



The Role of Schools in Shaping Students' Religious Character (Study at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon)

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ABSTRACT

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This article examines the role of schools in shaping students' religious character through a case study conducted at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon. The study aims to explore the strategies implemented by the school to internalize religious values and to analyze their impact on students' character development. Employing a qualitative research approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and systematic observations involving school leaders, teachers, and students. The findings reveal that the integration of religious education into the formal curriculum, the implementation of religious value-based extracurricular activities, and the creation of a supportive and religiously oriented school environment play a significant role in fostering students' religious character. These strategies contribute to the development of discipline, moral awareness, and spiritual sensitivity among students. The study highlights that schools have a strategic role not only in enhancing students' academic competencies but also in nurturing holistic individuals whose personalities are firmly grounded in religious and spiritual values

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1. Introduction

Education is a pathway that must be undertaken by all Indonesian citizens. The government has mandated a 12-year compulsory education program, which includes primary education, junior secondary education, and senior secondary education. To enhance the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market, the government has also established vocational-based schools, such as Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan or SMK). This initiative aims to ensure that the Indonesian workforce possesses adequate quality and skills.

SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon was established in response to the nation's need to prepare competent and qualified human resources in the maritime sector. In an effort to improve competitiveness, the school implements a cadet-based

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education model designed to strengthen students' physical and mental endurance. In maritime practice, particularly at sea, physical resilience and the ability to cope with extreme weather conditions are essential.

The cadet-based education model has distinctive characteristics, including appearance standards such as uniforms and hairstyles that follow military-like regulations, which are closely associated with discipline and firmness. Through this system, graduates are expected to possess strong character and high integrity in the workplace.

The emergence of Islam cannot be separated from the role of Prophet Muhammad SAW as the recipient of divine revelation and an educator of the ummah. At the age of forty, Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation in the Cave of Hira after previously engaging in *uzlah* as an expression of concern over the social conditions of the Quraysh society, which was characterized by moral decadence and ignorance. This event marked the beginning of his prophetic mission, which aimed to transform society through wise and ethical approaches, namely *hikmah*, *mau'izhah hasanah*, and *mujadalah* (Aziz, 2014; M. P. Mukhlisin, 2024). For nearly a decade, the Prophet carried out Islamic education and *da'wah* in Mecca through study circles, particularly at the house of Al-Arqam. Due to increasing resistance and persecution, he later migrated to Medina, a pluralistic and open society that provided broader opportunities for the development of Islamic education (Basri, 2021).

Islamic education has comprehensive objectives. According to Ramayulis, it aims to shape human beings as servants of Allah ('*abid*) who continuously worship Him, as *khalifatullah fil ard* responsible for maintaining life on earth, and as individuals who achieve happiness in both worldly and hereafter dimensions. Islamic education is grounded in *sharia*, which is derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly *ijtihad* (M. Mukhlisin et al., 2024; Ramayulis, 2013). *Sharia* serves as a divine guideline to maintain spiritual purity and moral order in human life (Sahid, 2016). Its implementation is reflected in the practice of the pillars of Islam, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage, which were directly taught by Prophet Muhammad to his companions. The Prophet's exemplary character in education is reflected in the values of *shidiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (communicativeness), and *fathonah* (wisdom), which continue to serve as foundational principles for Islamic character education (Mukhlisin, 2019; Mukhlisin et al., 2023).

Education, in essence, is a conscious effort to develop individuals with noble character and dignity. In the national context, education functions to develop students' potential so that they become faithful, pious, morally upright, healthy, knowledgeable, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible citizens in accordance with national education goals (M. Mukhlisin et al., 2023). The implementation of education should be goal-oriented, attentive to individual differences, holistic in developing personality, interactive in learning processes, and conducted through enjoyable methods to ensure effective learning outcomes (Gunawan, 2014).

One form of educational implementation is cadet-based education, a system that adopts semi-military principles to foster strong character among students. Cadet-based education aims to instill discipline, responsibility, physical and mental resilience, and a sense of patriotism, preparing students to meet the demands of the workplace

and social life (Khurniawan, 2019). This educational model is systematically designed according to academic years and semesters, supported by cadet organizational structures, and integrates physical and spiritual education to create balance between devotion to God and social responsibility.

