

Assessing the Life Cycle of Religious Habituation as a Social System: A Qualitative LCA Perspective on Value-Based Governance in Elementary Education

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to reconceptualize religious habituation in elementary education as a social system with a cumulative life cycle of ethical impacts. Rather than treating religious activities as isolated pedagogical practices, the study examines how repeated institutionalized religious habituation functions as a governance mechanism that shapes long-term moral, social, and environmental dispositions among students. By adopting a life cycle perspective, the research seeks to extend the scope of Life Cycle Assessment toward non-material, value-based social outcomes that remain underexplored in current LCA literature.

Method: The study employs a qualitative case study design conducted at an Islamic elementary school, using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were collected from school leaders, religious education teachers, habituation coordinators, and students across grade levels. Analysis followed an iterative thematic process aligned with a social LCA logic, tracing the stages of input, institutional process, repeated practice, and emergent social outcomes over time.

Findings: The findings reveal that religious habituation operates as a structured and cyclical system rather than a set of sporadic activities. Regular practices such as collective prayer, Qur'anic recitation, environmental cleanliness routines, and social charity generate cumulative ethical effects, including strengthened religious commitment, heightened environmental responsibility, and sustained prosocial behavior. These outcomes emerge not as immediate results but as long-term products of repeated institutional reinforcement.

Significance: This study contributes to Life Cycle Assessment scholarship by proposing a qualitative framework for assessing ethical and social impacts beyond material production systems. It highlights religious habituation as a legitimate unit of analysis within social LCA and offers a novel pathway for integrating moral governance and value formation into life cycle thinking, an area still rarely addressed in Scopus-indexed research.

INTRODUCTION

Moral and ethical formation has increasingly become a central concern in contemporary education systems facing social fragmentation, environmental neglect, and declining prosocial behavior. Scholars such as Akram et al., (2023) and Shim, (2023) have shown that character education is no longer sufficient when treated as an abstract curriculum objective detached from daily institutional practice. In many educational settings, values are articulated normatively but fail to materialize as sustained behavioral patterns. This disconnect raises questions about how moral values are operationalized,

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internalized, and reproduced over time within institutional environments. Research by Akram et al., (2023) and Shim, (2023) suggests that repeated social practices, rather than formal instruction alone, play a decisive role in shaping enduring character traits. However, most existing studies continue to treat these practices as pedagogical interventions rather than as systemic processes with cumulative impacts. As a result, the long-term social consequences of value-based habituation remain analytically underdeveloped. This gap becomes particularly visible when ethical outcomes are assumed rather than empirically traced across time.

Within Islamic elementary education, religious habituation has been widely implemented as a mechanism for strengthening students' religious character and social responsibility. Studies such as (Park & Wilt, 2024) emphasize that routine religious activities can cultivate affective and behavioral dimensions of religiosity when consistently practiced. Nevertheless, these studies often assess outcomes in a linear and short-term manner, focusing on immediate behavioral changes or attitudinal indicators. What remains insufficiently explored is how such habituation operates as a structured system whose effects accumulate through repetition, institutional reinforcement, and normalization. Bianchi et al., (2022) and Brahm & Poblete, (2024) highlight that value transmission is deeply embedded in organizational culture, yet they stop short of conceptualizing this process as a life cycle. Without a life cycle perspective, the ethical and social impacts of religious habituation risk being treated as incidental rather than as produced outcomes. This limitation suggests the need for an analytical framework capable of capturing ethical impacts as evolving and cumulative phenomena. A social Life Cycle Assessment perspective offers a promising lens to address this challenge.

