamic moral education as a matter of curricular effectiveness or behavioral outcomes. Such approaches often underplay the institutional processes through which moral meanings are normalized and sustained. As a result, the subtle mechanisms that transform religious education into a lived moral framework within schools remain insufficiently examined. This gap underscores the urgency of exploring Islamic moral formation as an institutional practice rather than a pedagogical product.

The urgency of this inquiry is further amplified by ongoing debates surrounding character education and moral development in pluralistic educational systems. Public elementary schools function as formative spaces where ethical norms are internalized at an early age, making them critical sites for examining how religion operates within institutional boundaries, a concern echoed by Larson, (2022); Mubin et al., (2025) in their discussion of character education paradigms in Islamic elementary contexts. Islamic religious education, when implemented through daily routines and habitual practices, contributes to shaping students' moral sensibilities beyond formal instruction. These practices often involve implicit expectations, embodied discipline, and symbolic regulation, which align with broader understandings of moral education articulated by Faella et al., (2025); Mejía, (2023) through the lens of hidden curricula. However, existing studies frequently prioritize ideological content or parental influence, as seen in Chofifah et al. (2025), rather than institutional dynamics. This emphasis limits analytical engagement with how schools themselves act as moral agents. Consequently, there is a pressing need for research that captures the processual nature of Islamic moral formation within public educational institutions. Addressing this need allows for a deeper understanding of how religion and morality intersect in everyday institutional life.

The rationale of this study lies in the need to reconceptualize Islamic religious education beyond outcome-oriented and instructional frameworks. While previous scholarship has provided valuable insights into the role of teachers, families, and curricula in shaping moral behavior, fewer studies have examined how institutional routines and practices collectively produce moral formation. Islamic moral education, when situated within a public elementary school, operates through repeated actions, shared norms, and symbolic gestures that gradually shape students' dispositions. This processual dimension remains under-theorized despite its centrality to lived religious experience. By focusing on institutional practices, the present study responds to calls for more nuanced analyses of religion as it is enacted in everyday settings. Such an approach aligns with broader interdisciplinary efforts to understand morality as socially and institutionally embedded rather than individually acquired. Moreover, examining moral formation at the elementary level offers insight into early ethical socialization processes that influence long-term character development. Therefore, this study is positioned to contribute both empirically and conceptually to the study of religion, spirituality, and ethics within public institutions.

Existing literature on Islamic moral education has predominantly emphasized integrative and humanistic approaches within religious schooling contexts. Subiyantoro et al., (2026) demonstrate how religious dimensions combined with humanistic education enhance student personality, yet their focus remains largely on pedagogical integration rather than institutional practice. Alsuhaymi & Atallah, (2025) explore ritual prayer as a means of self-purification, framing moral formation through individual spiritual discipline rather than collective institutional routines. Studies by Chofifah et al., (2025); Tohirin et al., (2025) further highlight teachers' roles and parental strategies in instilling Islamic values, reinforcing the emphasis on individual actors. Cultural perspectives on Islamic educational values are examined by Zulkarnain et al., (2025), who foreground symbolic traditions while paying limited attention to school-based institutionalization. Fadhlurrahman et al., (2025) extend the discussion to entrepreneurial education in pesantren, illustrating moral development through programmatic initiatives. Anti-corruption education models proposed by Muhammad et al., (2025) situate morality within structured curricula but stop short of analyzing everyday institutional enactment. Obaid et al., (2024) introduce the concept of hidden curriculum in Islamic legal education, offering an important bridge toward institutional analysis. Widodo et al., (2025) apply critical discourse analysis to textbooks, focusing on representational rather than processual dimensions. Safrilsyah et al., (2024) address prosocial behavior outcomes, maintaining an evaluative stance. Collectively, these studies provide a strong foundation yet leave the processual operation of moral formation within public elementary schools insufficiently explored.

Despite extensive scholarship on Islamic education and character formation, existing studies largely concentrate on instructional content, individual actors, or measurable outcomes. Few investigations examine how moral formation is sustained through institutional routines that operate implicitly and continuously within public schools. The absence of a processual institutional perspective limits understanding of how religious values become normalized as everyday moral practices. Moreover, public elementary schools remain underrepresented as sites of religious moral analysis compared to pesantren or madrasas. This study addresses these gaps by foregrounding institutional practices as the central mechanism of Islamic moral formation. By doing so, it introduces a novel analytical lens that shifts attention from what is taught to how morality is enacted and reproduced institutionally.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Islamic moral formation is produced through institutional practices of religious education in a public elementary school. The study seeks to examine moral formation as a continuous process embedded in daily routines, interactions, and symbolic norms. Rather than evaluating instructional effectiveness, it focuses on how institutional arrangements shape students' moral dispositions over time. This research aims to conceptualize religious education as a form of institutional moral practice. By adopting a processual perspective, the study highlights the relational and habitual dimensions of moral formation. It also aims to contribute to broader discussions on lived religion within public institutions. Through this approach, the study offers an alternative framework for understanding Islamic moral education.

