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The School-Based *Jumat Berkah* Program as a Reward-Based Strategy for Developing Students' Religious Character

Sheylla Putri Shafrilla,[1] Dhita Ayomi Purwaningtyas[2]
*shelaputreyy@gmail.com
[1,2] Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

Abstract

Developing students' religious character requires educational strategies that extend beyond religious instruction to foster the internalization of religious values through sustainable behavioral change. This study aims to examine the implementation of the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program as a reward-based strategy for developing students' religious character, analyze the role of rewards in facilitating religious character formation, and identify the supporting factors and challenges influencing the program's implementation at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using field research. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving nine purposively selected informants, including the program initiator, an Islamic Religious Education teacher, homeroom teachers, and students. Data credibility was ensured through source and method triangulation, while data were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the *Jumat Berkah* program effectively develops students' religious character by integrating exemplary practices, religious habituation, positive reinforcement, and school culture. Rewards function primarily as initial positive reinforcement that encourages participation in religious activities before gradually facilitating the transition from extrinsically motivated behavior to intrinsically regulated religious commitment. The program also enhances students' worship consistency, social responsibility, discipline, and religious awareness. Its effectiveness is supported by teacher role modelling, continuous habituation, active involvement of the school community, and sustainable charity management, while uneven religious awareness, family and social environments, and technical constraints remain significant challenges. This study introduces an integrated perspective demonstrating that reward-based reinforcement functions as a transitional mechanism that supports the internalization of religious character through continuous habituation within school culture rather than merely encouraging short-term behavioral compliance. The study extends the application of behavioral reinforcement theory in Islamic education by proposing an integrated model that combines positive reinforcement, exemplary practices, religious habituation, and school culture as complementary strategies for sustainable religious character development.

Keywords: *Jumat Berkah* program; positive reinforcement; religious character; religious habituation; school culture; qualitative study.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology, the unprecedented expansion of information access, and the transformation of social interactions have profoundly influenced the attitudes, behaviors, and value systems of young people worldwide. While technological development has created broader educational opportunities, it has simultaneously introduced complex moral and ethical challenges that affect adolescents' character formation. Schools increasingly encounter issues such as intolerance, bullying, violence, cyber misconduct, declining empathy, and weakened social responsibility, indicating that educational institutions are expected not only to develop students' cognitive competencies but also to cultivate moral and character development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; OECD, 2021). These challenges have become particularly significant in countries with strong religious and cultural traditions, where globalization and digitalization often interact with local moral values in complex ways.

Within the Indonesian educational context, concerns regarding the deterioration of students' moral behavior have become increasingly prominent. Ary Ginanjar Agustian, as cited by Chairiyah (2017) in Fadilah et al. (2021), argues that Indonesia is experiencing multidimensional crises, including a moral crisis within the education sector. Such concerns are reflected in the increasing occurrence of intolerance, student violence, bullying, juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, and various forms of behavioral deviation in schools. Islamic education likewise faces substantial challenges across educational levels. Some scholars attribute these problems to limitations in curriculum implementation, whereas others emphasize the influence of rapid social transformation and the gradual erosion of cultural values. Another perspective suggests that the crisis originates from the decline of exemplary role models (*qudwah hasanah*), weakening religious commitment, and diminishing Islamic values among younger generations (Fitri, 2018). These conditions indicate that educational institutions are required to respond not only through curriculum improvement but also by creating sustainable educational environments that nurture students' moral and religious development.

These contemporary educational challenges reinforce the growing consensus that character education should become a central objective of schooling rather than merely a complementary component of academic instruction. Education is expected to develop students holistically by integrating intellectual achievement with moral responsibility, ethical reasoning, and positive behavior. Character refers to the relatively stable personal qualities that distinguish individuals and shape their attitudes, decisions, and actions throughout daily life (Gunawan, 2012). Recognizing this importance, the Indonesian Ministry of Education has identified eighteen core character values to be integrated into educational practice, among which religious character occupies a fundamental position because it provides moral guidance for individual behavior and social interaction. This policy reflects a broader international movement emphasizing that schools should simultaneously cultivate academic excellence and character development to

prepare students for responsible citizenship in rapidly changing societies (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2014).

Religious character constitutes one of the essential dimensions of holistic character education because it shapes individuals' ethical judgment, self-regulation, and interpersonal relationships through internalized religious values. Rather than merely transmitting religious knowledge, religious character education seeks to encourage students to internalize spiritual values so that these values become reflected consistently in everyday attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes. Consequently, successful religious education is demonstrated not only by students' cognitive understanding of religious teachings but also by their ability to practice these values voluntarily in their daily lives. Religious character therefore serves as the foundation upon which other positive characteristics—including honesty, discipline, empathy, responsibility, and social care—can develop in a balanced manner (Andrianie et al., 2021). This perspective is consistent with contemporary theories of character education, which emphasize that sustainable character formation requires repeated behavioral practice, meaningful social interaction, and supportive educational environments rather than relying solely on classroom instruction (Lickona, 1991; Nucci et al., 2021).