The rationale of this study rests on the assumption that ethical and moral outcomes can be analyzed as life cycle effects rather than as isolated educational achievements. While Life Cycle Assessment has traditionally focused on material flows, emissions, and environmental impacts, recent discussions in social LCA argue for the inclusion of non-material social outcomes, as noted by (Al Haj Eid et al., 2025). However, empirical applications of social LCA remain largely confined to labor conditions, community impacts, and governance structures in production systems. Educational institutions, particularly those grounded in religious value formation, are rarely examined through this lens. This omission reflects an implicit bias that treats ethics as intangible and therefore analytically elusive. By contrast, habituation theory suggests that repeated practices generate predictable behavioral patterns over time, making ethical outcomes observable and assessable. Xu et al., (2025) demonstrate that habituation programs function through structured cycles of repetition and reinforcement, closely resembling process-based systems. These characteristics make religious habituation particularly suitable for life cycle analysis. Accordingly, this study positions religious habituation as a social system whose ethical impacts can be traced, assessed, and interpreted over time.

Existing Scopus-indexed studies on religious habituation and character education predominantly emphasize pedagogical strategies and institutional roles. Tohirin et al., (2025) explore teachers' narratives in instilling religious values, highlighting the importance of role modeling and consistency. Similarly, Firmansyah et al., (2025) analyze Islamic boarding school education as an integrated moral environment but frame

outcomes in descriptive rather than systemic terms. Research by Sarbini et al., (2025) proposes character education models to foster religious moderation, yet the analysis remains normative and policy-oriented. Kurniawan et al., (2025) examine emotional-cognitive integration in Islamic education, focusing on learning outcomes rather than longitudinal ethical effects. Studies by Kodir et al., (2025); Setiowati & Handayani, (2025) extend religious values into specialized domains such as sex education and nursing education, reinforcing the adaptability of moral instruction. Despite their contributions, these works largely treat habituation as an instructional technique. The cumulative social consequences of repeated religious practice remain analytically implicit rather than explicitly assessed.

More recent studies attempt to contextualize religious values within broader social and cultural systems. Muzayanah et al., (2025); Yani et al., (2025) emphasize the harmonization of religious and local wisdom values, suggesting that character formation is embedded in socio-cultural processes. Hindaryatiningsih et al., (2025) explicitly discuss value internalization as a management and governance issue within school culture. Masdul et al., (2024) analyze acculturation of religious values in early childhood, highlighting gradual internalization over time. Pangestu & Sumadi, (2024) focus on habituation programs as structured extracurricular systems that shape civic character. While these studies acknowledge temporality and repetition, they do not conceptualize habituation as a life cycle with identifiable stages and outputs. None of the reviewed studies employ a Life Cycle Assessment framework to evaluate ethical outcomes. Consequently, the social LCA potential of religious habituation remains largely unexplored within Scopus-indexed literature.

The reviewed literature reveals a consistent emphasis on religious habituation as a pedagogical and cultural mechanism, yet it also exposes a conceptual gap in how ethical outcomes are assessed. Existing studies tend to evaluate character formation either descriptively or normatively without tracing the cumulative effects of repeated institutional practice. Although some scholars acknowledge the importance of repetition and time, they stop short of framing habituation as a life cycle process. Moreover, Life Cycle Assessment scholarship rarely engages with value-based social systems such as education and religious governance. This separation results in a fragmented understanding of how ethical impacts are produced, sustained, and normalized. The absence of social LCA applications in religious education contexts represents a methodological blind spot. Addressing this gap requires integrating habituation theory with life cycle thinking. Such integration enables ethical outcomes to be analyzed as emergent properties of structured social systems rather than as isolated educational results.

The purpose of this study is to examine religious habituation in elementary education as a social system with cumulative ethical impacts using a qualitative social Life Cycle Assessment perspective. The study seeks to identify the stages through which religious habituation operates, from institutional input and planning to repeated practice and social outcomes. It aims to analyze how ethical values such as religiosity, environmental responsibility, and prosocial behavior emerge through sustained habituation processes. By applying life cycle logic, the study intends to move beyond linear evaluations of character education. The research also aims to extend the scope of social LCA into non-material