Character formation is a central aspect of education. Character is understood as a set of moral and ethical values that shape individuals' ways of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors. Character theory encompasses dispositional, situational, and integrative approaches, emphasizing that character is formed through the interaction between innate potential and environmental influences. Therefore, character education serves as a strategic means of instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and integrity, enabling students to become morally grounded individuals who contribute positively to society.

Despite its positive conceptual foundation, cadet-based education may also generate side effects that require attention. In the social context, incidents such as student brawls among vocational schools, promiscuity, and drug abuse are frequently reported. Media coverage has highlighted cases of violence, including senior students assaulting juniors in Semarang (Mukhlisin Mukhlisin; Malik Sofy; Deden Purbaya, 2024), as well as incidents involving cadets being attacked by gangs, leading to severe injuries and even death. These cases have caused concern among some members of the public about enrolling their children in institutions that apply cadet-based education.

In response to these negative perceptions and paradigms, SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon emphasizes comprehensive Islamic religious education. Religious education is not only the responsibility of institutions labeled as Islamic but also a right and obligation of every Muslim individual, as mandated by national law.

During a preliminary observation, the researcher was invited to deliver a *tausiyah* at an *Isra' Mi'raj* commemoration. This experience revealed that although the students' appearance may seem rigid, the school actively directs them toward developing strong religious character. This is reflected in a clean school environment, respectful attitudes toward teachers and *ustadz*, and high enthusiasm for religious activities. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring the roles played by SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon in fostering students' religious character.

Based on this background, the research questions are formulated as follows: (1) How is the process or program of cadet-based education implemented at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon? and (2) What aspects of religious character are developed through the cadet-based education model?

2. Methodology

The research method employed in this study is a qualitative approach. The author selected this approach based on the perspective of John W. Creswell, who states that qualitative methods aim to explore and understand the meanings that emerge from social, environmental, or human problems (Creswell, 2013). This study seeks to analyze the Islamic values implemented at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon.

The data sources in this research are divided into two categories. First, theoretical data derived from a literature review focusing on educational studies. Second, empirical data obtained through the collection of information from research subjects, including human resources such as teachers or instructors, the school

principal, students (cadets), parents, graduate users, and community leaders. In addition, supporting data were collected from alumni networks and the surrounding community. Non-human data sources include documents relevant to the research focus, such as symbols, images, photographs, information related to buildings and the school environment, meeting records, and other documents associated with this study (Thoyyar, 2007).

The data collection techniques applied in this research consist of several stages. First, observation. The researcher conducted preliminary observations prior to the study to determine the appropriate research object. Further observations were carried out to obtain direct data from the school environment. Second, interviews. The researcher conducted interviews to explore respondents' perceptions regarding the research theme, particularly the roles of the school. Third, documentation study. In this stage, the researcher collected data from public documents such as newspaper articles, papers, reports, photographs, artworks, videos, and audio recordings that could provide additional information. The availability of documented data enhances the credibility of the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiono, 2013).

Furthermore, the data were analyzed through the interpretation of the collected data. This interpretative process aims to construct an explanatory concept (Nazir, 2011). In this study, the author provides interpretations based on field data to explain the implementation of Islamic values within the cadet-based education system at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon.

3. Results and Discussion

Cadet Program: Madatukar Education

The Madatukar education program is a fundamental initiative for the character formation of cadets and is mandatory for all Grade X (tenth-grade) cadets. This program is based on Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 concerning the National Education Standards (State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia No. 4496 / No. 71). Madatukar is implemented at the initial stage before cadets are formally inaugurated, with the expectation that they internalize the expected character values prior to officially becoming cadets.

The Madatukar program is conducted over six effective days, during which prospective cadets are introduced to their rights and obligations, as well as various activities and school regulations. The program is supervised by the Cadet Corps Division (Dekorptar), which is responsible for ensuring the smooth implementation of the activities. The Madatukar agenda includes vocational orientation, counseling on the dangers of drugs and promiscuity, morning assemblies, marching drills, physical exercise, the obligation to perform the five daily prayers and Dhuha prayer, night patrols (jurit malam), cleaning duties (korvei), and night reflections.

The implementation of the Madatukar program involves various stakeholders, including instructors or dormitory heads, Islamic education teachers, maritime vocational instructors, the vice principal for curriculum, and the vice principal for cadet affairs. In addition, external speakers from the local police (Polsek) and military district command (Koramil/TNI) are invited to strengthen the motivation of prospective cadets in developing strong character aligned with national character-building goals.