Accordingly, responsibility for developing students' religious character extends beyond families as the primary educational environment to include schools as formal institutions capable of systematically cultivating positive habits through educational programs, organizational culture, and daily interactions. Schools possess strategic advantages because they provide structured environments where religious values can be consistently reinforced through learning activities, teacher role modeling, peer interaction, extracurricular programs, and institutional culture. Character education implemented within school culture enables students to repeatedly experience, observe, and practice desirable behaviors until they gradually become internalized as personal values rather than externally imposed obligations (Andrianie et al., 2021). Consequently, establishing school environments that integrate religious values into everyday educational practices has become an increasingly important strategy for strengthening students' moral resilience amid rapidly changing social conditions.

In response to these challenges, schools have increasingly adopted character education programs that extend beyond classroom instruction by embedding moral and religious values into daily school life. Rather than relying solely on cognitive learning, contemporary character education emphasizes the importance of school culture, habitual practices, teacher role modelling, and positive reinforcement in shaping students' long-term behavioral dispositions. School culture functions as a "hidden curriculum" through which values are continuously transmitted and internalized, enabling students to experience moral learning in authentic social contexts rather than merely understanding ethical principles theoretically. Consequently, sustainable character formation depends on the consistency of educational practices that integrate religious values into students' everyday experiences

(Tsauri, 2015; Andrianie et al., 2021). Recent studies likewise demonstrate that religious habituation embedded within school culture contributes significantly to students' religious awareness, discipline, responsibility, and social behavior, particularly when implemented systematically and supported by teachers' exemplary conduct.

Among the various approaches to character education, habituation has been recognized as one of the most effective mechanisms for transforming moral knowledge into consistent behavioral practice. Habit formation theory suggests that repeated behaviors performed within supportive environments gradually become automatic and eventually develop into stable personal dispositions. In educational settings, repeated religious practices—including congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, charity, voluntary worship, and collective reflection—enable students to internalize religious values through continuous practice rather than external instruction alone. This perspective is consistent with character education theory, which argues that virtues are cultivated through repeated moral actions reinforced by supportive institutional environments (Lickona, 1991; Fadilah et al., 2021). Therefore, successful religious character education requires schools not only to teach religious values but also to create organizational cultures in which these values are repeatedly practiced and socially reinforced.

Within this framework, positive reinforcement represents another important mechanism supporting sustainable character development. According to Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, behaviors that receive positive reinforcement are more likely to be repeated until they gradually become habitual. Educational rewards therefore should not merely function as incentives for immediate behavioral compliance but should facilitate the transition from extrinsic motivation toward intrinsic commitment, enabling students eventually to perform positive behaviors voluntarily without depending on external rewards. Recent educational research similarly indicates that appropriately designed reinforcement systems can strengthen students' engagement, self-regulation, and character development when combined with consistent habituation and meaningful educational experiences, whereas excessive dependence on rewards may reduce intrinsic motivation if implemented improperly. Consequently, reward systems should be viewed as transitional educational instruments rather than ultimate educational goals.

One practical manifestation of this approach is the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program implemented at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman. Unlike conventional religious activities that primarily emphasize participation in routine worship, the *Jumat Berkah* program integrates structured religious practices, charitable activities, teacher role modelling, collective participation, and a reward-based reinforcement system into a comprehensive school culture. Through activities such as Qur'anic recitation, *Asmaul Husna*, religious reflection, congregational worship, voluntary charity (*infak*), and recognition of students' religious consistency, the program seeks not only to encourage participation but also to cultivate sustainable religious habits. In this context, rewards function as positive reinforcement during the initial stages of

behavioral development while habituation gradually facilitates the internalization of religious values into students' everyday lives. Such an approach reflects the integration of behavioral reinforcement, school culture, and religious habituation within a single educational framework, distinguishing the program from ordinary religious extracurricular activities.

Previous studies have extensively investigated reward systems and character education in various educational contexts. Dewi Aprilia Sari et al. (2019) examined the use of reward and punishment for strengthening students' disciplinary character, whereas Warrohmah (2022) focused on character formation through reward and punishment strategies. Similarly, Defi Vita Fitria Sari explored the implementation of reward and punishment in fostering religious character through religious activities. Other studies have investigated religious habituation programs such as *Didikan Subuh* (Hamidi, 2024) and the *Gerakan Infak Jumat Dua Ribu* program in promoting students' social responsibility (Alfarikh, 2025). More recent international and national studies have further demonstrated the importance of school culture, religious habituation, and teacher role modelling in strengthening students' religious character.

Nevertheless, a careful examination of the existing literature reveals several important gaps. First, previous studies generally examine rewards as instruments for improving academic motivation, discipline, or immediate behavioral compliance rather than exploring their role as transitional mechanisms leading toward the internalization of religious character. Second, studies investigating religious character education predominantly emphasize habituation, school culture, or teacher role modelling independently, while relatively few examine how these elements interact with positive reinforcement within an integrated educational program. Third, empirical evidence explaining the process through which reward-based reinforcement gradually evolves into intrinsic religious awareness remains limited, particularly within Islamic secondary schools. Consequently, although reward systems and religious habituation have individually received scholarly attention, their combined contribution to sustainable religious character formation remains insufficiently understood.

