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The Role of Congregational Dhuha Prayer Habituation in Fostering Students' Discipline and Spiritual Intelligence

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Abstract

The decline of student discipline and the limited integration of spiritual development in primary education highlight the need for holistic educational approaches, particularly in Islamic school contexts. This study investigates the role of congregational Dhuha prayer habituation in fostering students' discipline and spiritual intelligence in an Islamic elementary school. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving one principal, two teachers, and eleven sixth-grade students selected purposively based on their direct and sustained participation in the program. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, and analyzed using the interactive qualitative model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that the congregational Dhuha prayer program functioned as a structured institutional routine that supported punctuality, procedural readiness, behavioral responsibility, emotional calmness, intrinsic religious motivation, and growing spiritual competence. Students' repeated participation in communal worship fostered both observable disciplinary behaviors and internal spiritual development within a supportive educational environment. This study contributes a co-emergence perspective, demonstrating that discipline and spiritual intelligence may develop simultaneously through a single embodied religious practice rather than as separate educational outcomes. The findings suggest that structured spiritual habituation may serve as a meaningful pedagogical strategy for holistic character formation in Islamic primary education.

Keywords: character education; dhuha prayer; discipline; islamic primary education; spiritual intelligence.

Introduction

The cultivation of student character remains a persistent concern in contemporary primary education, particularly amid growing concerns over declining discipline, weakened moral responsibility, and the overemphasis on cognitive achievement at the expense of holistic human development (Arif et al., 2024; Lickona, 1991). Increasingly, educational discourse recognizes that effective schooling should not be limited to academic competence alone, but should also nurture emotional, ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions of child development (Borba, 2001; Pandya, 2017). Within Islamic primary education, this expectation is even more pronounced, as education is fundamentally understood as an integrated process of nurturing intellect (*'aql*), character (*akhlaq*), and spirituality (*ruhiyyah*). However, in practice, school-based educational interventions often

prioritize observable academic and behavioral outcomes while giving comparatively less systematic attention to students' internal spiritual formation.

One developmental dimension that deserves greater educational attention is spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence refers to the human capacity for meaning-making, self-awareness, transcendental reflection, and value-guided action (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). In child development research, spiritual intelligence has been associated with psychological well-being, happiness, resilience, emotional regulation, and positive moral orientation (Grasmane et al., 2025; Pandya, 2017). Further evidence suggests that active spiritual engagement, particularly personal prayer practices, contributes meaningfully to children's spiritual well-being (Fisher & Francis, 2018). These findings indicate that spirituality in education should not be regarded merely as a supplementary religious component, but as an important developmental domain requiring intentional pedagogical cultivation.

Religious habituation has long been recognized as a viable pedagogical mechanism for character formation, particularly in Islamic educational settings. Habituation-based educational approaches strengthen behavioral consistency by transforming repeated actions into stable dispositions through routine practice and environmental reinforcement (Borba, 2001; Lickona, 1991). Previous studies have shown that structured religious habituation contributes positively to the formation of student discipline, independence, responsibility, and moral character in elementary education (Anwar & Hasanah, 2024; Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023; Rudini et al., 2025). In Islamic school contexts, worship-based learning has also been associated with improved student discipline, motivation, and academic engagement (Hidayah et al., 2021). These findings suggest that faith-based habituation can function not only as religious instruction, but also as an applied educational strategy for shaping everyday student behavior.

Among the various forms of religious habituation, Dhuha prayer occupies a distinctive pedagogical position. As a voluntary morning prayer performed within a structured timeframe, Dhuha prayer inherently requires punctuality, ritual preparedness, procedural discipline, and intentional participation. A growing body of research indicates that Dhuha prayer habituation contributes to character formation and disciplinary development among students in Islamic educational institutions (Dzikro, 2025; Khofi, 2024; Maulana et al., 2025; Sidik et al., 2025; Sopiiah et al., 2026). Congregational prayer practices have also been found to foster communal discipline and collective responsibility through shared participation and institutional routines (Mahmudulhassan et al., 2024; Masngut et al., 2024). These studies support the argument that structured worship routines may provide a meaningful behavioral framework for student discipline.

