

# Integrating Spiritual Habituation into Character Education: Dhuha Prayer and Qur'an Recitation at Elementary School

Riyasih<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta, 15419, South Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia

## Article Info

### Keywords:

*Character Education*  
*Dhuha Prayer*  
*Murojaah*  
*Islamic Character*  
*Emotional Regulation*  
*Learning Focus*

## ABSTRACT

Character education plays an important role in shaping students' moral, spiritual, and social development at the elementary school level. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of communal Dhuha prayer and Qur'an recitation (murojaah) as strategies for strengthening Islamic character, emotional regulation, and learning focus among second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with observation, documentation, and reflective analysis as the primary data collection techniques. The participants consisted of 32 second-grade students. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the structured implementation of Dhuha prayer and murojaah created positive changes in students' discipline, honesty, patience, social responsibility, emotional stability, and academic concentration. Students became more orderly during school activities, showed better self-control, and demonstrated improved focus during classroom learning after participating in spiritual routines. The study also found that consistent teacher guidance, positive reinforcement, and supportive school environments contributed significantly to the effectiveness of the program. This research concludes that collective spiritual habituation activities can serve as an effective and contextual model for strengthening character education in Islamic elementary schools.

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## Corresponding Author:

### Riyasih

Faculty of Education, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta, 15419, South Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia  
Email: [riyasasih8@gmail.com](mailto:riyasasih8@gmail.com)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education in Indonesia has become a major focus in national education reform. The government, through various policies, such as Strengthening Character Education (PPK) and the Pancasila Student Profile, encourages schools to develop students holistically: intellectually intelligent, spiritually strong, and socially superior [1]. In the context of globalization, which has had a major impact on shifting moral values, character formation is crucial, especially for early-age students who are in the basic development phase. This is where character education finds its momentum, especially at the elementary school level (SD) as the phase of early identity formation for students [2].

Second-grade elementary school students are psychologically in the concrete operational stage according to Piaget's theory. They learn through habits, role models, and direct experience. Therefore, values such as responsibility, honesty, patience, and self-control need to be systematically developed through meaningful daily activities. In an Islamic school environment like Muhammadiyah Elementary School, character values are inseparable from the principles of Islam and Muhammadiyah, which include worship, manners, sincerity, and discipline.

However, initial observations at Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School in Sorong Regency showed that many second-grade students had difficulty focusing on their studies, were easily distracted, and were unable to manage their emotions effectively. The homeroom teacher noted that some students appeared restless, lacked enthusiasm for lessons, and tended to act impulsively when under pressure. This reflects the importance of a spiritual approach that can provide inner peace and a stronger moral compass [3].

In this context, the implementation of congregational Dhuha prayer and Al-Qur'an recitation or murojaah is one



of the effective strategies in strengthening the spiritual character dimension of students. Dhuha prayer as one of the sunnah practices recommended by the Prophet Muhammad SAW has extraordinary spiritual virtues, including as an opener of sustenance, enlightening the heart, and balancing the soul [4]. Meanwhile, Al-Qur'an recitation, when done in tartil and routinely, becomes a medium that not only strengthens memorization, but also strengthens the power of thought, emotions, and behavior because the holy verses of the Al-Qur'an are full of value content [5].

Research conducted by Sylvia and Yuniarti found that the habit of morning worship such as Dhuha Prayer and murojaah can improve students' discipline, social awareness, and self-control [6]. Students become more focused and calm when attending lessons. In addition, teachers also reported a decrease in incidents of violations of school rules. Similar results were found by Zamroh and Haris who studied the effectiveness of daily murojaah on student perseverance at SDIT Nurul Huda, where there was an increase in learning consistency and academic motivation [7].

Researchers were interested in studying this topic because the phenomenon of spirituality in elementary education is often considered secondary, even though it plays a significant role in shaping children's personalities. A spiritual approach to education is not merely ritualistic but also has a pedagogical function in developing students' moral awareness and emotional maturity. Through direct observation and initial interviews with teachers at Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School, researchers witnessed the enthusiasm and positive behavioral changes emerging from students who consistently participated in the Dhuha prayer and murojaah activities.

Furthermore, this approach is crucial because the integration of spirituality and academics is part of Muhammadiyah's holistic and transformative educational vision. Education not only fosters intellectual intelligence but also fosters civilization through noble morals. Amidst the crisis of role models, schools are a strategic place to shape strong, sustainable, Islamic-based character that touches the deepest aspects of children's humanity.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Dhuha prayer and Quran recitation in schools is not only a routine ritual activity, but also a medium for building students' spiritual, social, and academic character. This study will explore more deeply how these two activities can be an effective habituation strategy in improving the moral quality and learning focus of second-grade students at Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study is expected to make a real contribution to the development of an Islamic character education model based on contextual and down-to-earth worship practices.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, chosen for its suitability in exploring naturalistic settings without manipulating variables [8]. The design aimed to understand how and why the habitual practices of communal Dhuha prayer and Qur'an recitation (murojaah) influence character formation, emotional regulation, and learning focus among second-grade students. By observing these daily religious routines as they naturally occur within the school environment, the researcher sought to capture the meanings, processes, and contextual factors underlying the students' behavioral and emotional development.

A case study strategy was implicitly used, focusing on a single bounded system that is SD Muhammadiyah Aimas. This allowed for an in-depth, holistic investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context. The bounded system provided a clear boundary for the research, ensuring that the analysis remained focused on the specific interplay between routine spiritual practices and targeted educational outcomes. Through this lens, the researcher could identify patterns in how consistent engagement with Dhuha prayer and murojaah contributed to disciplined character traits, improved emotional self-regulation, and sustained attention during learning activities, ultimately offering a nuanced understanding of the causal mechanisms and contextual conditions at play.

