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## Implementation of Organizational Culture in Building Students' Character: A Qualitative Study in Religious-Based Junior High Schools

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### Abstract

Organizational culture is one of the key factors determining the success of educational institutions, as it influences the behavior, values, and commitment of all school members. This study aims to describe the implementation of organizational culture in fostering students' character development in religion-based junior high schools. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals and teachers from two junior high schools. Data analysis was conducted using the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that organizational culture is built upon religious values, character development, discipline, social responsibility, and achievement, which are internalized through leadership role modeling, habitual practices, school programs, and teachers' professional development. Principals play a pivotal role as change agents by conducting supervision, monitoring, evaluation, and providing continuous motivation to all school members. The implementation of organizational culture is supported by effective communication, teachers' commitment, and parental involvement, while challenges arise from differences in family backgrounds, inconsistent implementation of cultural values, and limited resources. The study concludes that a strong organizational culture significantly strengthens character education and contributes to improving overall school quality.

### Keywords

Organizational Culture, Character Education, School Leadership, Religion-Based School, Qualitative Study



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## INTRODUCTION

The development of the world of education in the era of globalization and digital transformation requires schools to be not only oriented towards academic achievement, but

also able to form the character of students with integrity, adaptive, and competitiveness. The challenges of 21st century education are not only related to the mastery of academic competence, but also the ability to think critically, collaborate, communicate, creativity, and character formation which are the foundation of community life. The UNESCO *World Education Statistics 2024* report shows that quality education (*Sustainable Development Goal 4*) is still a global challenge that requires strengthening school leadership, teacher quality, learning environment, and effective governance of educational organizations. The report also emphasizes that the quality of the learning environment and school governance are important components in improving the quality of education in a sustainable manner.

School organizational culture is a set of values, norms, beliefs, and habits that are shared by all school residents in carrying out educational activities. This culture is a guideline of behavior that influences the way all members of the organization think, behave, and act, from school principals, teachers, education staff, to students. According to Edgar H. Schein (2017), organizational culture is a pattern of basic assumptions learned by a group when facing various problems of external adaptation and internal integration so that it is considered the right way to be understood and applied by new members of the organization. In the context of education, organizational culture is the identity of the school that distinguishes the characteristics of one school from another, as well as the foundation in building a conducive, collaborative, and oriented learning climate that improves the quality of education.

The urgency of organizational culture is further strengthened when it is associated with the role of school leadership. UNESCO's *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/2025* emphasizes that school leadership is one of the most determining factors for the success of the learning process. The report shows that only about one-third of the world's principal training programs have comprehensively covered the four key leadership dimensions: setting organizational direction, focusing on learning, building collaboration, and developing human resources. In addition, various international studies summarized in the report show that the contribution of school principals to improving student learning outcomes can reach 27% of the variation in learning outcomes influenced by factors that are within the school's control, after the quality of teachers.

Various studies also show that organizational culture has a close relationship with the effectiveness of educational delivery. A strong organizational culture is able to increase teacher job satisfaction, strengthen organizational commitment, create effective collaboration between school residents, and encourage improvement in the quality of learning and student achievement. Research on school organizational culture in Indonesia involving 93 school principals shows that school organizational culture is dominated by collaborative culture (*clan culture*) and hierarchical culture (*hierarchy culture*), which emphasizes cooperation, organizational stability, coordination, and innovation in the implementation of education. The findings show that organizational culture is one of the important social capital in improving school effectiveness.

Although various studies have examined the relationship between organizational culture and teacher performance, school effectiveness, and educational leadership, most studies still focus on quantitative approaches that examine the relationship between variables. Studies that reveal in depth the process of implementing organizational culture in school life, especially in religious-based junior high schools, are still relatively limited. In fact, religious-based schools have distinctive cultural characteristics because they integrate