At the same time, other studies suggest that prayer-based educational interventions may contribute to spiritual growth and spiritual intelligence development. Research has shown that repeated religious practice can enhance emotional calmness, self-awareness, religious motivation, and spiritual well-being among children and adolescents (Arlina et al., 2023; Hijriati et al., 2023; Setyasri & Anggraini, 2025). Early childhood studies similarly indicate that habituated worship practices contribute to children's religious character development through routine participation and supportive educational environments (Nuraisyah et al., 2024). These findings suggest that school-based prayer routines may foster internal spiritual development alongside observable behavioral outcomes.

Despite these growing contributions, important gaps remain in the literature. First, existing studies largely examine discipline formation and spiritual intelligence development as separate educational outcomes, rather than exploring how both may emerge simultaneously through the same structured religious practice. Second, much of the available literature focuses on measuring outcomes rather than examining the lived educational processes through which spiritual habituation shapes student behavior and inner development. Third, qualitative evidence capturing the perspectives of school leaders, teachers, and students regarding the integrated educational role of congregational worship remains relatively limited, particularly at the Islamic elementary school level.

Addressing these gaps, this study investigates the role of congregational Dhuha prayer habituation in fostering students' discipline and spiritual intelligence within an Islamic primary school context. By adopting a qualitative case study approach and incorporating the perspectives of

school leaders, teachers, and students, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how a structured communal worship practice functions not merely as a religious routine, but as an integrated pedagogical mechanism for behavioral discipline and spiritual formation.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the role of congregational Dhuha prayer habituation in fostering students' discipline and spiritual intelligence within a real-life educational setting. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand a contemporary educational phenomenon through the lived experiences and perspectives of participants directly involved in the program while preserving the contextual complexity of the institutional environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018a). This approach is particularly suitable for investigating how and why a specific educational intervention operates within a bounded context through the integration of multiple sources of evidence.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in an Islamic elementary school (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) where congregational Dhuha prayer had been institutionalized as a routine daily program prior to formal teaching and learning activities. The school was selected purposively because it had implemented the program consistently as part of its character and religious education framework.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement, institutional roles, and sustained experience with the program (Creswell & Poth, 2018b). The key informants consisted of one school principal and two teachers who were directly responsible for supervising and implementing the congregational Dhuha prayer program. Supporting informants included 11 sixth-grade students who had participated continuously in the program throughout their three years of study at the school. This sampling strategy was intended to ensure informational richness and contextual depth rather than statistical representativeness, in line with qualitative inquiry principles.

Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1 to provide a transparent overview of the study sample.

Table 1 Participant Characteristics

Participant Code	Role	Gender	Involvement in the Program	Relevant Experience
P1	Principal	Male	Institutional leader and program initiator	Responsible for policy design, supervision, and program sustainability
T1	Teacher	Male	Prayer supervisor	Directly involved in organizing and monitoring congregational Dhuha prayer
T2	Teacher	Female	Student supervision	Responsible for student behavioral monitoring and program support
S1-S11	Sixth-grade students	Mixed	Active participants	Participated continuously in the congregational Dhuha prayer program for approximately three years

Data Sources and Instruments

Data were collected from multiple sources to strengthen analytical credibility through triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018b; Miles et al., 2014). The primary data source consisted of semi-structured interviews, while documentary evidence served as supporting data.

The interview instrument was developed in the form of semi-structured interview protocols tailored to participant roles. Interviews with the principal and teachers focused on the historical background of the program, educational objectives, implementation mechanisms, perceived disciplinary and spiritual impacts, and operational challenges. Student interviews explored personal experiences, emotional responses, behavioral routines, perceptions of discipline, and subjective meanings associated with participation in congregational Dhuha prayer.