### 2.2 Research Site and Participant Selection

Site selection was conducted using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, located on Jalan Wortel, Malason Village, Aimas District, Sorong Regency, Southwest Papua, was selected for two primary reasons. First, the school has consistently implemented Islamic-based character education programs for at least two academic years. Second, the school maintained a structured schedule of communal worship activities, specifically Dhuha prayer and murojaah, which were fully integrated into the daily school routine. These criteria ensured that the research site provided a rich, naturalistic context for observing the habitual practices under investigation.

The participants were 32 second-grade students, consisting of 17 boys and 15 girls. This age range (7–8 years) corresponds to Piaget's concrete operational stage of cognitive development, during which children learn most effectively through repetition, direct modeling, and hands-on experience. The researcher justified this selection by noting that students at this developmental phase are highly receptive to character formation through habituation and role modeling. Thus, focusing on second-grade students allowed the study to capture the early and formative effects of spiritual routines on character, emotional regulation, and learning focus before more abstract cognitive abilities fully emerge in later grades.

### 2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection employed three primary techniques, observation, documentation, and reflective analysis, with triangulation across sources to enhance validity [9]. Observations were both non-participant and participant in nature,



using a semi-structured observation guide [10]. Focus areas include students' punctuality, prayer discipline, emotional expression (calm, restless, or enthusiastic), peer interactions during worship, and concentration levels during subsequent classroom learning. Observations were conducted over 15 school days across four weeks, daily during Dhuha prayer (10–15 minutes), murojaah (10 minutes), and the first 20 minutes of post-prayer academic lessons. The researcher recorded field notes containing both descriptive accounts and reflective sections, supplemented by a simple frequency checklist for behavioral indicators such as “maintains focus for more than 10 minutes.”

Documentation served as a second key technique, providing contextual validation and enriching observational data [11]. Collected documents included photographs and short video clips of communal prayer and recitation activities, daily attendance logs for Dhuha prayer and murojaah, teacher anecdotal records on student behavior (eg, instances of improved self-control or reduced classroom disruption), school program reports on Islamic character building from the 2023–2024 academic year, and students' murojaah achievement records (surahs memorized or reviewed). Third, the researcher maintained a daily reflective journal to record personal impressions, emerging patterns (eg, “students who prayed calmly tended to raise their hands more often during math lessons”), and interpretive memos linking observed behaviors to character constructs such as discipline, empathy, and patience. This reflective analysis was ongoing, allowing the researcher to adjust observational focus as themes emerged.

#### **2.4 Data Analysis (Miles & Huberman Model)**

The Miles and Huberman model is one of the most effective data analysis techniques for qualitative research [12]. According to Miles and Huberman, this interactive data analysis model has 3 components, namely (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) drawing conclusions [13].

##### **2.4.1 Data Condensation**

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data emerging from field notes. In this study, the researcher repeatedly read daily observation notes on student behavior during Dhuha prayer and murojaah, then filtered information relevant to the research focus such as discipline, emotional regulation, and learning concentration. Irrelevant data, such as weather conditions or technical disruptions outside the classroom, were eliminated. Codes were developed deductively (based on Islamic character education theory: discipline, sincerity, and istiqomah) and inductively (emerging from the data, for example, “restless while reading the Quran” or “waiting one's turn calmly”).

##### **2.4.2 Data Display (Data Presentation)**

Data presentation is a structured series of information that allows for drawing conclusions and taking action. In this study, data were presented in the form of a matrix and an organized descriptive narrative. For example, the researcher created a matrix with rows containing student groups based on their level of religious service participation (high, medium, low) and columns containing behavioral indicators such as emotional control, post-religious learning focus, and respect for peers. In addition to the matrix, a chronological narrative was created to describe the sequence of daily activities and changes in student behavior from the first to the fourth week of observation.

##### **2.4.3 Conclusion Drawing**

Conclusions were drawn from the beginning of data collection, where researchers began looking for recurring patterns, themes, relationships, and similarities. In this study, researchers identified a pattern that students who consistently participated in the murojaah tended to demonstrate longer focused learning durations (more than 15 minutes) than students with low participation. Interim conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process, for example by comparing field notes from one day to the next.

Verification is the process of double-checking conclusions drawn to ensure their accuracy and validity. Researchers conduct verification by cross-checking conclusions against original field notes and discussing initial findings with the second-grade teacher (member checking). If discrepancies are found, for example between the researcher's conclusions and the teacher's anecdotal notes, the researcher reviews the raw data and, if necessary, revises the conclusions. Verification occurs continuously, not just at the end of the study, so that the final findings are truly grounded in empirical evidence.

The three main components—data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion/verification—are interactive and occur simultaneously, not linearly. In this study, while the researcher was condensing the data (for example, selecting records about students' impulsive behavior), she was simultaneously composing the data presentation in narrative form and drawing tentative conclusions. If new data was discovered that did not fit the initial pattern, the researcher could return to the condensation stage to re-filter the data. This back-and-forth process continued throughout data collection at Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School, ensuring that the analysis was truly dynamic and responsive to developments in the field. This method was designed to answer the core research question of how collective spiritual practices in schools can impact the formation of religious character and improve students' learning focus. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic value-based character education strategies that are contextual, applicable, and have long-term impact.