Addressing these gaps, the present study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing reward not merely as an educational incentive but as an initial positive reinforcement strategy that supports the gradual transformation of externally motivated religious behavior into internally regulated religious character through continuous habituation within school culture. Unlike previous studies that primarily describe religious activities or reward implementation separately, this research integrates behavioral reinforcement theory, habituation, and school culture to explain the mechanisms underlying students' religious character development. Accordingly, this study aims to (1) examine the implementation of the reward-based *Jumat Berkah* program at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman, (2) analyze the role of rewards in facilitating the development and internalization of students' religious character, and (3) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of the reward-based *Jumat Berkah* program.

Through these contributions, the study extends current discussions on school-based religious character education by offering an integrated perspective on how positive reinforcement and religious habituation can jointly promote sustainable character development.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using field research to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program, supported by a reward system, was implemented as a strategy for developing students' religious character. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the implementation of the program within its natural educational setting rather than measuring causal relationships or testing predetermined hypotheses. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to understand complex social phenomena through direct interaction with participants and to capture the meanings underlying educational practices within their real-life contexts (Fiantika et al., 2020).

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman, West Sumatra, Indonesia, where the *Jumat Berkah* program has become one of the school's flagship initiatives for strengthening students' religious character through structured religious activities, teacher role modelling, habituation, and a reward-based reinforcement system. The school was purposively selected because it has consistently implemented the program as part of its school culture and character education policy, thereby providing an appropriate setting for examining how religious character is cultivated through continuous educational practices.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to recruit individuals who possess direct knowledge and experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Nine informants participated in this study, consisting of the initiator of the *Jumat Berkah* program, one Islamic Religious Education teacher who also served as the program coordinator, three homeroom teachers, and four students who actively participated in the implementation of the program. These participants were intentionally selected because they were directly involved in the planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation of the *Jumat Berkah* program, enabling them to provide comprehensive and information-rich perspectives regarding its implementation and its contribution to students' religious character development.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted to examine the implementation of religious activities, teacher–student interactions, students' participation, and the application of the reward system during the *Jumat Berkah* program. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences, perceptions, and reflections concerning the role of rewards, habituation, and school culture in fostering religious character. Meanwhile, document analysis was undertaken to

examine school documents related to the implementation of the program, including activity schedules, school regulations, photographs, attendance records, certificates of appreciation, and other supporting documents that provided contextual evidence for the findings. Employing multiple data collection techniques facilitated methodological triangulation and enhanced the comprehensiveness of the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied both source triangulation and method triangulation (Mekarisce, 2020). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different categories of participants, including teachers, school administrators, and students, in order to verify the consistency of emerging findings (Susanto & Jailani, 2023). Method triangulation was implemented by comparing information derived from observations, interviews, and documentary evidence. In addition, prolonged engagement in the research setting, repeated examination of field notes, and continuous comparison among multiple data sources were employed to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were systematically organized, coded, and categorized according to recurring concepts related to religious habituation, positive reinforcement, teacher role modelling, students' participation, and supporting or inhibiting factors. Subsequently, the categorized data were presented through thematic organization to facilitate interpretation and comparison across participants. Finally, conclusions were continuously verified by revisiting the original data, comparing findings across multiple sources, and ensuring that interpretations accurately reflected participants' experiences. This iterative analytical process enabled the identification of meaningful themes describing how the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program functioned as a reward-based strategy for developing students' religious character.

The study adhered to fundamental ethical principles throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the school administration, and all participants voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving information regarding the objectives of the research. Participants' identities were anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and all collected information was used exclusively for academic purposes.

Results and Discussion

Results

Implementation of the School-Based *Jumat Berkah* Program as a Reward-Based Strategy for Developing Students' Religious Character

Implementation of the School-Based Jumat Berkah Program

The findings revealed that the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program evolved from routine religious activities previously conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman, including Friday religious sermons, the recitation of *Asmaul Husna*, teachers' moral messages, and collective prayers. The initiative was introduced after one of the teachers, Mrs. Renny Anggraini, participated in the *Pola Pertolongan Allah* program in Padang City. Inspired by this experience, she adapted the principles of worship habituation and spiritual motivation into a structured school-based character education program known as *Jumat Berkah*.

Interview findings further indicated that, before the implementation of the program in 2023, students' religious practices were generally normative and had not yet developed into structured and consistent habits. Although students regularly participated in school religious activities, voluntary worship such as *Dhuha* prayer, *Tahajjud* prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and voluntary fasting had not become part of their daily routines.

The school therefore introduced the *Jumat Berkah* program to strengthen religious habituation through systematic reinforcement. Rather than merely providing religious knowledge, the program was designed to encourage students to translate religious values into everyday practices through repeated worship activities, social care, and positive reinforcement.

This objective was confirmed by Mrs. Renny Anggraini, the initiator of the program, who stated: "The *Jumat Berkah* program was designed so that students would not only focus on academics but would also become accustomed to worship and develop social awareness through sharing activities."

The findings also showed that the program is implemented every Friday and involves the entire school community, including the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and all students. Activities begin with students gathering in the school courtyard before participating in a sequence of religious and character-building activities.