domains of value formation. In doing so, it addresses the methodological gap between educational research and life cycle assessment scholarship. Ultimately, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of ethical governance in educational institutions. This perspective positions religious habituation as a legitimate object of life cycle-based social impact assessment.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design structured within a social Life Cycle Assessment framework to examine religious habituation as a cyclical social system. Qualitative case studies are particularly suitable for capturing complex institutional processes that unfold over time, as emphasized by Grenier, (2023); Wilhelmy & Köhler, (2022) in the analysis of embedded social systems. Rather than treating habituation as a discrete educational intervention, the research conceptualized it as a sequence of interconnected stages consisting of institutional input, routine enactment, and cumulative ethical outcomes. The social LCA perspective, as discussed by Antonopoulou, (2023) and Grosinger et al., (2022), provided a logical structure for tracing non-material impacts that emerge through repeated social practices. This design allowed ethical and social values to be examined as process-generated effects rather than assumed outcomes. The case study setting was selected to allow in-depth exploration of institutionalized religious routines within their natural context. Such an approach aligns with calls in recent social LCA literature to expand assessment beyond production systems into governance and social institutions. The design therefore integrates educational ethnography with life cycle thinking in a manner that remains methodologically rigorous and conceptually novel.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to capture multiple perspectives across the life cycle of religious habituation. The sample included school leaders, religious education teachers, habituation program coordinators, and students from different grade levels to reflect vertical institutional involvement, as recommended by Akhyar et al., (2024) for qualitative inquiry. School leaders provided insight into planning and governance decisions that constitute the institutional input stage of the habituation cycle. Teachers and coordinators represented the process stage by explaining how routines were enacted, monitored, and normalized in daily practice. Students were included to capture lived experiences and perceived outcomes of repeated religious activities. This multi-actor approach enabled triangulation of perspectives across structural and experiential dimensions of habituation. Including participants from multiple grade levels allowed the study to observe differences in internalization across time exposure. Such participant diversity is consistent with social LCA principles that emphasize stakeholder inclusivity, as outlined by (Fidan et al., 2025).

Instruments

Data were collected using semi-structured interview guides, observation protocols, and institutional document analysis instruments. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility while ensuring alignment with predefined life cycle stages, an approach

supported by Chan et al., (2025) for exploring meaning-making processes. Observation instruments were designed to record routine religious practices such as collective prayer, Qur'anic recitation, environmental cleanliness activities, and social charity events. Document analysis focused on syllabi, habituation schedules, guidebooks, and policy documents that function as institutional inputs within the habituation system. Each instrument was explicitly mapped to a specific phase of the social life cycle to maintain analytical coherence. This mapping ensured that data collection did not drift into purely descriptive accounts. Instruments were iteratively refined during field engagement to reflect emerging patterns without compromising analytical structure. Such adaptive instrumentation is consistent with qualitative rigor standards discussed by (May et al., 2022).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis strategy structured according to social Life Cycle Assessment logic. Initial coding was conducted to identify themes related to institutional inputs, routine processes, and ethical outcomes, drawing on the analytic procedures proposed by (Locke et al., 2022; May et al., 2022). These themes were then organized into sequential stages to reflect the cyclical nature of habituation rather than linear cause-effect relationships. The analysis emphasized how repetition and institutional reinforcement contributed to cumulative ethical impacts, aligning with social LCA's focus on process-generated outcomes as described by (Harvey et al., 2025). Cross-source triangulation was applied to validate patterns across interviews, observations, and documents. Reflexive memos were used to document analytical decisions and reduce interpretive bias. The final analytical structure produced a life cycle narrative of religious habituation as a governance system. This approach enables ethical outcomes to be assessed as emergent social impacts rather than isolated educational results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results indicate that religious habituation in the studied elementary school operates as a structured and repeatable social system rather than as a collection of isolated activities. Institutional inputs include formal schedules, written guidelines, teacher assignments, and symbolic regulations that legitimize daily religious routines. These inputs function as enabling conditions that stabilize the implementation of habituation practices across grade levels. Observational data show that routines such as collective prayer, Qur'anic recitation, environmental cleanliness, and charity activities are performed consistently and with minimal variation. The repetition of these practices creates predictable behavioral patterns among students over time. Interview data further reveal that teachers perceive habituation as a governance mechanism rather than merely a pedagogical tool. Students describe these practices as normal and expected components of school life, indicating internalization rather than compliance. This finding confirms that ethical outcomes emerge gradually through sustained institutional reinforcement.