Documentary sources included school disciplinary regulations, institutional program documentation, and daily Dhuha prayer attendance records. These materials were used to contextualize participant narratives and provide corroborative institutional evidence.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, formal institutional permission was obtained from the school administration, and ethical procedures were implemented through informed consent from adult participants as well as parental consent for student participants, ensuring voluntary participation and respect for participant confidentiality (Creswell & Poth, 2018b).

Second, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate participant comfort and authentic expression. Interviews with the principal and teachers explored institutional implementation and educational rationale, while student interviews focused on lived participation experiences and perceived personal impacts. Documentary evidence was collected concurrently to support contextual interpretation and cross-source verification.

Third, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Key participants were subsequently invited to review interview summaries as part of member-checking procedures to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the recorded information (Miles et al., 2014).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014).

During the data condensation stage, interview transcripts and documentary materials were systematically reviewed, selected, reduced, and openly coded to identify meaningful units relevant to the research focus. Coding emphasized recurring patterns associated with program implementation, disciplinary behavior, spiritual development, and implementation challenges.

In the data display stage, coded data were organized into thematic matrices to facilitate pattern recognition, thematic comparison, and cross-source interpretation. This structured display enabled the identification of relationships among participant experiences, institutional practices, and emergent educational meanings.

In the final stage, conclusions were drawn iteratively through interpretive analysis, consistency checking, and verification against raw interview data and documentary evidence. Analytical interpretations were refined continuously throughout the coding and verification process.

Trustworthiness

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed several qualitative rigor strategies, including source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Miles et al., 2014). Source triangulation was achieved by comparing perspectives from school leaders, teachers, students, and documentary records. Member checking was used to validate the accuracy of participant accounts, while peer debriefing supported critical reflection on emerging interpretations and strengthened analytical consistency.

Results

Mechanism of the Congregational Dhuha Prayer Program

The findings indicate that the congregational Dhuha prayer program was institutionalized as a routine school-wide religious habituation activity conducted before formal teaching and learning sessions. According to the principal, the program was initiated as part of the school's effort to cultivate students' consistent engagement in voluntary worship practices and to encourage the continuation of Dhuha prayer beyond the school environment.

Institutional commitment to the program was reflected in a structured implementation mechanism. Daily teacher duty schedules assigned supervisory responsibility for organizing and monitoring the prayer activities, particularly among male teaching staff responsible for leading congregational worship. The program was routinely preceded by the recitation of short Qur'anic surahs and integrated into the broader school schedule.

Documentary evidence further confirmed the formal embedding of the program within school routines. School disciplinary regulations required students to arrive no later than 07:00 WITA,

effectively linking punctual attendance with participation in the congregational prayer activity. Attendance monitoring sheets were also prepared as part of the institutional implementation framework, although documentation consistency varied in practice.

These findings suggest that the congregational Dhuha prayer program was not implemented as an incidental religious activity, but as a structured institutional routine integrated into the school’s broader educational culture.

To enhance clarity and provide an overview of the major findings, Table 2 presents a thematic summary of the key empirical results and their supporting evidence sources.

Table 2 Summary of Themes and Key Findings

Theme	Key Findings	Evidence Sources
Mechanism of the program	The congregational Dhuha prayer was institutionalized as a structured daily school routine integrated into disciplinary regulations and supported by teacher supervision	Principal, teachers, school documents
Discipline formation	Students demonstrated improved punctuality, ritual preparedness, procedural compliance, and orderly participation in school routines	Principal, teachers, students
Spiritual intelligence development	Students reported emotional calmness, happiness, intrinsic religious motivation, spiritual awareness, and increased ritual confidence	Students, teachers
Implementation challenges	Program implementation was affected by schedule inconsistency, varying student readiness, and ongoing managerial demands	Principal, teachers

The Role of the Program in Fostering Students’ Discipline

Interview findings consistently indicate that the congregational Dhuha prayer habituation program contributed to the development of student discipline, particularly in punctuality, procedural readiness, and compliance with institutional routines.