religious values into all educational activities, both through the learning process, habituation, and example of school residents. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of organizational culture in religious-based junior high schools through the perspective of principals and teachers. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of educational organizational culture as well as a practical reference for school principals, teachers, and education managers in strengthening organizational culture as a strategy to improve school quality and form student character.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of organizational culture in religious-based junior high schools. The research was carried out at YPM 3 Taman Junior High School and Integrated Bilingual Junior High School 2 Krian, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. The research subjects consist of principals, vice principals, and teachers who are directly involved in planning, implementing, and strengthening organizational culture in schools. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques with the criteria of having knowledge, experience, and active involvement in the implementation of organizational culture. Based on these criteria, the study involved eight informants, consisting of two principals, two deputy principals, and four teachers. At SMP YPM 3 Taman, the informants included one principal, deputy principal for student affairs, deputy principal for facilities and infrastructure, and one teacher. Meanwhile, at Krian Integrated Bilingual Junior High School 2, the informants consisted of one principal and three teachers. Research data was obtained through *in-depth interviews* using semi-structured interview guidelines so that it allows researchers to comprehensively explore information about organizational cultural values, cultural internalization strategies, the role of principals' leadership, and factors that support and hinder the implementation of organizational culture in school life. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted a review of school documents as supporting data to strengthen the research results.

The data obtained was analyzed interactively using a qualitative data analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which included three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. At the data reduction stage, the results of the interviews are transcribed, classified, and coded based on themes related to the focus of the research. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of a matrix, descriptive narrative, and graphical visualization to facilitate the process of identifying patterns, relationships between themes, and interpreting research results. The final stage is carried out by drawing conclusions through a verification process during the research so that findings consistent with field data are obtained. To ensure the credibility of the research results, source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from school principals, deputy principals, and teachers, technical triangulation through matching interview results with supporting documents, and member checking of several informants to ensure that the results of the researcher's interpretation were in accordance with the information conveyed by the informant.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of Organizational Cultural Values as the Foundation for Student Character Formation**

The results of the interviews showed that religious values were the most dominant

organizational culture with a percentage of 95%, followed by discipline (90%), responsibility (88%), cooperation (85%), and care (82%). This shows that the school organizational culture is strongly oriented towards the formation of religious character as the main foundation in all school activities. Other values have also been well implemented although the intensity is slightly lower (Figure 1 A). The results of the interview showed that the principal and teachers explained that the value was not just an organizational slogan, but was realized through various routine activities that became the school's culture, such as the reading of the Qur'an before learning, muroja'ah, book learning, habituation of Arabic and English, and the habituation of discipline in every school activity.

The findings show that organizational culture has become the identity of the school. The values that the organization has been accepted as a common guideline so as to form the behavior pattern of all school residents. In Schein's (2021) perspective, organizational culture consists of three levels, namely artifacts, *espoused values*, and *basic assumptions*. The religious habituation activities found in this study are cultural artifacts, while religious values, character, and discipline are forms of mutually agreed organizational values. Interestingly, all informants delivered almost uniform answers about the school's core values. The similarity of perceptions indicates that the organizational culture has reached a high level of internalization. This condition shows the existence of a strong organizational culture, which is an organizational culture that is able to unite the thinking of all members of the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2023).

The findings of this study support the results of Hallinger's (2020) research which explains that schools with a strong organizational culture tend to have higher teacher commitment, a positive work climate, and better learning quality. Similarly, research by Leithwood et al. (2020) found that school culture is a mediator between the principal's leadership and the improvement of the quality of education. However, this study showed different characteristics from most previous studies. If Hallinger's research is conducted more in public schools, then the organizational culture in the schools studied more emphasizes the religious dimension as the main value of the organization. Thus, organizational culture not only functions as a behavior control mechanism, but also as a medium for internalizing religious values. This finding corroborates the view of Deal and Kennedy (2000) that a strong organizational culture always has core values that are collectively understood by all members of the organization. In the context of Islamic schools, religious values are the core values that distinguish the organization from other schools.