Table 1. Sequence of Activities in the *Jumat Berkah* Program

No.	Activities
1	Gathering in the school courtyard
2	Musabaqah Syarhil Qur'an performance
3	Recitation of Asmaul Husna and Islamic songs
4	Moral messages from the principal and teachers
5	Announcement of individual and class rewards
6	Collective prayer
7	Class-based charity (infak) collection during the first lesson

The observations demonstrated that the activities were organized systematically, with each component serving a complementary function in developing students' religious character. Religious activities such as the Musabaqah Syarhil Qur'an performance, the recitation of *Asmaul Husna*, Islamic songs, and collective prayers provided opportunities for direct religious engagement. Meanwhile, teachers' moral messages functioned as value reinforcement, whereas reward announcements and charity collection encouraged students' participation, social responsibility, and consistency in practicing religious values. These findings suggest that *Jumat Berkah* represents an integrated school culture in which religious habituation, moral guidance, and positive reinforcement operate simultaneously to facilitate character development.

Reward-Based Strategies for Developing Students' Religious Character through the Jumat Berkah Program at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman

The findings indicate that the development of students' religious character through the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program is implemented through three complementary strategies: exemplary practices, habituation, and reinforcement. These strategies interact to support the gradual internalization of religious values.

1. Exemplary Practices

The study found that teachers play an essential role in modeling religious values throughout the implementation of the *Jumat Berkah* program. Their exemplary behavior extends beyond the Friday activities into everyday school life. Teachers accompany students during religious activities, encourage worship and charitable behavior, and consistently demonstrate positive conduct through congregational prayer, charitable giving, modest dress, and respectful interaction.

Observational data further revealed that students were more likely to imitate religious practices when teachers consistently demonstrated them. Consequently, exemplary practices function not merely as complementary activities but as an important mechanism through which students observe and internalize religious values in authentic educational settings.

2. Habituation

Another important strategy identified in this study is religious habituation through continuous participation in the *Jumat Berkah* program. Every Friday, students engage in structured religious activities, including charity collection, collective worship, and other religious practices. These repeated activities are intended to transform religious values into everyday habits.

To strengthen students' motivation, the school presents certificates to classes collecting the highest amount of charity each week. This recognition encourages healthy competition while maintaining the primary objective of charitable giving.

This finding was supported by an interview with Mr. Masriko, the Islamic Religious Education teacher and coordinator of the *Jumat Berkah*

program: "This activity is not merely about sharing; it is about helping students develop the habit of worship."

Beyond the Friday program, students are also encouraged to perform congregational *Dhuhr* prayer, attend school punctually, dress appropriately, demonstrate respectful behavior, and regularly perform *Dhuha* prayer. According to Mr. Masriko: "When students improve their prayers, their attitudes also improve. Students who regularly perform the dawn prayer are less likely to arrive late. At the beginning, many students were late, but over time there was a noticeable reduction, although a few still arrive late."

One student similarly explained: "I feel much more motivated to worship, especially to perform my prayers on time or even earlier than before."

These findings indicate that continuous religious habituation has gradually contributed to improvements in students' discipline, responsibility, and consistency in worship. Although behavioral changes have not yet occurred uniformly among all students, the decreasing number of late arrivals suggests that repeated religious practice has begun to foster sustainable positive habits.

3. Reinforcement

The findings further demonstrate that reinforcement constitutes an important component of the *Jumat Berkah* program. Positive reinforcement is implemented through appreciation for students who consistently participate in religious activities. Rather than serving solely as external incentives, rewards function as motivational support during the early stages of behavioral change.

As explained by Mr. Masriko: "At the beginning, rewards help motivate them. Over time, they become accustomed to the practices, and they eventually turn into habits."

This statement suggests that rewards are intentionally designed as temporary reinforcement to encourage students' initial participation, while continuous habituation gradually transforms externally motivated behavior into internally regulated religious practices. Consequently, reinforcement in the *Jumat Berkah* program extends beyond rewarding achievement and serves as a mechanism facilitating the transition from external motivation to enduring religious character.

The Role of Rewards in Developing Students' Religious Character through the *Jumat Berkah* Program at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman

The Role of Rewards in Developing Students' Religious Character through the Jumat Berkah Program

The findings indicate that the reward system plays a strategic role in supporting the development of students' religious character during the implementation of the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program. Rather than functioning solely as an appreciation for positive behavior, rewards serve as an initial reinforcement mechanism that encourages students to participate consistently in various religious activities. As students repeatedly engage in

these activities, external motivation gradually develops into habitual religious practices and personal awareness.

This finding was confirmed by Mr. Masriko, the coordinator of the *Jumat Berkah* program, who explained: "Rewards are given to motivate students, especially at the beginning of the program. Over time, however, the expectation is that they become accustomed to these practices and perform them out of their own awareness."

A similar experience was expressed by one student: "At first, I was just participating as usual. But after receiving rewards several times, I became more enthusiastic and motivated. Eventually, I got used to worshipping not because of the rewards anymore."

These findings demonstrate a gradual transition from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic religious commitment. Initially, rewards encouraged students to participate in worship activities; however, continuous participation enabled them to understand the spiritual meaning of these practices, leading to voluntary and self-regulated religious behavior. This suggests that rewards function primarily as temporary positive reinforcement rather than as the ultimate objective of the program.