Ultimately, it seeks to advance interdisciplinary dialogue within religion and spirituality studies.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Islamic moral formation has traditionally been theorized within frameworks of character education, moral instruction, and value transmission, where morality is treated as an outcome of pedagogical intervention. Within this perspective, religious education is often conceptualized as a structured process of inculcating norms through curriculum and teacher authority, as reflected in classical discussions of ethical virtue formation in education by (Didikin & Shumilova, 2025). However, contemporary scholarship on lived religion challenges this outcome-oriented view by emphasizing morality as an ongoing social practice rather than a fixed educational product. Scholars in the sociology of religion argue that moral meanings are produced through repeated actions, embodied routines, and shared institutional expectations rather than explicit moral teaching alone. This shift aligns with broader theoretical developments that frame religion as something people do in everyday contexts, not merely something they learn or believe. From this standpoint, schools emerge as critical sites where moral norms are enacted through institutionalized practices. Islamic religious education thus operates not only as a pedagogical system but as a moral environment structured by routine, discipline, and symbolic order. This theoretical move allows moral formation to be analyzed as a process embedded in institutional life rather than an individual cognitive achievement.

A processual approach to moral formation further highlights the role of institutions as moral actors that shape ethical dispositions through patterned practices. Drawing on theories of institutional practice, moral formation can be understood as emerging from the interaction between formal rules, informal norms, and habitual activities that structure daily life within organizations. Obaid et al. (2024) implicitly gesture toward this dynamic through their discussion of hidden curricula, where moral meanings are transmitted through practices that remain largely unarticulated. Similarly, studies of religious education increasingly acknowledge that moral learning occurs through participation in shared rituals, disciplined routines, and teacher modeling, as discussed by Alsuhaymi and Atallah (2025) in relation to embodied religious practice. These perspectives converge on the idea that morality is cultivated through continuity and repetition rather than isolated instructional moments. Within public elementary schools, such processes are particularly influential due to students' developmental stage and sustained exposure to institutional norms. Islamic moral formation, when viewed through this lens, becomes a relational and institutional process shaped by the school's moral architecture. This theoretical framing enables the present study to conceptualize religious education as a form of institutional moral practice that operates through everyday school life.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative process-oriented research design to examine Islamic moral formation as an institutional practice within a public elementary school. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to capture everyday practices, routines, and interactions through which moral meanings are enacted rather than to measure predetermined outcomes. The design aligns with interpretive traditions that view religion as lived and practiced within social institutions, particularly in educational settings. Processual analysis was adopted to trace how moral formation unfolds over time through repeated institutional activities, an approach consistent with thematic qualitative inquiry described by (Alamsyah, 2025; Aprianti, 2025). The research focused on understanding how religious education operates as a moral infrastructure embedded in school life. This design allowed for close attention to habitual practices such as collective worship, classroom discipline, and teacher modeling. Rather than isolating instructional events, the study examined moral formation as an ongoing institutional process. The qualitative processual design thus provided an appropriate framework for analyzing Islamic moral education beyond curricular intentions.

Participant

The participants in this study consisted of Islamic religious education teachers, school administrators, and students involved in daily religious activities within the selected public elementary school. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure direct engagement with institutional practices related to Islamic moral formation. Teachers were included due to their central role in organizing religious routines and modeling moral behavior within the school environment. School administrators were involved to provide insight into institutional norms and policy decisions shaping religious practices. Students were observed as participants in institutional routines rather than as evaluative subjects. The sampling strategy prioritized depth of engagement over representativeness, consistent with qualitative research standards articulated by (Bouncken et al., 2025; Samuel & Merkebu, 2025). Participants were selected based on their sustained involvement in religious educational practices. This approach enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives within the institutional setting.