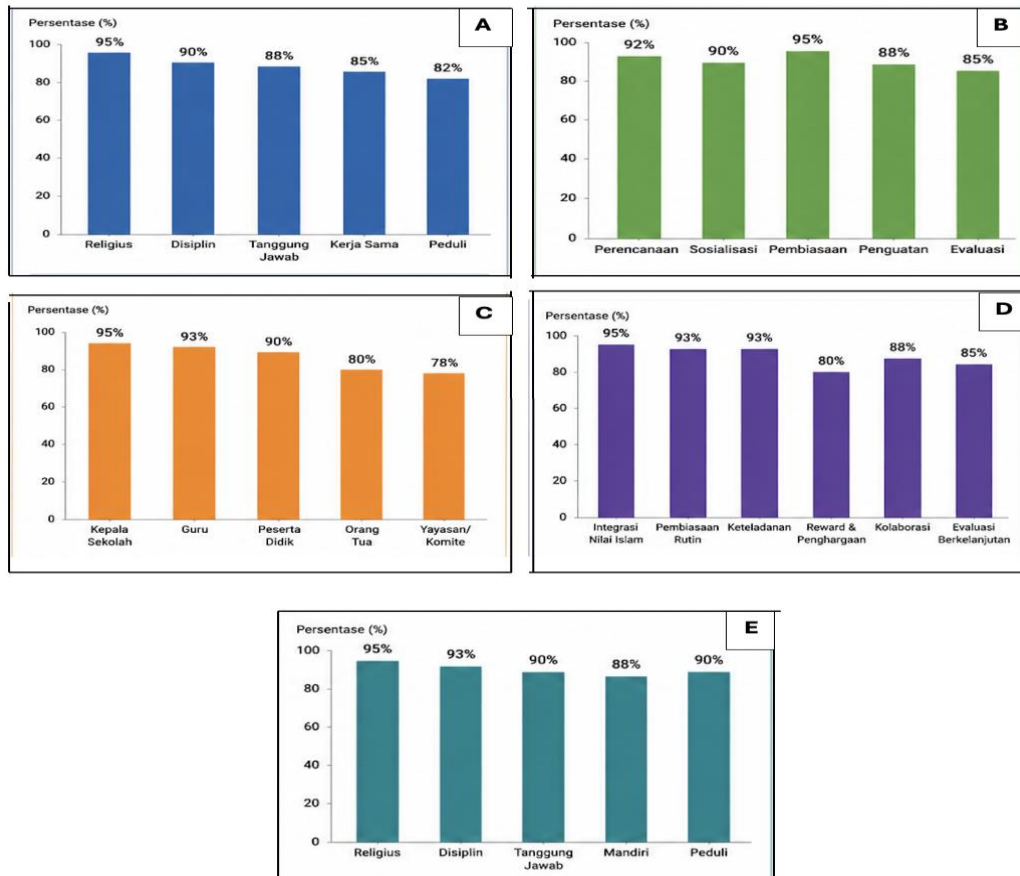


Figure 1.1 A) Organizational cultural values, B) Organizational culture implementation process, C) Role of actors in implementation, D) Organizational culture strengthening strategies, E) Impact on strengthening students' character

### Internalizing Organizational Culture Through Example and Habituation

The results of the study show that the implementation of organizational culture takes place through several stages, namely planning (92%), socialization (90%), habituation (95%), strengthening (88%), and evaluation (85%). The habituation stage obtained the highest score, indicating that the success of the implementation of organizational culture was more achieved through activities that were carried out regularly and repeatedly so that it became a habit of all school residents (Figure 1 B). The process of internalizing organizational culture is carried out systematically through various mechanisms involving all school residents. Based on the results of interviews with principals and teachers, the process began with socialization activities of organizational culture to new teachers and orientation for students from the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, organizational values are implemented through daily habituation, integration of character values in the learning process, supervision of the principal, and various school flagship programs. These programs include *Senja* (Monday Muroja'ah), *Raft* (Wednesday of the Book), and *Robe* (Friday Language) which are carried out regularly as part of the character formation of students. In addition, all informants explained that school principals and teachers consistently provide examples in the implementation of worship, time discipline, language use, and interaction with students so that organizational culture is not only understood as a formal rule, but also a habit that is carried out in daily activities. These findings show that the process of internalizing

organizational culture takes place in a sustainable manner through a combination of habituation, example, and the implementation of integrated school programs.