Types of Rewards in Developing Students' Religious Character through the Jumat Berkah Program

The study identified two forms of rewards implemented within the *Jumat Berkah* program: verbal rewards and non-verbal rewards. Both forms are designed to strengthen students' motivation while recognizing their consistency in practicing religious values.

1. Verbal Rewards

Verbal rewards are delivered through praise, encouragement, and public recognition by the principal, teachers, and peers during the weekly *Jumat Berkah* assembly. Students and classes demonstrating consistency in worship and charitable activities are acknowledged publicly during reward announcements.

These expressions of appreciation function not only as recognition of students' achievements but also as moral encouragement that reinforces positive behavior and motivates students to maintain their religious commitments. Public acknowledgment additionally contributes to creating a supportive school culture in which positive religious behavior receives collective appreciation.

2. Non-verbal Rewards

The findings further reveal that non-verbal rewards are provided both individually and collectively. Individual rewards are presented to students who consistently perform obligatory and voluntary acts of worship, including *Dhuha* prayer, *Tahajjud* prayer, voluntary fasting, and completion of Qur'anic recitation. Group rewards are awarded to the five classes collecting the highest amount of charitable donations each week in the form of certificates recognizing outstanding class participation.

Winning classes are announced publicly during the following week's *Jumat Berkah* program, making the reward ceremony one of the most anticipated moments for students. This recognition encourages healthy competition while simultaneously strengthening students' enthusiasm for charitable activities.

Mr. Masriko explained: "Through the *Jumat Berkah* program, students receive rewards such as lunch, gifts, or money placed in envelopes for those who consistently perform prayers, *Tahajjud*, or *Dhuha*. Outstanding classes also receive certificates."

These findings indicate that non-verbal rewards extend beyond symbolic appreciation. Material rewards, certificates, and public recognition collectively function as positive reinforcement that encourages students to maintain religious practices while gradually fostering intrinsic commitment through repeated participation.

Supporting Factors and Challenges in Implementing the Reward-Based Jumat Berkah Program as a Strategy for Developing Students' Religious Character at SMA Negeri 3 Pariaman

1. Supporting Factors

The findings reveal that the successful implementation of the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program is supported by several interconnected factors. The most important supporting factor is the gradual emergence of students' intrinsic awareness in practicing religious values. Although many students initially participated because of rewards, continuous habituation enabled them to understand the spiritual significance of worship and charitable activities, resulting in more voluntary participation.

One teacher explained: "Alhamdulillah, the changes we can observe are that students have become accustomed to giving charity regularly. Every Friday, they prepare their best donations before buying snacks. They also understand that, as social beings, they should help one another. In addition, students have become more enthusiastic about performing voluntary worship because rewards are provided through the *Jumat Berkah* program."

These findings indicate that rewards gradually shift from serving as external incentives to becoming catalysts for developing internal religious awareness. Besides students' growing motivation, the implementation of the reward system itself, active involvement of the entire school community, and sustainable management of charity funds collectively contributed to maintaining students' participation and strengthening the continuity of the program.

2. Challenges

Despite its positive outcomes, the implementation of the *Jumat Berkah* program also encountered several challenges. The most significant challenge was the uneven development of students' religious awareness. Although many students eventually participated voluntarily, some continued to engage primarily because of the reward system and had not yet fully internalized the spiritual meaning of worship.

The findings further indicate that students' personal circumstances, including economic limitations and individual life problems, also influenced their participation. Moreover, family environments and peer relationships affected the sustainability of religious character development. Differences in parenting styles, home environments, and social interactions outside school sometimes weakened the reinforcement students received during school activities.

The study also identified several technical and situational obstacles, including examination periods, public holidays, unfavorable weather conditions, and overlapping school events. These factors occasionally reduced students' attendance and participation in the *Jumat Berkah* program. Nevertheless, these challenges did not diminish the school's commitment to implementing the program continuously as part of its broader strategy for strengthening students' religious character.

Overall, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program depends not only on the reward system itself but also on the interaction among students' intrinsic motivation, teacher support, school culture, family environment, and the consistency of program implementation. These interrelated factors collectively influence the long-term development of students' religious character.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program represents a comprehensive model of religious character education that extends beyond routine religious activities by integrating school culture, religious habituation, social responsibility, and positive reinforcement into a unified educational strategy. Unlike conventional religious programs that primarily emphasize students' participation in weekly religious activities, the *Jumat Berkah* program systematically embeds religious values into students' everyday experiences through repeated practice and active engagement. This finding confirms that religious character is more effectively developed when religious values are transformed into lived experiences rather than remaining at the level of cognitive understanding. Such a finding supports Tsauri (2015), who argues that character education should be implemented through systematic planning, continuous practice, and supportive educational environments. Similarly, Andrianie et al. (2021) emphasize that character formation requires structured educational processes that gradually transform values into habitual behavior.