Teachers reported observable behavioral changes among students, particularly reduced lateness and improved preparedness for school activities. One teacher stated, “*Students are no longer late to school*” (Teacher 1), while another noted that students increasingly arrived with greater readiness for both worship and classroom learning.

The principal similarly emphasized that many students had developed the habit of performing *wudhu* at home before leaving for school and proceeding directly to the prayer area upon arrival. This suggests that disciplined preparation had become incorporated into students’ daily behavioral routines rather than being limited to school-based supervision.

Student interviews strongly supported these observations. All participating students reported regular participation in the congregational Dhuha prayer program and associated the activity with punctual attendance and disciplined morning preparation. Several students explicitly described adjusting their routines to avoid arriving late, while others emphasized direct movement from arrival to the prayer space without unnecessary delay.

Institutional disciplinary mechanisms also appeared to reinforce these behavioral outcomes. The school’s point-based disciplinary system provided external behavioral regulation, and several students acknowledged that avoiding sanctions initially motivated punctual attendance. However, repeated participation suggests that discipline formation was sustained not only through formal rules, but also through habituated behavioral practice.

The Role of the Program in Fostering Students’ Spiritual Intelligence

The findings also indicate that participation in the congregational Dhuha prayer program contributed to the development of students’ spiritual intelligence. Students’ narratives revealed several recurring indicators, including emotional calmness, happiness, intrinsic religious motivation, spiritual self-awareness, and growing ritual competence.

A prominent finding concerned students’ positive emotional responses following prayer participation. Most students described feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and inner comfort after engaging in the congregational prayer activity. These responses suggest that participation generated emotionally meaningful experiences rather than functioning solely as institutional compliance.

Students also reported increased calmness and improved emotional readiness for classroom learning following prayer. Repeated references to inner peace and concentration suggest that the prayer routine contributed to emotional self-regulation and psychological preparedness prior to academic engagement.

Another notable finding involved the emergence of intrinsic religious motivation. Although some students initially acknowledged external motivations, such as avoiding disciplinary sanctions, many described prayer participation in terms of personal spiritual benefit, emotional comfort, and the desire to become more diligent in worship. This indicates a gradual movement from externally regulated compliance toward personally meaningful engagement.

The findings additionally suggest growth in spiritual knowledge and ritual confidence. Several students reported increasing familiarity with prayer intentions (*niat*) and supplications (*doa*), including the ability to perform prayers independently without written prompts. Such responses indicate that the program supported not only repeated participation, but also the internal development of spiritual competence and religious confidence.

Implementation Challenges

Despite its perceived benefits, the program encountered several implementation challenges. One challenge concerned inconsistency in maintaining the intended schedule, as teachers acknowledged that the program was not always conducted according to the planned timeframe.

A second challenge involved variations in students' physical, emotional, and situational readiness. Teachers noted that differences in health conditions, mood, and daily circumstances occasionally affected the smooth implementation of the program, requiring flexibility in practice.

The principal additionally emphasized the managerial and emotional demands associated with sustaining the initiative over time. Maintaining consistency required patience, ongoing supervision, and adaptive institutional management responsive to students' developmental realities.

These findings suggest that although the congregational Dhuha prayer program was positively perceived and institutionally structured, its effective implementation depended on continuous pedagogical responsiveness rather than rigid procedural enforcement.

Discussion

Congregational Worship as an Embodied Mechanism of Discipline Formation

The findings suggest that congregational Dhuha prayer habituation functions as an effective non-repressive mechanism for fostering student discipline within Islamic primary education. Rather than relying primarily on punitive enforcement, the program embedded discipline within a structured spiritual routine requiring punctuality, ritual preparedness, procedural compliance, and orderly participation. Students' practices of performing *wudhu* before leaving home, arriving on time, and proceeding directly to the prayer area indicate that discipline was gradually internalized as part of a meaningful daily routine rather than merely imposed through institutional control.