The findings of the study show that the success of internalizing organizational culture is more determined by consistency, example, and habituation than by the number of rules applied by schools. This indicates that organizational culture develops through real experiences experienced by school residents in every educational activity so that organizational values become part of daily behavior. The findings are in line with *the Social Learning Theory* put forward by Bandura (1986), which explains that individuals learn behavior through the process of observing figures who are considered role models. In this study, school principals and teachers play the role of role models that display religious, disciplined, and responsible behavior so that students can more easily internalize these values. In addition, the results of this study also support the concept of organizational socialization from Schein (2021) who states that organizational culture is learned through the socialization process, interaction with organizational members, and experience participating in organizational activities. According to the author, the uniformity of informants' perceptions of organizational culture shows that the process of socialization, orientation, and habituation has taken place effectively so that it is able to form a joint commitment to school values.

The results of this study reinforce the findings of Berkovich (2018) and Fullan (2020) who explain that school culture is built through a combination of leadership, social interaction, habituation, and collaboration of all school residents in a sustainable manner, not just through formal policies. However, this study has novelty because it finds that the internalization of organizational culture in religious-based schools is strengthened through the innovation of school habituation programs, namely *Senja* (Monday Muroja'ah), *Rakit* (Wednesday Kitab), and *Robah* (Friday Language). These programs are not only a school routine, but also function as a medium for inheriting religious values, discipline, language skills, and Islamic character that are the identity of the organization. These findings are in line with the view of Deal and Peterson (2016) that an effective school culture is realized through traditions, rituals, and organizational symbols that are carried out consistently. Therefore, this study enriches the study of organizational culture by showing that the innovation of habituation programs that are in accordance with the characteristics of the school can be an effective strategy to strengthen the internalization of organizational culture while supporting the formation of students' character in a sustainable manner.

### **Transformational Leadership as a Driver of Organizational Culture**

The results of the study show that school principals have the greatest role (95%) as role models, directors, and policy makers. Furthermore, teachers play a very important role (93%) as implementers of organizational culture in the classroom. Students (90%) are the main subjects who practice the culture, while parents (80%) and foundations/committees (78%) function as supporters. These findings suggest that the success of organizational culture is highly dependent on principal's leadership and teacher commitment (Figure 1 C). Based on the results of the interviews, the role of the principal is realized through various leadership activities, such as academic supervision, monitoring of the learning process, routine evaluation, spiritual coaching, motivation to teachers, facilitation of competency development, and giving awards to teachers who show high performance and dedication. The informant also explained that the principal consistently provides an example in discipline, the implementation of worship, communication, and commitment to the

implementation of school cultural programs. In addition to carrying out administrative functions, the principal plays an active role in directing all school residents so that the cultural values of the organization can be implemented consistently in every educational activity. The findings show that the principal's leadership is the main factor driving the implementation of organizational culture in the two schools studied.

The findings of the study show that school principals have a strategic role as the main driver in building and maintaining the school organizational culture. This role is realized through academic supervision, learning monitoring, routine evaluation, spiritual coaching, motivation, and appreciation to teachers. These results indicate that the leadership of school principals is not only oriented to administrative functions, but also acts as an agent of change that is able to influence the behavior and commitment of all school residents. The findings are in line with the transformational leadership theory of Bass and Avolio (1994), which emphasizes four main dimensions, namely *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration*. These four dimensions are reflected in the example of school principals, providing motivation, teacher professional development, and mentoring that is carried out on an ongoing basis. According to the author, the successful implementation of organizational culture occurs because the principal is able to integrate leadership functions with character development so that organizational values are not only understood, but also practiced by all school residents.

The results of this study support the findings of Leithwood et al. (2020) who stated that the leadership of the principal is an important factor after the quality of teachers in improving the quality of education through strengthening the organizational culture and school climate. In addition, this finding is also in line with Schein (2021) who explains that leaders are the main actors in the formation and maintenance of organizational culture through example, socialization, and internalization of values. Nevertheless, this study showed different characteristics from previous research because the principal's leadership in religious-based schools was not only geared towards improving organizational effectiveness, but also reinforcing religious values as the core of school culture. These findings show that the integration of transformational leadership with religious values is an important factor in creating a strong organizational culture while supporting the formation of students' character in a sustainable manner.