From a broader educational perspective, these findings also reinforce contemporary studies suggesting that school culture functions as one of the most influential contexts for character formation because it continuously exposes students to shared values, norms, and behavioral expectations. Character education therefore becomes more sustainable when it is integrated into daily school routines instead of being delivered exclusively through classroom instruction. Recent international research similarly concludes that students' moral development is strongly influenced by the consistency of value implementation within the school environment, where repeated interaction

with teachers, peers, and institutional practices facilitates the internalization of positive values. Consequently, the effectiveness of the *Jumat Berkah* program lies not merely in the religious activities themselves but in the establishment of a school culture that consistently reinforces religious behavior through multiple educational experiences.

An important contribution of this study is the identification of three complementary strategies—exemplary practices, habituation, and reinforcement—that collectively explain how religious character develops within the school context. Previous studies generally discuss these strategies separately; however, the present findings demonstrate that their educational effectiveness depends on their integration within a coherent school culture. Exemplary practices provide observable behavioral models, habituation transforms repeated religious practices into daily routines, and reinforcement sustains students' motivation throughout the character development process. Rather than functioning independently, these strategies interact dynamically to facilitate the gradual transition from externally encouraged behavior toward internally regulated religious character.

The findings concerning exemplary practices further strengthen the long-standing argument that teachers represent one of the most influential agents of character education. Consistent with Andrianie et al. (2021), religious values cannot be effectively transmitted through verbal instruction alone; instead, students require authentic examples that demonstrate how religious principles are practiced in everyday life. Teachers participating in congregational prayer, charitable giving, respectful communication, and disciplined behavior provide students with concrete behavioral references that are easier to imitate than abstract moral explanations. This finding also supports Puspitasari (2014), Tsauri (2015), and Munawwaroh (2019) in Fadilah et al. (2021), all of whom argue that exemplary conduct constitutes one of the most effective approaches to developing students' moral, spiritual, and social character.

The present findings likewise correspond with international literature emphasizing teacher role modelling as a critical component of school-based character education. Teachers not only deliver curriculum content but also communicate institutional values through daily interactions, interpersonal relationships, and professional behavior. When students consistently observe teachers practicing the same religious values promoted by the school, they perceive those values as authentic and meaningful rather than merely normative expectations. This alignment between educational messages and teachers' behavior strengthens students' trust and facilitates the internalization of religious values.

Another important finding concerns the role of religious habituation as the primary mechanism through which repeated religious practices gradually become stable behavioral dispositions. Consistent with Fadilah et al. (2021), habituation represents a deliberate and continuous process through which repeated actions eventually become part of an individual's daily life. Likewise, Andrianie et al. (2021) explain that repeated positive behavior gradually

develops into self-regulated conduct rather than behavior driven by external pressure. Within the *Jumat Berkah* program, habituation extends beyond weekly religious gatherings to include congregational prayer, *Dhuha* prayer, charitable giving, punctuality, respectful interaction, and disciplined daily routines. These interconnected activities enable students to repeatedly practice religious values across different educational situations, thereby strengthening both behavioral consistency and moral awareness. This interpretation is also consistent with Darmiatun (2013), who argues that character develops through repeated behavioral practice rather than through isolated educational interventions.

From the perspective of habit formation, the findings indicate that repeated participation in religious practices gradually reduces students' dependence on external encouragement because the behaviors become increasingly automatic and personally meaningful. This interpretation helps explain why several students reported improved punctuality, greater consistency in worship, and stronger self-discipline after regularly participating in the *Jumat Berkah* program. Rather than producing immediate behavioral transformation, the program facilitates a gradual process in which repeated religious experiences accumulate into stable behavioral habits. Such findings extend previous studies by demonstrating that habituation functions not merely as repetitive activity but as a psychological mechanism through which religious values become internalized within students' everyday lives.

The findings also highlight the importance of reinforcement in maintaining positive religious behavior throughout the character development process. Consistent with Andrianie et al. (2021), reinforcement serves to preserve and strengthen desirable behaviors that have already emerged through exemplary practices and habituation. Similarly, Mustofa (2019) in Fadilah et al. (2021) argues that reinforcement is required after students have received moral understanding and opportunities for behavioral practice, ensuring that positive character continues to develop consistently. Wahyuddin (2020) further emphasizes that reinforcement should be embedded within supportive educational environments where positive behavior receives continuous appreciation.

The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that reinforcement within the *Jumat Berkah* program functions primarily as a developmental support mechanism rather than as an isolated reward system. Appreciation is intentionally provided to students who consistently participate in religious activities, thereby encouraging behavioral persistence while maintaining the educational objective of religious character formation. This finding suggests that reinforcement becomes most effective when integrated with exemplary practices and habituation instead of functioning independently. Consequently, character development emerges as a cumulative educational process in which modeling, repeated practice, and reinforcement operate simultaneously to transform religious values into stable behavioral dispositions. This integrated interpretation represents an important contribution of the present study because it explains how religious character

develops through the interaction of multiple educational strategies rather than through any single intervention alone.