### **3. RESULT**

#### **3.1. Implementation of Communal Dhuha Prayer and Murojaah as Daily School Routine**

The implementation of communal Dhuha prayer at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas followed a structured daily schedule that began successfully at 07:30 AM each morning before formal lessons commenced. The researcher observed that all second-grade students gathered in the designated prayer area, which was a clean carpeted section at the back of the classroom with visible markings indicating where each student should stand. The classroom teacher or occasionally a trained student acts as the imam, leading the prayer while the rest of the class follows in rows facing the qibla direction. The entire prayer session lasted approximately ten to fifteen minutes, during which the researcher noted that most students performed the physical movements of prayer correctly, although a few required gentle reminders about proper hand placement or posture. By the end of the fourth week, the researcher observed that students began gathering spontaneously at the prayer area upon hearing the adhan recording, without needing verbal announcements from the teacher.

Immediately following the Dhuha prayer, the murojaah session begins with minimal transition time, typically less than one minute between the final greeting and the first verse of recitation. During this ten-minute session, students recited previously memorized short surahs from Juz Amma, including An-Nas, Al-Falaq, Al-Ikhlās, and Al-Asr, in a choral manner led by the teacher. The researcher documented that the teacher would first pronounce a verse aloud with correct tajweed, then the entire class would repeat the same verse twice before proceeding to the next verse. Field notes from week one recorded that several students struggled to keep pace with the class, often falling behind or mumbling inaudibly while others recited clearly. By week three, however, the researcher observed that even the previously hesitant students had begun moving their lips and producing audible sounds, although their voices remained softer than their peers.

The integration of these two spiritual activities into the daily schedule created a distinct behavioral transition period between students' arrival at school and the start of academic instruction. The researcher noted that students who arrived in a noisy or hyperactive state gradually became calmer and more settled as the prayer and recitation progressed. The physical act of standing in orderly rows, performing synchronized movements, and reciting verses in unison appears to function as a behavioral anchor that redirects students' attention inward. One teacher informally commented that before this routine was consistently enforced, the first fifteen minutes of lessons were often chaotic and unproductive. During the observation period, the researcher witnessed that the prayer and recitation sessions were effectively replaced that chaos with a predictable, structured, and spiritually meaningful start to the school day.

Teacher supervision during both activities was consistent and active, with the classroom teacher present at every session and occasionally assisted by a visiting religious education teacher. The teacher's role extends beyond merely leading the activities to include monitoring student posture, attentiveness, pronunciation accuracy, and respectful behavior toward peers. Field notes recorded multiple instances where the teacher paused the recitation to demonstrate correct pronunciation of specific Arabic letters that several students had mispronounced consistently. Rather than expressing frustration, the teacher used these moments as teaching opportunities, explaining briefly why correct pronunciation matters for preserving the meaning of Qur'anic verses. The researcher observed that students responded positively to this approach, with several students later helping their peers correct the same pronunciation errors during subsequent sessions without teacher prompting.



**Figure 2. Dhuha Prayer on Islamic Holidays**

Documentation in the form of photographs and field notes revealed that the physical environment was deliberately arranged to support the consistent implementation of both activities. The prayer area features marked lines on the carpet indicating where students of different heights should stand to maintain orderly rows regardless of their physical size. A small wooden bookshelf near the teacher's desk contained enough copies of the Qur'an and illustrated prayer guides for every student in the class to access simultaneously. The researcher also noted a poster on the wall



displaying the daily schedule with the prayer and recitation times clearly highlighted in green marker. These environmental arrangements appear to have been established before the research began, suggesting that the school had already committed to making these spiritual practices a permanent and non-negotiable part of the daily routine. Overall, the implementation data demonstrated that both Dhuha prayer and murojaah were executed with consistency, structure, and institutional support across the entire four-week observation period.

### **3.2. Changes in Students' Islamic Character Formation**

Observational data documented noticeable improvements in student discipline over the four-week period, particularly in behaviors related to punctuality and adherence to activity procedures. During the first week, the researcher recorded that several students required repeated verbal reminders to perform ablution correctly, often rushing through the process or forgetting essential steps such as rinsing the mouth or nose. By the third week, however, most students were observed performing ablution in the correct sequence without teacher supervision, even helping younger or less experienced peers complete the procedure properly. The researcher also noted that students who previously talked or fidgeted during prayer began maintaining complete silence and stillness, a change that the teacher confirmed had not been consistently present before the structured program began. One particularly striking observation occurred when a student accidentally stepped on another student's prayer mat, instead of reacting angrily, the affected student simply repositioned his mat and continued praying without breaking his concentration. This incident suggested that the repeated practice of prayer had begun to internalize patience and self-control as habitual responses rather than merely enforced rules.

Honesty emerged as another character dimension that showed observable behavioral changes during the murojaah recitation sessions, particularly regarding students' admission of difficulty. In the first week, field notes documented that several students pretended to recite by moving their lips without producing sound when they had not yet memorized the assigned verse. The researcher observed that these students would also position themselves behind taller classmates, apparently hoping the teacher would not notice their lack of participation. By the second week, after the teacher had repeatedly praised students who honestly admitted forgetting verses, a noticeable shift occurred in classroom dynamics. Several students began raising their hands voluntarily to say, "I forgot, teacher," before the recitation even began, requesting the teacher to repeat the pronunciation before they attempted to recite. The researcher noted that the teachers responded to such admissions with phrases like "Thank you for being honest" rather than expressing disappointment, which appeared to create a safe environment where honesty was rewarded rather than punished.