### **Professional Development of Teachers as a Strategy to Maintain Organizational Culture**

The results of the study showed that the most effective strategy was the integration of Islamic values into school activities (95%). In addition, regular habituation (93%) and example (93%) are also the main strategies. Collaboration received an 88% score, 85% continuous evaluation, while rewards and rewards (80%) were the lowest implemented strategies. This means that schools prioritize habituation and exemplary approaches rather than awarding awards (Figure 1 D). Based on the results of the interviews, the programs carried out include workshops, *In House Training (IHT)*, academic supervision, mentoring for new teachers (*mentoring*), and performance evaluations that are carried out periodically. The informant explained that the activity not only aims to improve teachers' pedagogic and professional competence, but also serves as a medium to strengthen understanding of organizational cultural values applied in schools. Thus, the professional development process is an integrated part of the implementation of organizational culture in supporting the improvement of the quality of learning.

The findings of the study show that teacher professional development is an important

strategy in maintaining the sustainability of the school organizational culture. Organizational culture is not only maintained through formal rules or policies, but also through improving teachers' competencies to be able to implement organizational values consistently in the learning process. This finding is in line with the concept of *learning organization* put forward by Peter Senge (2006), who asserts that organizations that are able to survive are organizations that continue to develop the capacity of their members to learn and adapt to change. According to the author, the implementation of workshops, IHT, academic supervision, and mentoring regularly shows the school's commitment to building a learning culture that supports competency improvement while strengthening organizational culture.

The results of this study also support the research of Day et al. (2020) who stated that sustainable teacher professional development contributes to increasing organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and learning quality. The findings show that there is a suitability that school investment in human resource development is an important factor in maintaining organizational effectiveness. However, this study makes a different contribution because it shows that teachers' professional development is not only directed at improving academic competence, but also as a means of internalizing religious values and school culture. Thus, organizational culture develops through synergy between professional learning and value habituation, so as to strengthen the quality of teachers while building a sustainable organizational character.

#### **Impact on Strengthening Students' Character**

The results of the study show that the implementation of organizational culture has a positive impact on the formation of students' character. The greatest impact was seen on religious character (95%) and discipline (93%). In addition, responsibility (90%), care (90%), and independence (88%) have also been strengthened. This shows that the implementation of organizational culture contributes significantly to the formation of students' character as a whole (Figure 1 E). These findings indicate that an organizational culture built through the integration of school values, habituation, example, and continuous reinforcement is able to shape positive behavior of students in daily life. The dominance of religious character shows that the school environment has succeeded in instilling religious values as the main foundation for character formation, while the high values of discipline, responsibility, care, and independence reflect the success of the school in creating a conducive learning culture and supporting the holistic development of students' character.

The findings are in line with the theory of organizational culture which states that values, norms, and habits applied consistently will shape individual behavior in the organization. According to Edgar H. Schein (2017), a strong organizational culture will influence the mindset, attitudes, and actions of organizational members through the process of learning and internalizing values. In the context of education, these results also support the policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on Strengthening Character Education (PPK), which emphasizes that the formation of students' character takes place effectively through habituation, example, and the creation of a positive school culture. Therefore, the more consistent the organizational culture is applied by all school residents, the greater their contribution in forming students who are religious, disciplined, responsible, independent, and caring for their social environment.

#### **Supporting Factors and Obstacles to the Implementation of Organizational Culture**

The results of the study show that the implementation of organizational culture is influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors originating from the internal and external

environment of the school. The main supporting factors include principal leadership (95%), teacher commitment (93%), parental support (88%), structured school programs (85%), and availability of facilities and infrastructure (75%). Based on the results of the interviews, the leadership of the principal plays an important role in providing direction, example, and decision-making that supports the implementation of organizational culture. In addition, effective organizational communication, cooperation between educators, and the implementation of a reward system for teachers and students also strengthen the commitment of school residents in implementing organizational values. On the other hand, the inhibiting factors that are still faced include the lack of consistency of some school residents in implementing organizational culture (70%), the influence of the environment outside the school (65%), differences in students' backgrounds (60%), budget limitations (50%), and teachers' workload (40%) (Figure 2). These findings show that the success of the implementation of organizational culture is not only determined by the internal strengths of the school, but also influenced by the external environmental conditions that support the process of internalizing organizational values.

