NUMadura:
Journal of Islamic Studies, Social, and Humanities
Vol. 4 No. 1 (2025); E-ISSN: 2963-959X; DOI: 10.58790
https://journal.pcnusumenep.or.id/index.php/numadura/index

Teacher Spiritual Competence and Religious School Culture in Students' Moral Formation: A Multi-Site Study of Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Ternate, Indonesia

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Abstract
Survey studies have shown that Islamic school culture mediates the link between teacher spiritual competence and students' moral development, but they say little about how this occurs. This study examines how teachers' spiritual competence and religious school culture shape students' moral formation in two *madrasah tsanawiyah* in Ternate, North Maluku, one private and one state. Using a qualitative multi-site design, data were collected in June and July 2024 through semi-structured interviews with eight informants (principals, Akidah Akhlak teachers, vice-principals for student affairs, and students) and observations of teacher conduct, religious routines, Akidah Akhlak lessons, and student behavior, and were analyzed thematically within and across sites. Drawing on al-Ghazali's account of moral formation through exemplarity and habituation and on Schein's model of organizational culture, the findings suggest that religious school culture is less a separate channel between teachers and students than the space in which teachers' personal spirituality becomes shared practice, most clearly in the private madrasah. The two madrasahs appear to have built this space along different routes: an exemplary-habituative route anchored in teachers' participation in daily worship, and a policy-reflective route anchored in institutional expectations and reflective moral instruction. The study offers a process-level account that complements survey-based findings.

Keywords
teacher spiritual competence; religious school culture; moral formation; *akhlak*; *madrasah tsanawiyah*; multi-site qualitative study

Introduction

Madrasahs ask a great deal of their teachers' inner lives. A teacher of Akidah Akhlak is expected not only to explain honesty, patience, and responsibility but to possess them, and to possess them visibly enough that students learn from watching. Scholars of Islamic moral education have long noted that, within this tradition, moral character is not separable from religious commitment, since *akhlak* is understood as the outward expression of faith (J. Mark Halstead, 2007), and research on teacher education more broadly has argued that teachers' own dispositions and character are themselves part of what they teach (Osguthorpe, 2008). Yet spirituality is, in the first instance, a personal matter: a teacher's

sincerity, self-restraint, and devotion belong to the teacher. Madrasahs nonetheless hope that these personal qualities will shape something larger than any individual classroom, namely a school environment in which students acquire *akhlak* (moral character) as a matter of daily life. How a teacher's personal spirituality comes to form part of a school's shared moral environment is the question this study pursues.

The question is sharpened by the way teacher quality is defined in Indonesia. National regulation recognizes four teacher competencies, pedagogical, personal, social, and professional, and does not name spirituality as a competence of its own (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 14 Tahun 2005 Tentang Guru Dan Dosen, 2005). The spiritual dimension of teaching is generally read as part of personal competence, which concerns integrity, maturity, and the capacity to serve as a role model (Mujiburrahman, 2019). Indonesian scholarship, however, increasingly treats teacher spiritual competence as a distinct construct, understood as the awareness that teaching is a form of worship and expressed in sincerity, patience, and consistency between what teachers say and what they do (A. Samad et al., 2023; Bahalwan & Yenuri, 2023), and survey evidence from madrasah teachers suggests that spirituality contributes to teacher performance alongside professional competence (Susmiyati et al., 2022). The construct is thus recognized in research and, as this study will show, in practice, while its place in the formal framework remains indirect.