Patience was another character trait that manifested differently across the observation period, particularly during moments when students had to wait for their individual turn to recite. During the first week, the researchers recorded many instances of impatient behaviors, including students tapping their feet, looking around the room, whispering to neighbors, or shuffling their prayer mats noisily. One student was observed sighing loudly and rolling his eyes when the teacher called another student's name before him, a clear expression of frustration at having to wait. By the third week, the teacher introduced a simple routine of silent dhikr for students waiting for their turn, instructing them to quietly repeat short phrases of praise to Allah while keeping their eyes lowered. The researcher observed that this structured waiting activity dramatically reduced restless behaviors, as students now had a clear and acceptable way to occupy their waiting time. By the fourth week, students who finished their recitation early were observed sitting calmly with their hands folded, no longer disturbing peers who were still reciting, demonstrating a functional understanding of patience as active respect for others' learning time.

responsibility as a character indicator was measured through students' care of personal and shared religious materials, including Qur'an copies, prayer mats, and ablution facilities. During the first week, the researchers documented many instances of students leaving Qur'an copies on the floor, returning them to the bookshelf with pages bent or covers facing the wrong direction, or failing to roll up their prayer mats after use. The teacher addressed this by explicitly teaching proper handling procedures during a dedicated ten-minute session and by assigning rotating student monitors responsible for checking the condition of all materials after each session. By the second week, the researcher observed that students began voluntarily checking their own materials before returning them, a behavior that the teacher confirmed was previously rare. By the fourth week, the researcher noted that students not only handled their own materials carefully but also reminded peers who were about to mishandle shared items, using phrases like "Turn the book around so the cover faces out" or "Fold the mat from the top, not from the middle." The teacher commented informally that this sense of collective responsibility had extended beyond religious materials to include classroom supplies such as crayons and scissors, suggesting that responsibility learned in one context generalized to other settings.

The collective nature of the prayer and recitation activities also fostered social responsibility, particularly in how students helped peers who struggled with recitation or prayer procedures. Field notes documented spontaneous peer tutoring incidents, such as one student quietly demonstrating the correct sitting position during prayer to a classmate who was slouching, without being asked by the teacher. The researcher observed that these helping behaviors occurred more frequently among students who sat next to each other consistently across multiple sessions, suggesting that proximity and repeated interaction facilitated mutual support. By the third week, several students who finished their individual recitation early began waiting for their slower peers to finish, offering quiet encouragement such as "You can do it" or nodding approvingly when the peer completed a difficult verse correctly. The teacher confirmed in an informal conversation that before the structured program, students rarely offered such assistance during religious activities, viewing them as



individual tests of memory rather than collective spiritual exercises. This transformation indicated that the communal format of Dhuha prayer and murojaah effectively transformed what could have been purely individual spiritual acts into meaningful opportunities for practicing social responsibility within a supportive peer learning environment.

### 3.3. Observable Changes in Students' Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation was assessed through observation of students' behavioral responses to minor frustrations, transitions between activities, and interpersonal conflicts during the school day. During the first week of observation, the researcher documented many incidents where students displayed impulsive reactions, including grabbing crayons from peers without asking, shouting in frustration when unable to pronounce a difficult Arabic word, or crying loudly when corrected by the teacher about prayer posture. One particularly notable incident involved a student who accidentally knocked over another student's water bottle, instead of apologizing or helping clean up, the student ran away toward the bathroom and hid there for several minutes. The teacher reported that such reactive behaviors were common before the structured program began and was a primary reason she had welcomed the research. By the third week, however, the researchers observed a noticeable reduction in impulsive outbursts, with students more frequently pausing before reacting or seeking adult help rather than escalating conflicts independently. The teacher confirmed this observation, noting that she had to intervene in peer conflicts far less often than she had become accustomed to in previous months.

Calmness as a specific dimension of emotional regulation was measured through observation of students' behavior during transitions, particularly the shift from active recitation to quiet seatwork. During the first week, the researcher observed that students typically required a long and noisy settling period after completing murojaah, during which they talked loudly, moved around the classroom, played with non-learning objects, or simply stared blankly into space instead of their initially assigned tasks. One student was observed pretending to sharpen a pencil for nearly five minutes, repeatedly inserting and removing the pencil without actually turning the sharpener handle. By the second week, the teacher began ending each murojaah session with a one-minute silent reflection, instructing students to close their eyes and take three deep breaths before opening their workbooks. The researcher observed that this simple routine dramatically reduced transition chaos, as students now have a clear behavioral script to follow between recitation and academic work. By the fourth week, several students were observed opening their workbooks and beginning to write without any teacher instruction immediately after the silent reflection ended, their faces calm and their movements deliberate rather than rushed or reluctant.

The expression of frustration during challenging academic tasks was another lens through which emotional regulation was observed across the four-week period. During the first week, when students encountered difficult math problems in the lesson immediately following murojaah, many displayed visible frustration behaviors such as tapping pencils rapidly on desks, sighing loudly, putting heads down on folded arms, or tearing pages out of notebooks. One student was observed crumpling his entire worksheet and throwing it under the desk after struggling with a single problem for less than thirty seconds. By the third week, the same academic challenge elicited noticeably fewer frustration behaviors, and the duration of those behaviors when they did occur became much shorter. The researcher noted that several students who previously gave up immediately began showing persistence, such as re-reading problems multiple times or trying different strategies before asking for help. One student was overheard whispering to himself, "It's okay, try again," a phrase that mirrored the teacher's encouraging language during murojaah sessions when students struggled with pronunciation. This transfer of regulatory self-talk from the spiritual context to the academic context demonstrated that emotional regulation strategies learned during religious activities generalized to other challenging school settings.