The findings further reveal that rewards within the *Jumat Berkah* program function primarily as positive reinforcement supporting students' transition from externally motivated participation toward intrinsically regulated religious behavior. Unlike conventional educational practices in which rewards often serve as the final objective of students' achievement, the reward system identified in this study is intentionally designed as a temporary motivational instrument. Students initially participate in religious activities because external appreciation attracts their attention; however, continuous habituation gradually enables them to understand the spiritual meaning of worship, ultimately reducing their dependence on external rewards. This finding supports Maria J. Wantah (2005) in Astari et al. (2020), who explains that rewards encourage students to maintain positive behavior by making them feel appreciated. Likewise, M. Ngalim Purwanto in Marta (2016) describes rewards as educational tools that strengthen desirable behavior through praise or tangible appreciation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings provide empirical support for B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory, particularly the concept of positive reinforcement. According to Skinner, behaviors followed by positive consequences are more likely to be repeated because reinforcement increases the probability of future behavioral occurrence (Daulay, 2022). Within the *Jumat Berkah* program, religious activities such as *Dhuha* prayer, *Tahajjud* prayer, Qur'anic recitation, voluntary fasting, and charitable giving function as behavioral stimuli. Students' participation represents the behavioral response, whereas verbal and non-verbal rewards serve as positive reinforcement that encourages repeated engagement. More importantly, the findings demonstrate that repeated reinforcement eventually facilitates behavioral habituation, enabling students to continue practicing religious values even after the motivational role of rewards gradually diminishes. This extends Skinner's theoretical framework by illustrating how reinforcement can initiate a developmental process leading toward the internalization of religious character within an authentic school context.

A particularly noteworthy finding concerns the transformation of students' motivation. Several participants reported that although they initially joined religious activities because of rewards, they eventually continued participating because they personally recognized the importance of worship. This transition indicates that the educational value of rewards depends not on their material form but on how they are integrated into continuous religious habituation. Therefore, rewards should not be interpreted as mechanisms creating long-term dependency but rather as temporary scaffolding that supports students during the early stages of character development. This interpretation also explains why excessive reliance on rewards may become counterproductive when appreciation becomes the primary educational objective instead of facilitating moral internalization.

These findings are consistent with Faryadi (2017) in Yuniarto et al. (2022), who argues that rewards should be administered proportionally to avoid creating students' dependence on external appreciation. Similarly, Jayanti (2022) warns that inappropriate implementation of rewards may shift students' orientation toward obtaining recognition rather than practicing desirable behavior sincerely. The present study demonstrates that this potential limitation can be minimized when rewards are combined with teacher role modelling, continuous habituation, and supportive school culture. Under such conditions, rewards become transitional reinforcement rather than permanent motivational dependence.

Another important contribution concerns the identification of verbal and non-verbal rewards as complementary reinforcement strategies. Consistent with Magdalena et al. (2020), verbal rewards such as praise, encouragement, and public appreciation strengthen students' confidence and reinforce positive behavior through social recognition. Aliya et al. (2024) likewise explain that simple expressions of appreciation can effectively sustain desirable behaviors because they satisfy students' psychological need for recognition. Meanwhile, non-verbal rewards—including certificates, meals, monetary gifts, and public recognition of outstanding classes—provide tangible appreciation while simultaneously reinforcing collective participation. The coexistence of these two reward forms indicates that educational reinforcement extends beyond material incentives and includes symbolic and social appreciation capable of strengthening students' sense of responsibility, pride, and belonging within the school community.

Overall, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of the reward system lies not in the material value of the rewards themselves but in their pedagogical function as positive reinforcement embedded within a broader framework of school culture, teacher role modelling, and religious habituation. This integrated mechanism constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the present study, demonstrating that reward-based religious character education is most effective when rewards operate as transitional reinforcement leading students from extrinsic motivation toward intrinsic religious commitment, rather than remaining the ultimate purpose of participation.

The findings indicate that the success of the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program cannot be attributed solely to the implementation of a reward system. Instead, its effectiveness results from the interaction of multiple educational components that collectively establish a supportive religious school culture. The active involvement of the principal, teachers, homeroom teachers, administrative staff, and students creates a consistent educational environment in which religious values are continuously practiced, reinforced, and socially validated. This finding supports Fadilah et al. (2021), who argue that character education requires collaboration among all members of the school community, while Andrianie et al. (2021) emphasize that sustainable character formation depends upon the collective commitment of educational stakeholders in creating environments that consistently promote positive values.

The present findings further demonstrate that students' intrinsic motivation gradually became one of the strongest supporting factors for the sustainability of the *Jumat Berkah* program. Although many students initially participated because of rewards, continuous participation enabled them to develop a deeper understanding of worship, charity, and social responsibility. This transformation suggests that the effectiveness of religious character education depends not merely on external reinforcement but also on students' gradual internalization of religious values through repeated educational experiences. This finding is consistent with contemporary perspectives on character education, which emphasize that enduring character develops when moral values become integrated into students' personal identities rather than remaining externally regulated behaviors. Consequently, the *Jumat Berkah* program illustrates how school culture can facilitate the progression from behavioral compliance toward autonomous moral commitment.

Another important supporting factor identified in this study is the consistency of program implementation. Weekly religious activities, continuous teacher participation, sustainable charity management, and systematic appreciation through rewards create educational continuity that strengthens students' behavioral stability. Rather than functioning as isolated religious events, these activities become interconnected experiences that repeatedly expose students to the same religious values across different educational situations. Such continuity enables positive behaviors to be maintained over time and contributes to the gradual formation of religious habits. This finding extends previous discussions by demonstrating that the effectiveness of school-based religious character education is determined not only by the quality of individual activities but also by the consistency with which those activities are implemented throughout the educational process.