Existing research has approached the relationship between teacher spirituality and students' morals from two directions, and each leaves part of the question open. Quantitative studies have reported that teachers' personal competence and the institutional climate are associated with students' morals (Ruslan et al., 2023), and a recent survey-based study found that Islamic school culture mediates the relationship between teacher spiritual competence and the moral development of primary students (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022). Such findings establish that school culture matters, but measuring teacher spirituality and school culture as separate constructs leaves unexamined how far they overlap, that is, how far the culture is itself made up of teachers' conduct. Qualitative studies, for their part, have documented the practices through which madrasahs cultivate character, above all teacher exemplarity and religious habituation (A. Samad et al., 2023; Bahalwan & Yenuri, 2023). Ethnographic work on Indonesian *pesantren* has likewise shown how charismatic pedagogy and the discipline of daily life shape students' dispositions (Nilan, 2009), and research on character education more broadly identifies role modeling among the practices most consistently associated with effective moral education (Berkowitz, 2011). These studies show what madrasahs do, but they tend to list exemplarity and school culture side by side as parallel strategies rather than asking how the first becomes the second. Most are also single-site studies, which makes it difficult to see whether this process takes the same form in institutions that are organized differently, such as private foundation-run and state madrasahs. Research from North Maluku has examined the religiosity of students in senior secondary schools and madrasahs (Sugianto et al., 2024) and the links between Islamic character education and local Qur'anic traditions in Ternate (Ati & Gay, 2023), but the relationship between teachers' spirituality and school culture in the region's madrasahs has not been examined.

Answering the question requires attention at two levels, and this study draws on one lens for each. At the level of the teacher and the student, al-Ghazali's account of moral formation in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* holds that good character is acquired by repeating good actions, at first with effort, until they become second nature, under the guidance of a teacher whose own conduct gives authority to what is taught (Al-Ghazali, 1995), a view that closely parallels the Aristotelian argument that habituation is not

mindless drill but the ground from which moral reasoning later grows (Athanassoulis, 2024). At the level of the institution, Schein's model of organizational culture distinguishes between observable practices, espoused values, and underlying assumptions, and identifies the mechanisms, such as role modeling and what leaders attend to and evaluate, through which culture is embedded (Schein & Schein, 2016). The first lens explains how a student may move from obligation to habit; the second explains where, within an institution, a teacher's conduct may be anchored once it becomes shared. The two lenses also meet at a common point. Al-Ghazali defines good character (*khuluq*) as a firmly established disposition of the soul from which actions proceed easily, without the need for deliberation, and Schein describes an organization's deepest cultural layer as assumptions so taken for granted that they guide conduct without being questioned. Both describe the stage at which moral conduct no longer needs to be prompted, one at the level of the person and the other at the level of the institution.

The study is set in two *madrasah tsanawiyah* in Ternate, North Maluku, one a private madrasah run by a foundation and the other a state madrasah. The two share a curriculum and a similar repertoire of religious routines but differ in governance, which makes them a revealing pair. Neither madrasah maintains religious practices that are distinctive to Ternate or North Maluku; their routines resemble those found in madrasahs across Indonesia, which suggests that the patterns identified here may be relevant well beyond the region. The study examines how teachers' spiritual competence is expressed in daily school life and in Akidah Akhlak instruction, how that competence relates to the religious culture of each madrasah, and how the resulting patterns differ between the two institutions.

The study argues that religious school culture is better understood as the space in which teachers' personal spirituality becomes shared and repeated practice than as a separate factor through which that spirituality passes. In the two madrasahs studied, this space appears to have been built along different routes: an exemplary-habituative route anchored in teachers' visible participation in daily worship and routines, and a policy-reflective route anchored in institutional expectations and reflective moral instruction. The claim that culture is built directly from teachers' conduct holds most clearly for the first route; in the second, teachers' conduct is one element within a wider set of institutional norms. By offering a process-level account of these routes, the study seeks to complement survey-based findings on school culture and to bring classical Islamic thought on moral formation into conversation with organizational culture theory.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multi-site case study design (Yin, 2018) to examine how teachers' spiritual competence and religious school culture shape students' moral formation in two *madrasah tsanawiyah* in Ternate, North Maluku. A qualitative design was chosen because the study is concerned with how these relationships unfold in everyday school life rather than with estimating their strength across a population. The multi-site design allowed each madrasah to be analyzed as a case in its own right while also supporting a systematic comparison between the two.