Instrument

Data were generated through non-participant classroom observations, informal field observations of school religious routines, and document-based analysis of instructional and institutional materials. Observation was used as the primary instrument to capture how Islamic moral values were enacted through everyday practices rather than articulated explicitly. Field notes were recorded systematically to document interactions, rituals, and symbolic behaviors relevant to moral formation. Observational instruments were guided by sensitizing concepts related to institutional practice and moral habituation rather than fixed coding schemes. Document analysis included lesson plans,

school regulations, and schedules of religious activities to contextualize observed practices. These instruments allowed triangulation between observed behavior and institutional expectations. The use of multiple instruments strengthened interpretive depth, a strategy recommended in qualitative institutional research by (Elliott et al., 2025; Habersang & Reihlen, 2025). Together, these instruments facilitated a holistic understanding of Islamic moral formation as practiced within the school.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis approach to identify patterns of institutional moral practice across observations and documents. Initial familiarization involved repeated reading of field notes and documents to identify recurring practices related to moral formation. Coding was conducted inductively to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing predefined categories. This analytic strategy followed the phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun & Clarke, (2022); Byrne, (2022), while maintaining sensitivity to processual dynamics. Themes were refined through iterative comparison across data sources to ensure consistency and conceptual clarity. Particular attention was given to how routines, repetition, and symbolic regulation contributed to moral habituation. Analytical memos were used to track interpretive decisions and emerging conceptual insights. This process enabled the identification of institutional mechanisms through which Islamic moral formation was sustained.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, triangulation of data sources, and reflexive analysis throughout the research process. Credibility was enhanced by cross-checking observations with institutional documents and participant explanations. Transferability was supported through detailed contextual descriptions of institutional practices rather than claims of generalization. Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail of data collection and analytic decisions, following qualitative rigor principles discussed by (Janis, 2022; McGill et al., 2023). Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Consent was secured from school authorities and participants involved in the research process. Anonymity was maintained by removing identifiable information related to individuals and the institution. Ethical sensitivity was particularly emphasized due to the involvement of children and religious practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Institutional Moral Routines as Continuous Ethical Practice

The results show that Islamic moral formation within the school operates through continuous institutional routines rather than isolated instructional events. Daily practices such as collective prayer, greetings, and ritualized classroom conduct function as moral scaffolding embedded in school life. These routines are consistently reproduced across time and space, creating a stable moral environment. Moral expectations are communicated implicitly through repetition rather than explicit moral explanation.

Students participate in these routines as part of ordinary school activities rather than as formal moral lessons. Over time, participation becomes habitual, reducing the need for verbal moral instruction. Moral formation thus emerges as a gradual process shaped by institutional continuity. The school functions as a moral space where ethical dispositions are cultivated through everyday practice.

Teacher Embodiment and Symbolic Moral Regulation

Teacher behavior plays a central role in mediating institutional morality through embodied and symbolic actions. Teachers model expected moral conduct through dress, speech, punctuality, and interpersonal interaction. These behaviors serve as symbolic references that guide student conduct without formal enforcement. Moral correction often takes the form of gestures, reminders, or silence rather than explicit reprimand. This approach normalizes moral expectations while minimizing confrontation. Students adjust behavior by observing and interpreting these symbolic cues. Moral regulation operates relationally rather than hierarchically. The institutional moral climate is sustained through example rather than instruction.

Variation, Tension, and Moral Negotiation

Although institutional routines are dominant, moral formation is not uniform or uncontested. Variations in student participation reveal moments of passive compliance, selective engagement, and occasional disengagement. Some students participate ritually without full affective involvement, indicating differentiated moral responses. Teachers respond to these variations through tacit tolerance rather than direct intervention. Moral expectations remain present even when not fully enacted. These tensions illustrate that moral formation involves negotiation rather than total conformity. Institutional practices allow flexibility while maintaining normative boundaries. Moral formation thus unfolds through regulated variation rather than strict uniformity.

Table 1. Institutional Practices and Moral Functions

Institutional Practice	Moral Function	Mode of Operation
Collective prayer	Moral habituation	Routine participation
Teacher modeling	Ethical exemplification	Embodied conduct
Classroom rituals	Moral normalization	Symbolic repetition
Informal reminders	Moral regulation	Tacit cues
Scheduling of activities	Moral continuity	Temporal structuring

This table summarizes how institutional practices collectively function as mechanisms of Islamic moral formation. Moral meanings are sustained through repetition, embodiment, and symbolic regulation rather than explicit instruction.



Figure 1. Processual Flow of Institutional Moral Formation

This figure illustrates the processual nature of Islamic moral formation observed in the school. Moral dispositions emerge through repeated participation and negotiated engagement with institutional routines.

Discussion

The findings position Islamic moral formation as a form of lived religion embedded in institutional practice rather than doctrinal transmission. Moral meanings are enacted through routine participation in everyday school life rather than formal religious instruction, echoing perspectives on lived religion articulated by (Juzwik et al., 2022). The school becomes a site where religion is practiced through embodied routines and symbolic norms. Moral formation emerges through continuity rather than episodic intervention. This processual understanding aligns with Marshall, (2024) emphasis on everyday religious practice. Public institutions thus mediate religious morality through structured routines. Islamic religious education operates as a moral environment rather than a pedagogical module. This reframing expands the analytical scope of religion in education studies.