This finding aligns with character education perspectives emphasizing that moral action develops through repeated habituation within a supportive moral environment (Borba, 2001; Lickona, 1991). Habituation transforms externally guided behaviors into stable personal dispositions, particularly when reinforced through consistent routines and meaningful social contexts. In this study, although the school maintained a formal disciplinary structure through a point-based code of conduct, student narratives suggest that discipline increasingly extended beyond compliance with rules toward personally accepted behavioral readiness. This pattern supports broader evidence that worship-based educational practices can contribute to improved student discipline, motivation, and self-regulation (Hidayah et al., 2021).

The communal dimension of the program appears particularly significant. Discipline in this setting was not enacted solely as an individual obligation, but as a collectively reinforced school rhythm involving teachers, peers, and institutional routines. Similar studies in Islamic educational contexts have shown that structured religious habituation contributes positively to disciplinary character formation, responsibility, and behavioral consistency (Anwar & Hasanah, 2024; Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023; Maulana et al., 2025; Rudini et al., 2025; Sidik et al., 2025; Sopiah et al., 2026). Congregational worship practices may strengthen discipline not only through formal

supervision, but through peer modeling, communal expectation, and synchronized participation in meaningful routines.

This interpretation is also consistent with developmental perspectives emphasizing the importance of adult modeling, environmental consistency, and emotionally stable educational routines in children's character development (Boyatzis, 2005). In the present study, teacher involvement, collective movement toward the prayer space, and institutional predictability created a behavioral architecture that normalized discipline as a shared social practice. Comparable findings from Islamic school settings in Malaysia likewise suggest that discipline formation becomes more effective when embedded within holistic institutional cultures rather than isolated behavioral interventions (Mahmudhassan et al., 2024).

Spiritual Intelligence Development Through Structured Religious Practice

Beyond behavioral discipline, the findings indicate that the congregational Dhuha prayer program contributed meaningfully to students' spiritual intelligence development. Students' descriptions of happiness, inner calm, emotional focus, personal religious motivation, and increasing confidence in worship practices reflect dimensions consistent with spiritual intelligence frameworks emphasizing meaning-making, self-awareness, inner regulation, and value-oriented consciousness (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

These findings resonate with broader child development research showing positive relationships between spirituality, happiness, emotional well-being, and resilience (Grasmane et al., 2025; Pandya, 2017). Active spiritual engagement—particularly prayer participation—has been shown to contribute more substantially to children's spiritual well-being than passive religious exposure alone (Fisher & Francis, 2018). The present findings support this distinction, as students were not merely attending a mandated institutional ritual, but actively preparing for participation, reflecting on their emotional experiences, and increasingly developing personal engagement with worship.

The findings also suggest that spiritual growth emerged not only affectively, but cognitively and behaviorally. Students' increasing ability to memorize prayer intentions and supplications, perform prayer independently, and articulate personal meanings associated with participation indicates growing spiritual competence rather than mechanical repetition alone. Similar findings have been reported in studies examining prayer-based spiritual development among children and adolescents, where repeated worship practices were associated with strengthened spiritual awareness and emotional calmness (Arlina et al., 2023; Hijriati et al., 2023; Setyasri & Anggraini, 2025).

The educational environment also appears to have played an important mediating role. Students repeatedly described emotionally positive experiences linked to teacher calmness, supportive interaction, and non-threatening supervision. Previous scholarship suggests that the effectiveness of spiritual interventions depends not solely on the religious activity itself, but also on the relational quality of the educational environment in which the activity is embedded (Boyatzis, 2005; Grasmane et al., 2025). In this sense, spiritual intelligence development in the present study appears to have emerged through the interaction between ritual practice, relational guidance, and emotionally supportive educational conditions.

The Co-Emergence of Discipline and Spiritual Intelligence as a Conceptual Contribution

A central contribution of this study lies in the finding that discipline and spiritual intelligence emerged simultaneously through the same embodied educational practice. Existing literature has generally treated these domains as distinct educational outcomes, with studies typically examining discipline formation through habituation or spiritual intelligence through religious practice as separate analytical concerns (Anwar & Hasanah, 2024; Arlina et al., 2023; Setyasri & Anggraini, 2025; Sidik et al., 2025). The present findings suggest a more integrative developmental relationship.