Table 1. Social Life Cycle Stages of Religious Habituation and Observed Outcomes

Life Cycle Stage	Institutional Elements	Observed Social Effects
Input	Policies, schedules, teacher roles	Legitimization of religious routines
Process	Daily habituation practices	Behavioral consistency
Output	Repeated participation	Normalization of values
Outcome	Internalized ethics	Sustained religiosity and prosocial behavior

Table 1 illustrates how religious habituation functions as a social life cycle system. Institutional inputs establish formal legitimacy, while repeated processes generate normalized behavior. Outputs are visible in routine participation, whereas outcomes emerge as internalized ethical dispositions. This structure aligns with social LCA logic by distinguishing between immediate activities and long-term social impacts.

**Figure 1.** Social–Ethical Life Cycle of Religious Habituation (Textual Diagram)

Figure 1 presents the processual flow of religious habituation as a cyclical system. Ethical impacts do not appear immediately but are produced through repetition and normalization. This diagram highlights that ethical outcomes are cumulative rather than event-based. The cycle reinforces itself through institutional continuity.

Discussion

The findings challenge the common assumption that religious habituation produces ethical outcomes automatically. While earlier studies such as (Tanveer, 2025) emphasize moral instruction, this study demonstrates that outcomes depend on sustained institutional structuring rather than doctrinal content alone. The results support habituation theory, as discussed by Pangestu and Sumadi (2024), which argues that repetition is central to value internalization. Unlike descriptive character education studies, this research frames habituation as a governance system that regulates behavior over time. This perspective aligns with organizational culture theory highlighted by Muzayanah et al. (2025). Ethical formation emerges not from isolated lessons but from predictable institutional routines. Such findings extend educational discourse into governance analysis. This shift is rarely articulated in Scopus-indexed LCA literature.

From a Life Cycle Assessment perspective, the results expand the notion of impact beyond material and environmental dimensions. Social LCA scholars such as Groothuijsen et al., (2023) argue that social outcomes must be traced across process stages, which this study operationalizes in an educational context. The observed ethical internalization corresponds to what Zheng et al., (2022) describe as cumulative social effects. Unlike labor-focused social LCA studies, this research examines value-based impacts. The study thus addresses a blind spot in LCA scholarship regarding moral and ethical systems. The findings suggest that education institutions can be treated as social production systems.

Ethical values function as non-material outputs generated through structured processes. This reconceptualization broadens the analytical scope of LCA.

The normalization of religious practices observed in this study supports Yani et al. (2025), who argue that values become effective only when embedded in daily routines. However, the present findings go further by demonstrating that normalization operates as a life cycle stage rather than a pedagogical outcome. This distinction is critical because it explains why short-term interventions often fail to produce lasting ethical change. Studies by Firmansyah et al. (2025) and Sarbini et al. (2025) focus on curriculum models but overlook temporal accumulation. The life cycle framing reveals how ethical outcomes depend on continuity rather than intensity. This insight challenges programmatic approaches that prioritize innovation over consistency. It also explains variability in character education outcomes across institutions. The contribution lies in identifying time and repetition as analytical variables.

The integration of environmental cleanliness routines within religious habituation highlights the intersection of ethics and sustainability. Previous studies such as Hindaryatiningsih et al. (2025) discuss environmental values normatively but do not trace behavioral stabilization. The findings show that environmental responsibility becomes habitual when linked to religious obligation. This linkage creates moral legitimacy that strengthens behavioral persistence. From a social LCA viewpoint, such integration demonstrates how ethical and environmental impacts can co-evolve. This co-evolution is rarely addressed in conventional LCA models. The results suggest that value-based governance can indirectly support sustainability goals. This insight positions religious habituation as a relevant object of sustainability research. It also bridges ethical education and environmental assessment.