Recovery time from emotional distress was also documented, particularly for three students whom the teacher identified as having historically high emotional reactivity before the research began. During the first week, when these specific students become upset—for example, after losing a turn to recite, being corrected by the teacher, or having a peer take their designated prayer spot—they required extended periods to return to a calm state. The researcher observed that during these recovery periods, the affected students would refuse to participate in any activity, turning their backs to the teacher, hiding their faces with their hands, or sitting motionlessly with arms tightly crossed. By the third week, the same students showed noticeably shorter recovery times, and their distress behaviors shifted from aggressive or avoidant responses to more contained expressions such as quiet crying or simply looking downward without disturbing others. One of these three students was observed approaching the teacher voluntarily during week four to explain, "I felt sad because my friend didn't share," a behavior that the teacher described as entirely new and unprecedented for this particular child. The teacher expressed surprise and delight at this development, noting that previously this student would have screamed or thrown an object rather than using words to express emotional states.

Finally, the researchers documented students' ability to regulate high energy levels and excitement, particularly comparing the morning transition from prayer to academics with the afternoon transition from recess to post-lunch lessons. During the morning, the researcher observed that students generally transitioned from Dhuha prayer to seatwork with relative calmness, their voices low and their movements controlled. In contrast, during the afternoon return from recess, the same students displayed dramatically different behavior, running into the classroom, shouting to friends, and taking extended periods to settle down even when the teacher used identical classroom management strategies. This contrast suggests that the spiritual routine specifically contributed to regulating students' energy levels in ways that general passage of time or simple teacher redirection could not replicate. The teacher confirmed this observation, remarking that the most



challenging part of her day had always been the post-recess session, while the post-prayer session had become her students' favorite teaching period because it arrived ready to learn. By the fourth week, the researcher noted that several students appeared to use deep breathing techniques spontaneously after returning from recess, even though no prayer session preceded that transition, suggesting that the regulatory skills learned during morning spiritual practice were beginning to be applied more broadly across the school day.

#### **3.4. Changes in Students' Learning Focus Following Spiritual Activities**

Learning focus was operationally defined as sustained attention on academic tasks, measured through observation of students' eye gaze direction, body orientation, response to teacher questions, and completion of assigned work without off-task interruptions. During the first week of observation, the researcher noted that students' attention during the math lesson immediately following Dhuha prayer was highly fragmented and easily disrupted. Many students were observed turning their heads toward the window whenever sounds came from outside, playing with pencils or erasers instead of writing, or initiating conversations with neighbors about topics completely unrelated to the lesson. The teacher was observed stopping her instruction multiple times during each lesson to redirect specific students, often using students' names repeatedly before they would refocus their attention. One student in particular was observed staring at the ceiling for nearly two full minutes while the teacher explained a new concept, only to raise his hand moments later to ask a question that had just been answered. The teacher expressed frustration during an informal conversation, stating that before the structured prayer program, she had become accustomed to re-teaching the same material multiple times because students were not focused enough to absorb it the first time.

By the third week of observation, the researcher documented a noticeable improvement in students' ability to maintain attention on academic tasks for longer periods without external redirection. Students were observed keeping their eyes on the teacher or the whiteboard for extended durations, only occasionally glancing away and then quickly returning their gaze to the front of the classroom. The number of off-task conversations between neighboring students decreased substantially, and when such conversations did occur, they were typically brief and related to the lesson content rather than unrelated social talk. The teacher noted during week three that she no longer needed to repeat instructions as frequently, as most students appeared to have heard and understood her the first time. One student who had been among the most easily distracted in week one was observed raising his hand to answer a complex question correctly, then waiting patiently with his hand raised rather than calling out or fidgeting while waiting to be called upon. The researcher recorded in field notes that this represented a qualitative shift in classroom attentional dynamics, from an environment characterized by constant redirection to one characterized by sustained mutual engagement.

he relationship between individual participation consistency in spiritual activities and observed learning focus showed a clear pattern, although the researcher avoided quantifying this relationship with percentages. Students who arrived early and participated fully in both Dhuha prayer and the entire murojaah session were consistently observed to be among the most focused learners during the subsequent academic lesson. In contrast, students who arrived late and missed part of the prayer or recitation were disproportionately represented among those who struggled to maintain attention, often appearing restless or distracted even when the teacher used engaging instructional methods. The researcher also noted that students who participated actively in recitation, meaning they recited aloud with a clear voice rather than silently mouthing the words, tended to show better focus than those who participated passively. One particularly illustrative case involved twin siblings who sat next to each other, the sister who recited audibly was observed completing her math worksheet quickly and accurately, while her brother who rarely produced audible sound during murojaah spent the same period staring blankly at his paper. This within-family comparison suggests that the quality of participation, not merely physical presence, may be an important factor in the focusing effect of spiritual routines.

The quality of task completion, not merely the duration of focus, also showed observable improvement across the four-week observation period. During week one, the researcher examined student work produced during the first academic block after prayer and found that many worksheets contained incomplete problems, answers written in the wrong spaces, or responses that did not match the questions asked. Several students were observed rushing through their work without checking it, completing problems incorrectly at high speed rather than carefully and accurately at a moderate pace. By week three, the researcher observed that students more frequently paused to review their answers before submitting work, a metacognitive behavior that had been entirely absent during week one. The teacher independently confirmed this observation, noting that she had not explicitly taught self-checking strategies, suggesting that the improvement emerged naturally from increased attentional capacity rather than from specific instructional changes. One student was overheard saying to a peer, "I finished, but I need to check first," before turning in his worksheet, a statement that reflected an emerging sense of academic responsibility that the teacher described as developmentally advanced for second grade.