The two sites were selected purposively to represent the two main governance arrangements in Indonesian Islamic junior secondary education. The first is a private madrasah owned and administered by a foundation. The second is a state madrasah administered under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Both follow the national madrasah curriculum, including Akidah Akhlak as a dedicated subject, and both maintain routine religious activities. Their difference in institutional status made it possible to examine

whether, and how, the link between teacher spirituality and school culture takes different forms under different governance conditions. Because each type is represented by a single madrasah, however, the comparison is not intended to isolate the effect of governance status; differences between the sites may equally reflect leadership style, school size, or institutional history. To protect the confidentiality of the institutions and their members, the two sites are referred to throughout as the private madrasah and the state madrasah.

The analysis was informed by two theoretical lenses. Al-Ghazali's account of moral formation through exemplarity and habituation (Al-Ghazali, 1995) guided attention to teacher-student interaction and to the repetition of moral and religious practices. Schein's model of organizational culture (Schein & Schein, 2016) guided attention to the institutional level, distinguishing between observable practices, espoused values, and underlying assumptions.

Participants and Data Collection

Data were collected between June and July 2024 through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Eight informants took part, four from each madrasah, representing the same four roles at both sites: the principal, the Akidah Akhlak teacher, the vice-principal for student affairs, and one student (Table 1). Adult informants were aged between 35 and 54 years, and student informants were enrolled in Grades 8 and 9. Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their direct involvement in teaching, religious programs, or student affairs, so that each site could be examined from the perspectives of school leadership, classroom instruction, student management, and student experience.

Table 1. Informants by Role and Site

No	Informant Category	Private Madrasah	State Madrasah	Age / Grade
1	Principal	1	1	35–54 years
2	Akidah Akhlak teacher	1	1	35–54 years
3	Vice-principal for student affairs	1	1	35–54 years
4	Student	1	1	Grades 8 and 9
	Total	4	4	8

Interviews with adult informants lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and interviews with student informants between 15 and 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian on madrasah premises; student interviews took place without a teacher present, so that students could speak about their teachers freely. Interview guides were tailored to each role while covering common themes: the meaning and expression of teachers' spiritual competence, the forms and purposes of religious school culture, the integration of spiritual values into Akidah Akhlak instruction, approaches to student guidance and discipline, and perceived changes in students' conduct. Student interviews focused on students' experiences of teachers' conduct and of religious activities, and on whether they applied the values learned at school outside it.

Each madrasah was observed on two to three occasions, covering four common foci: teachers' spiritual conduct (punctuality, greetings, courtesy, patience, emotional control, and fairness toward students), the implementation of religious routines (prayers before lessons, Qur'an recitation, congregational prayer, and teachers' participation in these activities), Akidah Akhlak lessons (the

integration of values, the use of everyday examples, and opportunities for discussion and reflection), and students' moral conduct (courtesy, honesty, discipline, responsibility, and peer relations). Observations were recorded as descriptive field notes accompanied by initial interpretive notes. Interview quotations reported in this article were translated into English by the authors; for several key statements, the original Indonesian wording is also given.

The researcher had no institutional or personal ties to either madrasah or to any of the informants, which reduced the risk that informants would present their schools in a particular light to a colleague, although it also meant that access to the routines of each school was limited to the period of fieldwork.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The analysis was abductive. Initial categories were derived from constructs used in previous research, namely teacher spiritual competence, religious school culture, and students' moral development, while the patterns that distinguish the two sites were identified inductively through cross-site comparison. Data were analyzed thematically in two stages. In the within-site stage, interview transcripts and field notes from each madrasah were coded through open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin et al., 2008). Open coding identified concrete units of meaning, such as teachers giving examples of good behavior, teachers showing patience, and the routine of prayer and Qur'an recitation. Axial coding grouped these units into categories such as teacher exemplarity, value internalization, religious practice, and individual and social morality. Selective coding then organized the categories into four overarching themes: teacher spiritual competence, spiritual pedagogical practice, religious school culture, and students' moral development. In the cross-site stage, the themes were compared across the two madrasahs using a matrix (Miles et al., 2018) to identify convergent features and site-specific patterns. It was at this stage that the distinction between the two routes emerged, and the two theoretical lenses were then applied to interpret it.