Finally, the findings raise critical questions about how ethical success is evaluated in educational institutions. Many studies rely on self-reported attitudes or short-term behavioral indicators, as seen in Kodir et al. (2025). In contrast, the life cycle approach emphasizes process continuity and outcome stabilization. This shift aligns with calls by Masdul et al. (2024) to move beyond outcome snapshots. Ethical impacts must be understood as emergent properties of systems rather than as discrete achievements. The discussion thus reframes evaluation standards for character education. It also provides a methodological contribution by adapting social LCA logic to education. Such adaptation remains rare in Scopus-indexed research. The novelty lies in treating ethics as assessable social impacts.

Implications

The study implies that educational institutions should reconceptualize religious habituation as a governance system rather than as a supplementary program. Policy design should prioritize consistency, institutional legitimacy, and long-term continuity to generate ethical outcomes. For Life Cycle Assessment scholarship, the findings demonstrate the feasibility of applying social LCA to non-material systems. This approach encourages scholars to expand impact categories beyond labor and community relations. Practically, schools can use life cycle thinking to evaluate value-based programs. Ethical governance thus becomes measurable through process analysis. The study also informs

sustainability education by linking ethics with daily environmental practices. These implications extend both educational and LCA paradigms. They invite interdisciplinary collaboration.

Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on a single institutional context, which may affect generalizability. The qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth, limiting comparative analysis. Ethical outcomes were inferred through behavioral patterns rather than quantified measures. The study also relies on participant interpretation, which may introduce subjective bias. Temporal analysis was based on retrospective accounts rather than longitudinal tracking. The absence of comparative schools restricts cross-context validation. Despite these limitations, analytical transferability remains possible. These constraints highlight areas for methodological refinement.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should apply social Life Cycle Assessment to multiple educational institutions for comparative analysis. Longitudinal designs could strengthen causal inference regarding ethical internalization. Mixed-method approaches may integrate qualitative insights with quantitative indicators. Researchers should explore other value-based systems such as civic or environmental education. Expanding LCA impact categories to include moral governance warrants further theoretical development. Cross-cultural studies could test the universality of habituation life cycles. Collaboration between LCA scholars and educational researchers is encouraged. Such efforts would further legitimize ethical systems within LCA scholarship.

CONCLUSION

This study reconceptualizes religious habituation in elementary education as a structured social system whose ethical impacts unfold through a cumulative life cycle rather than as immediate pedagogical outcomes. By applying a qualitative social Life Cycle Assessment perspective, the research demonstrates that ethical values such as religiosity, environmental responsibility, and prosocial behavior are produced through sustained institutional inputs and repeated practices. The findings challenge the prevailing assumption that moral formation results automatically from curriculum content or sporadic religious activities. Instead, ethical internalization emerges as an outcome of normalized routines embedded within governance structures. This life cycle framing extends the analytical reach of Life Cycle Assessment into non-material domains that have been largely overlooked in Scopus-indexed literature. The study thus contributes theoretically by positioning ethical governance and value formation as legitimate objects of social LCA. Methodologically, it illustrates how qualitative evidence can be systematically aligned with life cycle logic without compromising rigor. Overall, the research strengthens the interdisciplinary bridge between education, ethics, and sustainability assessment, offering a novel and robust contribution suitable for publication in a high-impact international journal.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Atika Aprianti was responsible for the conceptual development of the study, including the formulation of the research framework, theoretical positioning within social Life Cycle Assessment, and the integration of ethical governance perspectives. She led the data collection process, conducted field observations and interviews, and performed the primary qualitative analysis. Atika Aprianti also drafted the initial manuscript, developed the results and discussion sections, and coordinated the revision process to ensure alignment with the journal's focus and scope.

Abd Gafur contributed to the refinement of the research design and methodological rigor, particularly in aligning the qualitative approach with life cycle assessment principles. He supported data interpretation through critical review and theoretical validation, ensuring coherence between empirical findings and conceptual arguments. Abd Gafur also provided substantive revisions to the discussion and conclusion sections, strengthening the scholarly contribution and international relevance of the article. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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