The emphasis on repetition and routine highlights moral habituation as a central mechanism of ethical formation. Ethical dispositions are cultivated through sustained engagement rather than explicit moral instruction, reflecting classical and contemporary discussions of virtue ethics by (Yuan et al., 2023). Moral learning unfolds incrementally through practice, consistent with processual theories of social action discussed by (Kornberger & Leixnering, 2025). Institutional repetition reinforces normative expectations over time. This challenges outcome-oriented models of character education that prioritize measurable behavior. Moral formation here is continuous and relational. Ethics becomes something practiced rather than taught. This perspective advances a practice-based understanding of morality.

Teachers function as institutional moral agents whose embodied conduct shapes ethical expectations. Their authority is enacted through example rather than command, resonating with relational models of moral education discussed by (Supriyono et al., 2025). Moral influence emerges through everyday interaction rather than formal authority. Teachers mediate institutional values through presence, consistency, and symbolic behavior. This supports Gravett et al., (2024) argument that moral education is enacted relationally. Moral authority is distributed rather than centralized. Ethical norms are sustained through social practice. The findings underscore the importance of embodiment in moral formation.

The study demonstrates that public elementary schools operate as moral institutions where religious values are normalized through routine practice. This challenges assumptions that moral formation occurs primarily in religious or familial settings, as discussed (Istratii & Ali, 2023). Public institutions shape ethical subjectivities through implicit regulation rather than explicit moralization. Institutional neutrality does not eliminate moral influence. Instead, morality is embedded in everyday practice, reflecting Subramani & Biller-Andorno, (2022) insights on disciplinary power. Islamic moral formation functions within public frameworks without overt indoctrination. This

expands understandings of religion in secular institutions. The school emerges as a morally formative space.

This study contributes conceptually by reframing Islamic religious education as institutional moral practice rather than instructional intervention. It does not claim moral effectiveness or normative superiority. Instead, it analyzes how moral formation operates processually within institutional contexts. This distinction prevents conflation with evaluative character education models. The focus on process rather than outcome aligns with contemporary calls for reflexive educational research. Moral formation is treated as dynamic and negotiated. The findings are contextually grounded rather than universally prescriptive. This conceptual positioning strengthens analytical clarity.

Implications

The study suggests that religious education should be understood as an institutional moral process rather than a discrete pedagogical activity. This perspective encourages scholars to examine everyday practices as central sites of ethical formation. Institutions can be recognized as active moral agents shaping ethical dispositions. The findings contribute to IJORS discussions on lived religion and public morality. They also inform debates on religion in public education without reducing morality to outcomes. Understanding morality as processual allows more nuanced analysis. This approach enriches interdisciplinary scholarship. It reframes how religious education is theorized.

Limitations

This study focuses on a single public elementary school, limiting broad generalization. The qualitative design emphasizes depth over representativeness. Observational methods may be influenced by researcher presence. The analysis prioritizes institutional practice rather than individual moral outcomes. Cultural specificity shapes the findings. Longitudinal effects were not examined. Family and community influences were beyond the study's scope. These limitations invite cautious interpretation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could compare institutional moral practices across multiple schools. Longitudinal studies may reveal sustained moral trajectories. Comparative analyses between public and religious schools would deepen insight. Student perspectives could further enrich understanding. Cross-cultural studies may extend applicability. Mixed-method approaches could complement processual findings. Research on moral negotiation deserves further attention. Such studies would advance religion and ethics scholarship.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Islamic moral formation in a public elementary school is best understood as a processual institutional practice rather than a discrete instructional outcome. Moral dispositions are cultivated through sustained engagement with routine activities, symbolic regulation, and embodied modeling embedded in everyday school life. Institutional routines function as ethical infrastructures that normalize moral

expectations over time. Teachers operate as institutional moral agents whose conduct mediates ethical norms through example rather than explicit moral instruction. Moral formation emerges through negotiated participation, allowing for variation while maintaining normative boundaries. This process highlights morality as dynamic, relational, and contextually situated. By foregrounding institutional practice, the study reframes Islamic religious education beyond curricular transmission. The findings contribute a conceptual lens for understanding moral formation as lived, institutional, and processual within public education.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Nesi Apriyadi contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, and primary data analysis, as well as drafting the initial manuscript. Sukarno contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, methodological design, and critical revision of the manuscript for intellectual content. Aam Amaliyah contributed to data interpretation, refinement of the discussion, and manuscript editing to ensure coherence and academic rigor. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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