Trustworthiness was addressed through technique triangulation, by comparing what informants reported in interviews with what was observed in classrooms and school routines, and through source triangulation, by comparing accounts from four categories of informants at each site and across the two sites (Lincoln, 1985). Member checking was conducted with informants to confirm the accuracy of their accounts, and emerging interpretations were discussed with academic colleagues through peer debriefing.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The study was conducted independently and was not submitted to a formal institutional ethics review. Permission to conduct the research was obtained orally from the leadership of both madrasahs, and all informants gave oral informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. For the two student informants, oral consent was also obtained from their parents or guardians, and interviews were conducted with the knowledge of the madrasah. Student interviews were kept short, took place on school premises, and recorded no personal data beyond grade level. Informants are identified only by role and site.

The study has several limitations. Its findings are based on two sites and eight informants and are therefore not statistically generalizable, although the comparative design supports analytical transfer to similar settings. Each site was represented by a single student, so the student perspective is necessarily limited. Because the fieldwork took place over a two-month period with two to three observations at each site, the evidence speaks to students' moral conduct and their own accounts of

change rather than to developmental change measured over time; for this reason the study refers to moral formation rather than moral development.

Result and Discussion

Results

The findings are presented in four themes that emerged from the within-site and cross-site analysis: teachers' spiritual competence as lived exemplarity, the religious culture of each madrasah, Akidah Akhlak instruction as a bridge between values and conduct, and students' moral conduct and its variation. Across all four themes, the two madrasahs shared many features, but they differed in where the main weight of moral formation appeared to rest.

Teachers' Spiritual Competence as Lived Exemplarity

At both sites, informants described teachers' spiritual competence as something that extends beyond religious knowledge and is expressed primarily through conduct. The principal of the private madrasah explained: "Teachers are not only tasked with delivering subject matter; they must also be an example for students in daily life. Teachers who have spiritual awareness will show discipline, honesty, patience, responsibility, and care for their students. These values will, indirectly, be imitated by the students." The Akidah Akhlak teacher at the same madrasah described this exemplarity as beginning with the self: "I try to start with myself, such as arriving on time, giving greetings, speaking politely, staying patient when facing students who make mistakes, and performing worship. In my view, students accept advice more easily when they see that their teacher also practices what is being conveyed" (*siswa lebih mudah menerima nasihat apabila mereka melihat bahwa gurunya juga menjalankan apa yang disampaikan*).

Observations at the private madrasah were consistent with these accounts. Teachers greeted students on entering the classroom and opened lessons with a collective prayer. When some students were not paying attention, teachers did not respond with a harsh reprimand but first reminded them in courteous language, and they used such moments to advise students on respecting parents, teachers, and peers. The student informant at this madrasah observed that teachers modeled good behavior "through the way they speak and treat students."

At the state madrasah, spiritual competence was framed more explicitly as part of teachers' professional identity and as a matter of institutional policy. The principal stated: "We see that teachers must have a balance of pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual competence. Spiritual competence is the foundation for teachers in carrying out their educational duties. Therefore, we encourage teachers to increase their religious awareness, maintain their integrity, and display behavior that reflects Islamic values." Observations showed teachers opening lessons with greetings and prayer, using courteous language, and giving students opportunities to express their opinions. When a student had not completed an assignment, the teacher gave a reprimand together with an explanation of why responsibility matters, and took care not to embarrass the student in front of peers. The student informant at this madrasah summarized the lesson drawn from teachers' conduct: "Being a good person is not only knowing what is right and wrong, but also doing it" (*menjadi orang baik itu bukan hanya mengetahui mana yang benar dan salah, tetapi juga harus melakukannya*). "Teachers teach us to be honest, disciplined, to respect our friends, and to be responsible, and they also try to show these attitudes in daily activities."