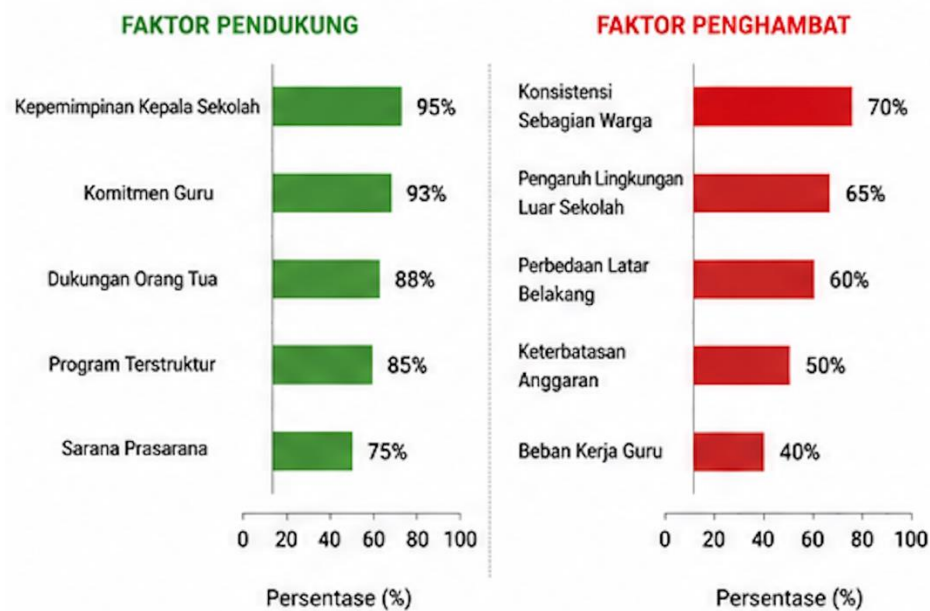


Figure 2. Factors that support and inhibit the implementation of organizational culture

The findings show that the implementation of organizational culture is the result of interaction between the school's internal system and the external environment in which students develop. The success of the organization's culture does not only depend on the principal's leadership and teacher commitment, but also requires the support of the family and the community so that the values instilled in the school can be applied consistently in daily life. On the other hand, the influence of the environment outside the school, differences in students' backgrounds, and limited resources can hinder the sustainability of the implementation of organizational culture. The results of this study are in line with *the Ecological Systems Theory* put forward by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which explains that individual development is influenced by the interaction of various environments, such as family, school, and community. Thus, the harmony of values between school and family is an important factor in strengthening the internalization of organizational culture while shaping the character of students in a sustainable manner.

In addition to leadership and environmental support, this study shows that the

implementation of the reward system contributes to maintaining the motivation and commitment of teachers and students to maintain organizational culture. These findings support the Reinforcement Theory put forward by B. F. Skinner (1953), which states that behaviors that obtain positive reinforcement tend to be maintained and repeated. The results of this study are also in line with the research of Nguyen et al. (2022) which found that the reward system has a positive effect on organizational commitment and teacher work motivation. However, this study shows that the effectiveness of the award cannot stand alone, but must be supported by strong leadership, commitment of all school residents, parental involvement, structured programs, and a conducive environment. Therefore, strengthening organizational culture requires continuous synergy between schools, families, and communities so that obstacles in the form of inconsistencies in the implementation of culture, external environmental influences, budget limitations, and teachers' workloads can be minimized so that the implementation of organizational culture takes place optimally.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of organizational culture in religious-based junior high schools is carried out through the internalization of religious values, discipline, responsibility, care, integrity, and orientation to achievement which are implemented consistently through example, habituation, principal's leadership, and teacher professional development. The successful implementation of organizational culture is supported by the synergy between transformational leadership, teacher commitment, organizational communication, the reward system, and family support so that it is able to shape the character of students while improving the quality of education delivery. The novelty of this research lies in the discovery of an organizational culture implementation model that integrates religious values with typical school habituation programs, namely *Senja* (Monday Muroja'ah), *Rakit* (Wednesday of the Book), and *Robah* (Friday Language), as a systematic strategy in strengthening organizational culture and character education. The findings confirm that organizational culture developed through the collaboration of all school residents and external environmental support is a strategic factor in building a school with character, adaptive, and sustainable characteristics.

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