Finally, the researcher documented an interesting qualitative observation regarding the timing of focus improvements relative to the daily schedule and the integrity of the spiritual routine. During days when the murojaah session was shortened due to school-wide assemblies or other unavoidable interruptions, the researcher observed that students consistently showed poorer focus during the subsequent academic lesson compared to days with a full-length recitation session. Students appeared more restless, required more frequent redirection, and produced work of lower quality on shortened days, even when the teacher made no other changes to the lesson plan. This pattern suggests that the



duration and completeness of the spiritual routine mattered for the focusing effect, rather than the mere act of having prayed or recited regardless of length. The researcher also noted that on days when the teacher was absent and a substitute teacher led the activities with less structure or enthusiasm, students also showed reduced focus, highlighting the importance of teacher modeling and consistent implementation. Taken together, these observational findings documented a clear association between habitual participation in Dhuha prayer and murojaah and improved learning focus, with the strength of the association varying by participation consistency, activity length, and the quality of teacher facilitation.

### **3.5. Patterns of Student Participation Before and During the Observation Period**

Before the structured observation period began, the researcher conducted an initial assessment of student participation in Dhuha prayer and murojaah to establish baseline conditions. During this initial phase, the researcher observed that only a minority of second-grade students consistently participated in both activities from start to finish with apparent engagement and effort. Most students attended the prayer session physically, as the teacher required everyone to be present, but many behaviors displayed indicating low engagement such as standing with improper posture, rushing through prayer movements carelessly, or looking around the room instead of focusing on the recitation. The teacher explained during an informal conversation that she had previously prioritized academic instruction over religious activities, often shortening or skipping murojaah when the schedule felt too tight. The researcher noted that this initial context was characterized by inconsistent implementation, variable student engagement, and a general atmosphere of treating spiritual activities as secondary to academics rather than integrated with them. This baseline assessment provided the comparative context against which changes during the structured four-week observation period would be understood.

Throughout the four-week observation period, the researcher documented gradual changes in the number of students who participated actively and consistently, although these changes were not uniform across all students. Some students who had been minimally engaged during the initial assessment became increasingly involved as the weeks progressed, particularly those who received positive reinforcement from the teacher for small improvements in recitation volume or prayer posture. Other students, however, remained at similar levels of participation across all four weeks, appearing either unable or unwilling to change their engagement patterns despite the teacher's consistent encouragement. The researcher observed that students who lived closest to the school were among those who showed the earliest and most sustained improvements, suggesting that logistical factors such as travel distance and morning fatigue may have influenced students' capacity to participate fully. By the fourth week, the researcher noted that the classroom atmosphere during prayer and recitation had shifted noticeably from the initial baseline, with more students arriving on time, fewer students needing individual redirection, and a general sense that these activities had become a normal and expected part of the daily routine rather than an optional add-on.

The researcher identified three distinct patterns of participation change among the thirty-two students, based on observational notes and teacher input rather than numerical calculations. The first pattern, observed in approximately half of the students, was characterized by consistently or gradually increasing participation across all four weeks, with these students appearing to internalize the routine and requiring less external prompting over time. The second pattern, observed in about one-third of students, was characterized by inconsistent participation that fluctuated from day to day based on factors such as arrival time, mood, or whether a particular friend was also participating actively that day. The third pattern, observed in the remaining students, was characterized by persistently low participation despite the teacher's repeated efforts, with these students continuing to arrive late, leave early, or stand silently during recitation even in the final week of observation. The teacher noted that the students in this third group were also those who generally struggled most with academic engagement and behavioral self-regulation, suggesting that their difficulty with spiritual participation may have been part of a broader pattern of school adjustment challenges rather than a specific resistance to religious activities.

Individual student trajectories varied considerably, and the researcher documented three cases in detail to illustrate this diversity of experience. The first student, a boy who lived far from school and frequently arrived late, showed minimal improvement across the four weeks, as his primary barrier was transportation-related and beyond the teacher's influence. The second student, a very shy girl who initially stood completely silent and still during murojaah, gradually began moving her lips in synchronization with the class by week two, and by week four was observed producing audible though still quiet recitation while occasionally glancing at the teacher for approval. The third student, a boy who participated enthusiastically during week one, missed several consecutive days of school due to a family trip, and upon returning appeared confused and hesitant, requiring several days to re-establish the routine before his participation returned to previous levels. The teacher commented that the third student's regression after absence highlighted how important daily consistency was for habit formation, as even a short break could disrupt emerging behavioral patterns. These individual cases demonstrate that aggregate descriptions of participation change necessarily mask considerable variability, and that understanding why participation changes requires attending to each student's unique circumstances and barriers.

Several contextual factors appeared to influence participation patterns, based on the researcher's field notes and conversations with the teacher throughout the observation period. The most frequently cited barrier to full participation was late arrival, which affected students who lived far from school, who had parents who worked early morning shifts, or who had siblings in different grade levels with different start times. Another important factor was students' confidence in their Qur'anic recitation skills, as those who were less fluent tended to participate more passively, apparently to avoid the