Despite these positive outcomes, the findings also reveal several challenges that limit the effectiveness of the *Jumat Berkah* program. The most prominent challenge concerns the unequal development of students' religious awareness. Although many students eventually demonstrated internally motivated religious behavior, others continued participating primarily because of external rewards or had not yet fully understood the spiritual meaning underlying religious practices. This finding confirms that character formation is inherently a gradual developmental process rather than an immediate educational outcome. Consistent with Rakhmat (2004), genuine religious behavior originates from internal religious awareness, which requires continuous guidance, reflection, and repeated practice before becoming firmly established.

The study also highlights the significant influence of contextual factors beyond the school environment. Family background, parenting practices, peer relationships, socioeconomic conditions, and students' everyday social experiences were found to influence the sustainability of religious character developed through the *Jumat Berkah* program. Students who received consistent religious reinforcement at home generally demonstrated stronger continuity in practicing religious values, whereas those experiencing less supportive environments encountered greater difficulty maintaining positive

behaviors outside school. These findings support Syahri et al. (2025), who argue that character development is shaped by the interaction between school, family, social environment, and contemporary digital influences. Accordingly, school-based character education should be viewed as one component within a broader ecological system of moral development rather than as an isolated educational intervention.

Several technical constraints were likewise identified, including examination schedules, school holidays, unfavorable weather conditions, and overlapping institutional activities. Although these situational factors occasionally reduced students' participation, they did not substantially weaken the school's long-term commitment to implementing the program. Instead, the findings demonstrate the importance of institutional flexibility and administrative support in maintaining continuity despite operational challenges. This observation reinforces the view that successful character education depends not only on pedagogical design but also on effective educational leadership and organizational commitment.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by proposing an integrated explanation of religious character formation through the interaction of school culture, exemplary practices, habituation, and positive reinforcement. Previous studies have generally examined these components independently; however, the present findings demonstrate that their educational effectiveness emerges through their dynamic interaction. More specifically, rewards function as initial positive reinforcement, exemplary practices provide authentic behavioral models, habituation transforms repeated actions into stable routines, and school culture sustains these processes through consistent institutional support. Together, these mechanisms facilitate the gradual transformation of extrinsically motivated religious behavior into intrinsically regulated religious character. This integrated explanation represents the principal theoretical contribution of the present study and extends the application of behavioral reinforcement theory within the broader context of school-based character education.

The study also offers practical implications for educational policy and school management. Schools seeking to strengthen students' religious character should avoid relying exclusively on rewards or isolated religious activities. Instead, reward systems should be integrated with teacher role modelling, continuous habituation, supportive school culture, and collaboration with families. Educational leaders should likewise ensure that rewards remain proportional and educationally meaningful so that they encourage initial participation without fostering long-term dependence on external incentives. Through such an integrated approach, school-based character education can move beyond behavioral compliance toward the sustainable internalization of religious values, enabling students to practice religious teachings voluntarily within both school and community settings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the school-based *Jumat Berkah* program, supported by a reward system, constitutes an effective strategy for developing students' religious character through the integration of exemplary practices, religious habituation, positive reinforcement, and school culture. The principal finding reveals that the educational impact of the reward system extends beyond increasing students' initial participation in religious activities. Rather than functioning as the ultimate objective of the program, rewards operate as initial positive reinforcement that gradually facilitates the transition from extrinsically motivated religious behavior to intrinsically regulated religious character through continuous habituation. This finding suggests that sustained religious character development depends more on the interaction between reinforcement, repeated religious practice, and supportive school culture than on rewards themselves. Consequently, the study challenges the conventional assumption that reward systems merely generate temporary behavioral compliance and instead demonstrates their potential to promote long-term character internalization when embedded within a comprehensive educational environment.

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways. First, it reinforces previous findings emphasizing the importance of exemplary practices, habituation, and school culture in character education. Second, it questions the widespread assumption that reward-based educational strategies inevitably produce students' dependence on external motivation. Instead, the findings demonstrate that appropriately designed rewards can function as transitional reinforcement that supports the gradual internalization of religious values rather than replacing intrinsic motivation. Third, this study introduces an integrated conceptual perspective by explaining religious character development through the interaction of positive reinforcement, religious habituation, exemplary practices, and school culture, thereby enriching current discussions on school-based religious character education and extending the application of behavioral reinforcement theory within Islamic educational settings.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single public senior high school and involved a relatively small number of participants, thereby limiting the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Furthermore, the qualitative design focused on an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and did not evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the *Jumat Berkah* program using longitudinal or mixed-method approaches. Consequently, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to schools with different cultural, institutional, or religious characteristics.

Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples across different educational levels and geographical contexts in order to examine the broader applicability of the proposed model. Comparative and longitudinal studies are also needed to investigate the sustainability of students' intrinsic religious motivation after external rewards

are gradually reduced. In addition, future studies may integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the relationships among positive reinforcement, religious habituation, school culture, and religious character development more comprehensively. Such investigations would further strengthen the empirical foundation for designing sustainable school-based character education programs that promote the internalization of religious values rather than short-term behavioral compliance.

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