The primary objective of the Madatukar program is to cultivate disciplined and independent character traits and to equip cadets with resilience in facing challenges. The ultimate goal of education at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon is to produce maritime officers, not merely ship crew members or workers in other fields. Therefore, the Madatukar program is expected to prepare a resilient and competent generation for the maritime sector.

Mabintal Education Program

The Mabintal education program at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon is a continuation of the Madatukar program and is intended for first-level cadets (Grade X). The program is conducted for approximately three months, beginning one week after the completion of the basic character formation period. Mabintal refers to a mental development phase designed to facilitate the transition of prospective cadets into fully prepared cadets capable of facing challenges in the maritime world.

The Mabintal program is organized by teachers and instructors under the supervision of the principal. Field implementation is coordinated by Dekoptar or cadet staff, who manage and supervise activities continuously over a 24-hour schedule throughout the three-month period.

Daily Mabintal activities include congregational prayers five times a day (Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, and Isha), morning, afternoon, and evening assemblies, classroom learning activities, independent study, and cleaning of dormitory and classroom environments. Additional activities include marching drills, afternoon runs, and Poco-Poco gymnastics, all aimed at developing discipline, character, and a sense of solidarity among cadets.

Islamic Religious Programs

SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon consistently commemorates major Islamic holidays as part of its religious education programs. These include the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Maulid Nabi) in Rabi' al-Awwal, aimed at emulating the Prophet's noble character, fostering love for Islam, strengthening social bonds among the school community, and developing organizational skills among cadets.

The school also commemorates Isra' Mi'raj, emphasizing gratitude for the divine command of prayer. These religious events are enriched with Islamic competitions such as Qur'anic memorization (Juz 'Ammah), Qur'anic recitation (MTQ), quizzes, speeches, recitation of the Qur'an, rebana or hadrah performances, religious sermons (tausiyah), and the recitation of Maulid Barzanji. These activities are organized by cadets under the guidance of Islamic education teachers.

Congregational Prayer Programs

All cadets are required to participate in congregational prayers five times daily. Although prayer is a personal obligation, the school emphasizes habituation to ensure consistent observance, with sanctions imposed for noncompliance. Cadets are also required to perform congregational Dhuha prayers every morning at 7:00 a.m. following the morning assembly, based on the belief that this practice fosters discipline and spiritual sustenance.

Following the completion of the Arrozaq Mosque in 2022, Friday prayers are conducted exclusively within the school mosque. Prayer leaders and preachers are

scheduled among teachers and trained cadets, with intensive preparation provided by Islamic education teachers. During Ramadan, all cadets from levels I to III are required to perform Tarawih prayers collectively, reinforcing religious devotion and piety.

Yasin and Asmaul Husna Recitation

Another religious program involves the collective recitation of Surah Yasin and Asmaul Husna every Friday, led by Islamic education teachers. This practice is rooted in prophetic tradition and local Islamic customs, helping cadets integrate religious practices into community life.

Ramadan Boarding School Program

The Ramadan boarding school (Pesantren Ramadan) program is inspired by Indonesia's pesantren tradition and is conducted for one to two weeks during Ramadan. Activities include Dhuha prayer, Qur'anic study sessions, Islamic motivation, lessons on aqidah, akhlaq, fiqh, Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic history, as well as communal meals for sahur and iftar. The program culminates with religious sermons before breaking the fast and Tarawih prayers involving the entire school community.

Religious Character of Students

The religious character developed at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon includes several dimensions: aqidah (faith), sharia (religious practice), akhlaq (morality), taqwa (piety), love for the homeland, religious moderation, and environmental and social awareness. These values are cultivated through structured programs, role modeling by teachers, habituation of worship, discipline, and social service activities. Through this integrated approach, cadets are expected to become morally grounded, spiritually devoted, socially responsible, and professionally competent maritime officers.

4. Conclusion

The roles and programs of cadet-based education at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon include the Madatukar program, Mabintal, Madabintal, congregational prayers, the Dhuha sunnah prayer, recitation of Yasin and Asmaul Husna, the commemoration of Islamic holy days, and the Ramadan boarding school program. The religious character developed through the school's educational role at SMK Pelayaran Buana Bahari Cirebon encompasses tawhid (belief in the oneness of God), adherence to Islamic law (sharia), taqwa (piety), emulation of the noble character of the Prophet Muhammad, environmental awareness, social responsibility, love for the homeland, and the cultivation of a moderate attitude in practicing religion.

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