In both madrasahs, then, teachers' spiritual competence was understood and observed as exemplary conduct. In the private madrasah, however, the emphasis fell on teachers' personal patience,

courtesy, and participation in worship, whereas in the state madrasah it fell on integrity, fairness, and emotional control as part of professional conduct, supported by an explicit expectation from school leadership.

Religious School Culture: Practices, Participation, and Norms

Both madrasahs maintained a similar set of religious routines: greetings, prayers before and after lessons, Qur'an recitation, and congregational prayer. The informants' accounts differed, however, in how these routines were sustained.

At the private madrasah, the principal described religious culture as built through habituation in which teachers take part alongside students: "We try to build a religious culture through the habituation of religious activities, for example getting students used to giving greetings, reading prayers before and after lessons, performing congregational prayer, and reading the Qur'an. We also encourage teachers to be directly involved in these activities, so that students do not only receive instructions but also see their teachers' example." Observations confirmed that teachers did not only instruct students to take part in religious activities but participated in them as well. The vice-principal for student affairs extended this principle beyond ritual: "When students are habituated to keeping things clean, teachers must also show the behavior of keeping things clean." The student informant described how participation that began as an obligation gradually became part of daily life: "At first it was perhaps because it was required, but over time it became a habit" (*awalnya mungkin karena diwajibkan, tetapi lama-lama menjadi kebiasaan*).

At the state madrasah, religious culture was described as an institutional commitment that should permeate school life as a whole. The principal stated: "Religious culture is not placed merely as an additional activity; it must become part of the life of the madrasah. It can be implemented through the habituation of prayer, Qur'an recitation, congregational worship, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, and the habituation of polite behavior and mutual respect. We want religious values to become part of students' awareness." Observations showed teachers and administrative staff jointly directing students to take part in religious activities in an orderly way, and religious values being extended to everyday norms such as keeping the environment clean, respecting others, and behaving courteously. The vice-principal for student affairs linked these routines to discipline while noting their dependence on the wider school community: "Routine activities train students to value time, obey rules, and be responsible. However, discipline also requires consistent supervision and exemplarity from all members of the madrasah." The student informant reported that these activities had made it easier to become "more accustomed to praying, reading the Qur'an, and paying attention to prayer times," and had helped in coming to "understand the importance of worship."

Religious culture in the private madrasah thus appeared to be sustained mainly through teachers' visible participation in shared practices, whereas in the state madrasah it appeared to be sustained mainly through institutional expectations and norms that involved all school staff.

Akidah Akhlak Instruction as a Bridge between Values and Conduct

Akidah Akhlak lessons at both madrasahs linked moral content to students' everyday experience, but they did so in different ways. At the private madrasah, the teacher emphasized concrete examples and personal demonstration: "When teaching about honesty, for example, I do not only explain the meaning of honesty, but also give examples of honest behavior in the madrasah, in the family, and in the community. I also try to show honesty in how I speak and act, so that students can see directly how the material is applied." In the observed lesson on honesty and responsibility, the teacher connected the material to situations students commonly encounter, such as not cheating in examinations, admitting

mistakes, carrying out classroom cleaning duties, and respecting classmates. Several students actively offered examples from their own experience.

At the state madrasah, the teacher emphasized reflection on the reasons and consequences of moral action. The teacher explained: “I always explain that good character must come from self-awareness and faith in Allah. When students make mistakes, I do not immediately blame them but invite them to understand the consequences of their actions. I want students to realize that doing good is part of their responsibility as Muslims.” In the observed lesson, the teacher presented examples of cheating, neglecting assignments, and disregarding classmates’ opinions, then asked students to explain the consequences of such behavior and how a Muslim ought to act, giving them opportunities to reflect on their own conduct. The teacher also described adapting this approach to students’ different family and social backgrounds, using “a persuasive and communicative approach so that students do not feel judged.”