When students prepared for prayer, regulated their arrival time, participated in congregational worship, and returned to class in an orderly manner, they engaged simultaneously in behavioral self-regulation and spiritual participation. Discipline was therefore not experienced merely as

external behavioral compliance, while spirituality was not confined to abstract inward feeling; rather, both became mutually reinforcing dimensions of the same repeated educational practice.

This study proposes a **co-emergence model**, in which structured religious habituation functions as an integrative pedagogical mechanism for both behavioral discipline and spiritual formation. This contribution extends existing understandings of Islamic character education by suggesting that embodied worship practices may provide a more holistic developmental framework than models that artificially separate behavioral training from spiritual cultivation.

For primary school learners, this integrative mechanism may be particularly significant. Children’s development at this stage is strongly shaped by routine participation, imitation, environmental modeling, and emotionally meaningful experience (Boyatzis, 2005). Congregational Dhuha prayer, by combining physical movement, temporal structure, verbal recitation, collective participation, and spiritual intentionality, appears especially well suited to activating multiple developmental domains simultaneously.

Based on the findings and the preceding discussion, Figure 1 presents the proposed co-emergence conceptual model illustrating how structured congregational Dhuha prayer habituation simultaneously facilitates discipline formation and spiritual intelligence development within Islamic primary education.

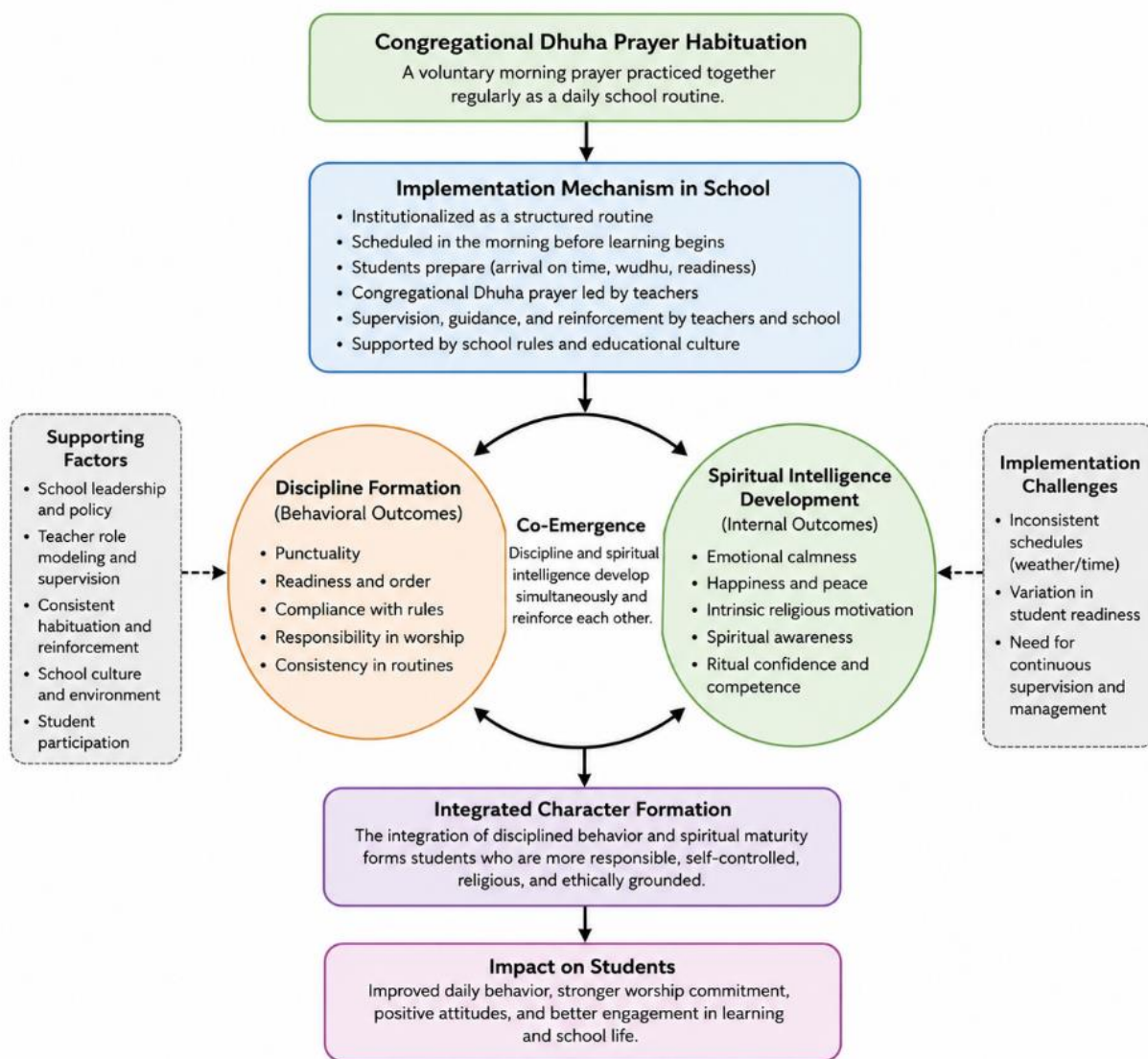


Figure 1. Proposed Co-Emergence Model of Discipline Formation and Spiritual Intelligence Development through Congregational Dhuha Prayer Habituation in Islamic Primary Education

Implementation Tensions and Practical Implications

Despite the positive findings, the implementation challenges identified reveal important practical considerations. Time inconsistency, varying student readiness, and the managerial demands of sustaining the program illustrate the complexity of institutionalizing daily religious habituation within dynamic school environments. Similar operational tensions have been observed in school-based worship implementation, where ideal institutional routines must continuously adapt to practical realities and developmental variability (Dzikro, 2025; Masngut et al., 2024).

The principal's emphasis on patience is particularly instructive. In this context, patience should not be understood merely as a personal virtue, but as a pedagogical competency essential to long-term character and spiritual formation. Habituation-based educational interventions are inherently gradual and non-linear, requiring adaptive management, relational sensitivity, and consistent institutional commitment rather than rigid enforcement alone.

Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic elementary schools seeking integrative approaches to character formation may benefit from embedding structured spiritual routines within daily school culture. However, effectiveness depends not simply on implementing ritual activities, but on cultivating supportive relational environments, meaningful participation, and developmentally responsive institutional practices.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in a single Islamic elementary school context, limiting transferability to other institutional settings with different organizational cultures or student demographics. Second, reliance on student self-reported experiences introduces the possibility of social desirability bias despite triangulation efforts. Third, incomplete attendance documentation limited the ability to systematically verify long-term participation patterns through institutional records.

Future research may strengthen this line of inquiry through comparative multi-site case studies, longitudinal designs, parental perspectives, or mixed-method approaches examining the long-term relationships between religious habituation, discipline, and spiritual development. Further exploration across gender, school type, and varying levels of prior religious exposure would also deepen understanding of the co-emergence model proposed in this study.

Conclusion

This study concludes that congregational Dhuha prayer habituation can function as an integrated educational practice for fostering both student discipline and spiritual intelligence in Islamic primary education. The findings indicate that the structured routine of daily congregational worship supported punctuality, procedural readiness, behavioral responsibility, emotional calmness, intrinsic religious motivation, and growing spiritual competence among students.

A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that discipline and spiritual development need not be treated as separate educational outcomes. Instead, both may co-emerge through a single embodied communal religious practice embedded within the daily life of the school. Through repeated participation in structured worship routines, students engaged simultaneously in behavioral self-regulation and spiritual formation, suggesting the pedagogical value of integrating meaningful religious habituation into holistic character education.

Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic elementary schools may strengthen character formation through non-repressive disciplinary approaches grounded in spiritually meaningful daily routines, provided that implementation remains developmentally responsive, relationally supportive, and institutionally sustained.

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