embarrassment of making mistakes in front of peers. The teacher's own behavior also mattered, as on days when he was visibly enthusiastic and frequently offered specific praise, participation was observably higher than on days when he appeared tired or rushed. The researcher noted that the physical environment played a role as well, when prayer mats or Qur'an copies were disorganized or missing, participation dipped, but when materials were ready and accessible, students engaged more readily. By the end of the four-week period, the teacher expressed confidence that the new routine was sustainable, although she acknowledged that maintaining it would require ongoing effort, particularly in ensuring that the students who faced logistical barriers received the support they needed to arrive on time and participate fully.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study was designed to answer three main questions previously formulated in the methodology. First, regarding the implementation of Dhuha Prayer and murojaah at Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School, the findings indicate that implementation takes place through a structured daily routine (7:30 a.m. daily), led by teachers with an exemplary approach and positive reinforcement, and supported by an adequate physical environment (prayer mats, Quran, schedule posters). Second, regarding the impact of these activities on students' Islamic character, the findings indicate that there is an increase in discipline (arriving on time, maintaining order), honesty (admitting to forgetting memorization), patience (waiting one's turn without complaining), and social responsibility (helping friends who are having difficulties). Third, regarding the impact on emotional regulation and learning focus, the findings indicate that students become calmer, recover more quickly from distress, and are better able to maintain attention on academic tasks, especially in sessions immediately following prayer activities. Thus, all three research questions have been explicitly answered through observational data collected over four weeks in the field.

##### 4.1. Implementation of Dhuha Prayer and Murojaah as School Routines

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of congregational Dhuha prayer and murojaah at Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School took place in a structured and consistent manner, with students showing increased participation and active involvement throughout the four weeks of observation. These findings interpret that the success of the implementation does not solely depend on the worship activities themselves, but rather on three observed supporting factors: (a) the regularity of the same time and procedures every day, (b) the active role of teachers as models and facilitators, and (c) the arrangement of a supportive physical environment (prayer area, prayer mats, Al-Qur'an). Theoretically, these findings support Bandura's (1977) view of social learning theory, where students learn through observing teachers and peers in a repetitive and consistent context [14]. This study extends this theory by showing that social learning through observation occurs not only in an academic context, but also in a spiritual-ritual context integrated into the daily school routine. Thus, the successful implementation of a program to habituate worship is highly dependent on the stability of the structure, consistency of role models, and the availability of adequate physical facilities.

##### 4.2. Changes in Students' Islamic Character

The findings of this study identified that students showed improvements in aspects of discipline, honesty, patience, and social responsibility during regular participation in Dhuha Prayer and murojaah. Interpretation of these findings suggests that collective worship activities serve as a more effective means of internalizing values than verbal instructions alone, because students directly experience the positive consequences of disciplined behavior (e.g., finishing on time, receiving teacher praise) and the negative consequences of undisciplined behavior (e.g., falling behind in recitation). These findings strongly support Piaget's theory of the concrete operational stage, where children aged 7-8 years learn best through direct experience and repetition, rather than through abstract explanations of morality [15]. Compared with Mistiningsi and Fahyuni's study which found increased discipline through the habit of morning worship [16], this study extends these findings by specifically showing how honesty emerges when students begin to admit their inability to memorize without fear of punishment. The scientific contribution of this finding is that collective worship-based character education can form a spiritual habitus (in Bourdieu's sense) that transforms external values into internal dispositions that are automatic and do not need to be consciously considered every time one acts.

##### 4.3. Student Emotional Regulation

This study found that students demonstrated improved emotional regulation, characterized by reduced impulsive behavior, improved composure during transitions between activities, and shorter recovery times from emotional distress. The interpretation of these findings is that the Dhuha prayer and murojaah, with their repetitive, rhythmic nature, requiring body and breathing control, indirectly train students' capacity to manage their physiological arousal. When students become accustomed to standing still, regulating their breathing, and repeating the recitation to a certain rhythm, they are actually training the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for calming the body after stress or excessive excitement. [17]. These findings extend Gross's theory of emotion regulation, which is typically applied in adult contemplation, by showing that simple emotion regulation strategies based on religious rituals can be taught implicitly to young children through habituation, without the need for explicit instruction on "how to manage emotions" [18]. This study also supports Rahmawati's findings on the effectiveness of daily murojaah on student persistence [19], but goes further by showing that academic persistence may be mediated by improved emotion regulation, rather than solely by improved memory or cognition [20]. Significantly, these findings provide a practical contribution in that schools facing problems with impulsive and aggressive behavior in young students can consider collective worship habituation programs



as a low-cost and easy-to-implement non-pharmacological intervention.

#### **4.4. Focus on Studying After Worship**

The findings of this study indicate that students demonstrated a significant increase in learning focus in academic sessions conducted immediately after Dhuha Prayer and murojaah, compared to sessions not preceded by worship activities. The interpretation of this finding is that spiritual activities that require concentration, self-control, and response inhibition (e.g., not talking during prayer, not moving carelessly) function as "cognitive practice" that prepares the brain for academic tasks that also require concentration and self-control [21]. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of "cognitive priming" where the previous activity activates the same neural networks that will be used in the subsequent activity [22]. This finding challenges the common assumption that worship activities are "empty rituals" that have no cognitive function, by empirically demonstrating that worship performed earnestly actually improves children's attention capacity. Compared to Nisa et.al's study which focused on the moral aspects of murojaah [23], this study extends the literature by documenting a direct relationship between participation in religious activities and academic performance in non-religious subjects such as mathematics [24]. The research question of "how" learning focus is improved can be answered by the following mechanisms: (a) anxiety reduction through predictable rituals, (b) increased emotion regulation that reduces internal distractions, and (c) response inhibition training that improves executive control. Practically, these findings imply that subjects requiring high concentration (e.g., mathematics, reading comprehension) should be scheduled immediately after morning worship, rather than after recess or before school ends.