Students’ Moral Conduct and Its Variation

At both sites, observations and interviews indicated forms of moral conduct consistent with the values promoted by the madrasah, alongside clear variation among students. At the private madrasah, students greeted teachers, used courteous language, and followed teachers’ directions during lessons. During classroom cleaning duties, however, some students worked together readily while others still needed direction and supervision. The vice-principal for student affairs observed that habituation “helps students recognize responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect,” while acknowledging that “there are still some students who need special attention,” and that guidance relied on advice rather than “punishment alone.” The student informant reported being “often reminded to speak honestly, respect others, and not mock friends,” and had begun to understand that “doing good is not only when we are at school, but also at home.” The Akidah Akhlak teacher identified the main obstacles as differences in students’ character, the influence of peers, and mobile phone use, concluding that moral formation “requires cooperation between teachers, the madrasah, and parents.”

At the state madrasah, students were observed working together in group tasks, helping one another, and respecting classmates’ opinions. Some students, however, were not paying attention during lessons or had not fully carried out their responsibilities, and the teacher responded by reminding them of the importance of responsibility and discipline. The madrasah used a graded approach to misconduct, which the vice-principal for student affairs described as follows: “First, the student is given a reprimand and an explanation of the mistake. If the behavior is repeated, we carry out further guidance involving the homeroom teacher and the parents. The aim is not merely to give sanctions but to help the student improve.” The principal described a set of indicators used to evaluate students’ moral development, including discipline, responsibility, honesty, politeness, social care, and involvement in religious activities, noting that “assessment cannot be based only on subject grades.” The student informant described applying these values at home, such as helping parents, speaking politely, and respecting siblings, and added: “Although I sometimes still make mistakes, I am beginning to understand that good attitudes must be practiced everywhere.”

Table 2 summarizes the main similarities and differences between the two sites.

Table 2. Cross-Site Summary of Findings

No	Dimension	Private Madrasah	State Madrasah

1	Expression of teachers' spiritual competence	Patience, courtesy, and participation in worship	Integrity, fairness, and emotional control within professional conduct
2	Role of school leadership	Encouraging teachers to take part in religious activities	Explicit policy positioning spiritual competence as foundational
3	Religious school culture	Sustained through teachers' visible participation in shared practices	Sustained through institutional norms involving all staff
4	Akidah Akhlak instruction	Concrete examples and personal demonstration	Discussion and reflection on reasons and consequences
5	Response to misconduct	Advice and continuous guidance	Graded guidance involving homeroom teachers and parents
6	Students' moral conduct	Courtesy, cooperation, and habits of worship	Discipline, responsibility, and an emerging awareness of moral reasons
7	Reported obstacles	Differences in character, peer influence, mobile phone use	Differences in family and social background

Discussion

Is School Culture Really "Between" Teachers and Students?

Survey research has modeled Islamic school culture as a mediator, a variable that carries the effect of teacher spiritual competence through to students' moral development [Reference study, year]. The findings of this study do not contradict that relationship, but they raise a question about what is being measured. A mediation model can accommodate a close relationship between predictor and mediator; what it cannot easily show is how far the two constructs overlap in the practices that define them. In the private madrasah, religious culture was to a large extent made of teachers' conduct. Congregational prayer was a cultural practice because teachers prayed alongside students; cleanliness was a school norm because, as the vice-principal put it, "teachers must also show the behavior of keeping things clean." Remove teachers' participation and it is not clear how much of the culture would remain. The state madrasah presents a less pronounced case. There, culture also rested on policy, evaluation indicators, and the involvement of administrative staff, so teachers' conduct was one important element among several rather than the substance of the culture itself.

This matters for how the relationship is studied. Where teachers' spirituality and school culture are partly constituted by the same actions, measuring them as separate constructs raises a problem of construct overlap: the "indirect effect" captured statistically may describe a process in which teachers are not only the source but also much of the channel. A process-level account therefore does more than illustrate a mediation model. It suggests that school culture is better understood as the space in which personal spirituality becomes shared practice than as a separate factor through which it passes, and that how much of that space teachers fill themselves may vary from one institution to another.

Two Routes into Culture, Two Kinds of Fragility

If culture is where personal spirituality becomes collective, the two madrasahs appear to have built that space from different materials. Schein offers two distinct tools for describing this difference (Schein & Schein, 2016). The first is his distinction between the layers of culture: observable practices, espoused values, and basic assumptions. The second is his account of the mechanisms through which leaders embed culture, among them deliberate role modeling and what leaders pay attention to, measure, and evaluate. The two tools describe different things, the first where culture resides and the second how it is put there, and the two madrasahs differ on both.

In the private madrasah, the principal embedded culture mainly through role modeling, asking teachers to take part in religious activities "so that students do not only receive instructions but also see their teachers' example," and the culture that resulted was anchored chiefly in visible practice. In the state madrasah, the principal embedded culture more through attention and evaluation, naming spiritual competence as foundational for all teachers and specifying indicators by which students' conduct was assessed, and the resulting culture was anchored more in articulated values, supported by a graded procedure for misconduct and a reflective approach to Akidah Akhlak. These are differences of emphasis rather than a strict dichotomy: the private madrasah's principal also articulated values, and the state madrasah also relied on daily routines. Nor should the difference be attributed to governance status alone. With a single madrasah of each type, the two routes may reflect the leadership of particular principals or the history of particular institutions as much as their private or state character.

Each route seems to carry its own fragility. A culture built on teachers' visible participation may be vivid but dependent on particular people; it is not obvious how such a culture would fare if committed teachers left. A culture built on articulated values may be more durable on paper but risks becoming formal if those values are not lived. The state madrasah's vice-principal appeared to recognize this risk in noting that discipline "requires consistent supervision and exemplarity from all members of the madrasah," an acknowledgment that policy needs embodiment as much as embodiment benefits from policy.

Both madrasahs aspired to the same endpoint, that religious values should become "part of students' awareness." In Schein's terms this is the layer of basic assumptions, and in al-Ghazali's it is the point at which conduct has become *khuluq*, a settled disposition from which good actions proceed without deliberation. The convergence of the two vocabularies is instructive: what an institution hopes to make taken for granted collectively is what al-Ghazali hopes each person will come to do without effort. The data do not allow a claim that either madrasah has reached this point. They suggest instead that the two routes may converge on this aim from opposite directions, and that each might be strengthened by borrowing what the other emphasizes.

From Obligation to Habit, and from Habit to Awareness

The student at the private madrasah offered what may be the most telling sentence in the data: participation in religious activities began "perhaps because it was required, but over time it became a habit." This is almost exactly the movement al-Ghazali describes, in which good character is acquired by performing good actions repeatedly, at first with effort and even reluctance, until they become natural (Al-Ghazali, 1995). Al-Ghazali also places the guide at the center of this process, and the private madrasah's Akidah Akhlak teacher articulated the reason in contemporary terms: students "accept advice more easily when they see that their teacher also practices what is being conveyed." Read in this light, teacher exemplarity is not an addition to habituation but part of what makes students willing to accept it.

The state madrasah points to the step that habit alone may not secure. Its Akidah Akhlak teacher explicitly sought to move students away from good behavior motivated by "fear of punishment" toward

conduct rooted in “self-awareness and faith in Allah,” and its student described having learned that being good “is not only knowing what is right and wrong, but also doing it.” Habituation and reflection thus appear less as competing methods than as two moments in one process, with each madrasah giving greater weight to one of them while retaining elements of the other. This reading is consistent with (Sanderse, 2013) argument that role modeling becomes morally educative only when students come to understand why a model’s conduct is admirable, which suggests that exemplarity and reflection are not alternatives but conditions for each other. Kristjánsson (2006) makes a related point, arguing that role modeling educates only when it inspires emulation, a wish to become like the model, rather than simple imitation. In Lickona's (1992) terms, the data speak mainly to moral knowing and moral action; the affective dimension of students’ moral formation was not directly examined, and with one student informant per site, these observations should be read as indicative rather than conclusive.