#### **4.5. Significance and Scientific Contribution of the Research**

The main scientific contribution of this research is the development of a character education model based on the habituation of collective worship that is contextual and applicable for elementary school level. In contrast to character education approaches that have tended to be cognitive (teaching values through lectures or discussions) or punishment-reward (point systems for good behavior), this research shows that an approach based on collective spiritual rituals has the advantage of internalizing values through bodily and emotional experiences, not just through cognitive understanding [25], [26]. The theoretical significance of this research is to expand the framework of thinking about character education that has been dominated by Lickona's theory of knowing, loving, and doing the good, by adding the dimension of "ritual embodiment" where moral values are internalized through repeated physical and emotional experiences in a communal context [27]. Practically, this research contributes in the form of a concrete implementation protocol that is easy to replicate by other Islamic elementary schools, including guidelines on minimum duration (25-30 minutes per day), teacher roles, environmental arrangements, and strategies for overcoming barriers to participation. In policy terms, these findings support the strengthening of the Character Education Strengthening (PPK) program launched by the government, by showing that religious activities that have often been seen as "extracurricular" or "additional" actually have a direct contribution to achieving national character education goals.

#### **4.6. Theoretical, Practical, and Policy Implications**

The theoretical implication of this research is the need to revise existing models of character education to incorporate the collective ritual dimension as a mechanism for internalizing values distinct from cognitive or behavioristic mechanisms. Bandura's social learning theory needs to be expanded to accommodate the finding that observation and imitation in religious ritual contexts have a stronger effect on character change than observation in secular contexts, perhaps because rituals simultaneously involve emotion, repetition, and communal commitment. The most immediate practical implication is that Islamic elementary schools should make Dhuha prayer and murojaah a daily mandatory activity, not an optional one, with a minimum of 30 minutes allocated before the start of core lessons. Teachers need to be trained to maximize the pedagogical function of prayer activities, for example by providing specific verbal reinforcement ("you honestly admitted you forgot, that's good") rather than simply leading the prayer mechanically. Policy implications include recommendations to the Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to integrate collective prayer habituation programs into national character education standards, including the provision of implementation guidelines and mass teacher training. Furthermore, policies on lesson scheduling need to take these findings into account by placing subjects requiring high concentration in the first hours after morning prayer activities.

#### **4.7. Research Limitations**

This study has several limitations that need to be frankly acknowledged to avoid overstated claims. The first limitation is the study's duration of only four weeks, making it impossible to assess whether the observed behavioral changes were temporary (simply due to novelty or extra attention from the researcher) or truly enduring as long-term character changes. The second limitation is the focus on a single school (Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School) with a specific cultural and religious context (a Muslim-majority school in Southwest Papua), so generalizations to schools with different demographics (e.g., public schools with minority Muslim students, or schools in more populous Javanese communities) need to be made with caution. The third limitation is the potential for researcher bias, as the researcher acted as both the primary instrument of data collection and interpreter. Therefore, although reflexivity was maintained through reflective journaling, it is still possible that the researcher's expectations or assumptions influenced what was observed and how the data was interpreted. The fourth limitation is the lack of systematic baseline measurements before the intervention beyond simple initial observations, making it difficult to ascertain that the observed changes were truly due to the habituation program and not to other factors such as students' natural maturation or seasonal changes affecting

mood. The fifth limitation is the use of only one observer, so no inter-rater reliability can be calculated to ensure that other researchers will see the same patterns. Future research is recommended to address this limitation with a longitudinal design (at least one semester), involving multiple observers, using multiple case studies (several schools with different characteristics), and developing a more standardized character measurement instrument while maintaining the richness of the qualitative data.

## 5. COCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of communal Dhuha prayer and Qur'an recitation (murojaah) at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas positively contributed to strengthening students' Islamic character, emotional regulation, and learning focus. The structured and consistent habituation of spiritual activities succeeded in creating a more disciplined, calm, and supportive learning environment for second-grade students. The study revealed significant behavioral improvements among students, particularly in the aspects of discipline, honesty, patience, responsibility, and social care. Students gradually became more active and orderly in participating in religious activities, demonstrated better emotional self-control, and showed greater concentration during academic lessons conducted after Dhuha prayer and murojaah sessions. The findings also indicate that spiritual routines function not only as acts of worship but also as pedagogical tools that help students internalize Islamic moral values through daily practice and repetition.

Furthermore, the success of the program was strongly influenced by the active role of teachers, consistent implementation procedures, positive reinforcement, and supportive physical environments within the school. These elements helped transform religious activities into meaningful habits that shaped students' attitudes and behaviors both spiritually and academically. This study contributes to the development of Islamic character education by demonstrating that collective worship-based habituation can become an effective, contextual, and sustainable approach for elementary schools. Therefore, schools are encouraged to integrate structured spiritual activities such as Dhuha prayer and murojaah into daily educational practices as part of holistic character development programs that balance intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual growth.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to express all praise and gratitude to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala for His mercy, taufik and inayah so that the preparation of this journal can be completed well. Shalawat and greetings may be poured out on the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the perfect role model in shaping the character of our human beings.

The author also expresses his deepest appreciation and gratitude to:

- The supervising lecturer, who has provided guidance, direction, and intellectual support throughout the research process and writing of this article.
- Colleagues and colleagues, for their contributions through discussions, suggestions, and moral support that helped enrich perspectives and refine arguments.
- My beloved family, who has always been a source of strength and motivation in every step of the author's academic journey.
- Muhammadiyah Aimas Elementary School, Sorong Regency, which has opened access and supported the implementation of the data collection process in an open and conducive manner.

Finally, the author acknowledges that this work still has limitations. Therefore, all forms of constructive criticism and suggestions are highly appreciated for the perfection of future scientific works.

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