The age of the students may also matter here. The survey study that prompted this research examined primary school pupils, whereas the students in this study were young adolescents in Grades 8 and 9. It is plausible that the reflective emphasis observed in the state madrasah is especially suited to this age, when students can be asked not only to follow routines but to give reasons for them, and that the balance between habituation and reflection appropriate for a *madrasah ibtidaiyah* differs from that appropriate for a *madrasah tsanawiyah*. This possibility could be tested by comparative research across levels of schooling. Research on adolescents also counsels caution: young people often do not regard their teachers as role models, and moral education may achieve more by engaging the models students choose for themselves (Sanderse, 2024). Against this background, the explicit references that both student informants made to their teachers’ conduct are notable, although with one student per site they cannot show how widely this view is shared.

When Practice Runs Ahead of Policy

Indonesian regulation recognizes four teacher competencies and places the spiritual dimension within personal competence (Mujiburrahman, 2019). The state madrasah principal nonetheless spoke of spiritual competence as a pillar in its own right, alongside pedagogical, professional, and social competence, and informants at both sites treated it as the foundation of the teacher’s role. At least in these two madrasahs, practice appears to have moved ahead of the formal framework. This raises a question the present study cannot settle but can usefully pose: whether spiritual competence should be recognized more explicitly in teacher development, as scholars of Islamic teacher education have urged in other settings (Memon, 2011), and how this might be done without reducing a disposition grounded in sincerity to another item on a checklist. The obstacles both madrasahs reported, including peer influence, mobile phone use, and differences in family background, add a further caution. Informants at both sites stressed cooperation with parents, which suggests that the reach of any religious school culture depends partly on how far it connects with the rest of students’ lives, a conclusion consistent with research identifying parental involvement as one of the practices associated with effective moral education (Berkowitz, 2011).

Conclusion

This study set out to understand how a teacher’s personal spirituality comes to form part of a madrasah’s shared moral environment. In the two *madrasah tsanawiyah* examined in Ternate, the answer appears to lie less in school culture acting as a separate channel between teachers and students than in school culture being built, to a considerable extent, from teachers’ own conduct, most clearly in the private

madrasah and more partially in the state madrasah. Teachers' patience, courtesy, integrity, and participation in worship became cultural practice when they were repeated daily, shared with students, and expected of the institution as a whole.

The two madrasahs reached this point by different routes. The private madrasah relied mainly on teachers' visible participation in religious routines and on concrete moral example, a route that corresponds closely to al-Ghazali's account of character formed through guided repetition. The state madrasah relied more on articulated institutional expectations, explicit indicators for evaluating students' conduct, and Akidah Akhlak instruction that invited reflection on the reasons for moral action. Read through Schein's model, the first route anchors culture mainly in practice and the second mainly in espoused values. Neither appears complete on its own, and each seems to offer what the other most needs. Both aim at the same point, which al-Ghazali calls *khuluq* and Schein calls basic assumptions: the stage at which good conduct no longer needs to be prompted.

For madrasahs, this suggests two practical considerations. Where moral culture rests heavily on the example of particular teachers, it may be worth giving that example institutional form, through shared expectations and routines, so that it does not depend on individuals alone. Where culture rests heavily on policy and evaluation, it may be worth attending to whether those values are visibly lived by the adults who articulate them. For teacher development more broadly, the findings suggest that spiritual competence is already treated in practice as a distinct dimension of teaching, even though the national framework does not name it as such, and that this recognition deserves careful policy attention.

The conclusions should be read in light of the study's scope. They rest on two sites and eight informants, including one student at each madrasah, and on fieldwork conducted over two months. The evidence therefore speaks to students' conduct and their own accounts of change rather than to developmental change observed over time, and the affective dimension of moral formation was not directly examined. Because the two madrasahs share routines common to madrasahs across Indonesia, the routes identified here may well be found elsewhere, but this remains to be tested. Future research could follow students over a longer period, include a larger and more varied group of student participants, compare several madrasahs of each governance type, and examine whether the balance between habituation and reflection shifts across levels of schooling.

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