

Cultural Constraints in Shaping the Spiritual Commitment of Students in Faith-Based Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT. The formation of spiritual commitment among students in faith-based primary schools is often influenced by cultural dynamics embedded in everyday educational practices. However, existing studies have predominantly examined spiritual commitment through curricular or behavioral perspectives, leaving the influence of institutional culture relatively underexplored. This study aims to investigate how cultural factors shape the development of students' spiritual commitment in religious educational settings in Palembang City. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, this study employs a descriptive qualitative case study design. The participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in everyday school practices. They included classroom teachers and assistant teachers as the primary implementers of daily educational activities, students as the direct recipients of the formative process, and the school principal as the key actor shaping institutional policies and school culture. Data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman framework. The findings identify three major cultural barriers. First, religious activities implemented as administrative obligations tend to be perceived as routine requirements rather than meaningful spiritual experiences. Second, an institutional emphasis on the regularity of religious practices encourages evaluation based on attendance and procedural compliance, thereby limiting deeper value internalization. Third, inconsistencies in educators' role modelling create a gap between normative discourse and everyday practice, ultimately undermining the credibility of the values being promoted. Theoretically, this study extends perspectives on spiritual education by demonstrating how institutional habitus and disciplinary mechanisms can simultaneously encourage religious participation while constraining the development of authentic spiritual commitment among students.

Keywords: *Cultural barriers, Spiritual commitment, Religious education, Primary school students.*

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INTRODUCTION

The formation of spiritual commitment among students in faith-based primary schools rarely takes place in a neutral space; rather, it unfolds within cultural dynamics that shape how educational practices are enacted. (Kurniawan et al., 2025; Lapasere et al., 2025; Rozanita et al., 2026; S et al., 2025) argue that the internalization of spiritual values is not determined solely by the formal curriculum but is also influenced by the habits and institutional orientations that develop within the school environment (Adiyono et al., 2025; Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Arifin et al., 2023; Aziz et al., 2025; Hasnadi & Inayatillah, 2022). Educational patterns that emphasize administrative order and routine often shift learning away from deeper meaning-making (Yusuf, 2023) likewise notes

that cultural constraints may emerge in the form of a normalization of educational practices that prioritize social control, thereby confining the formation of spiritual commitment to the level of external compliance. These conditions suggest that the development of spiritual commitment among primary school students is closely intertwined with institutional culture in shaping the depth of students' religious experience (Agustin & Kistoro, 2024; Ardianto et al., 2026; Ramadhan & Albab, 2025). The cultural dimension therefore becomes a crucial aspect to examine, as spiritual education represents a foundational value that needs to be meaningfully realized at the primary school level.

Spiritual commitment that is shaped primarily by institutional culture tends to be difficult to sustain over the long term, as it often remains focused on symbolic patterns of activity rather than on deeper personal engagement. (Tan & Liu, 2022) states that educational habitus is formed through the repetition of practices that come to appear natural, thereby allowing routines to be reproduced as norms with little critical questioning. (Karim et al., 2025) argue that spiritual commitment is not merely the outcome of conscious learning, but is also shaped by structures of disposition embedded through everyday experiences at school. This perspective is further reinforced by (Pusvitasari, 2023), who notes that power relations operate through discipline, supervision, and normalization, positioning compliance as the primary mechanism in shaping primary school students' spiritual commitment. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, dialogue and reflection are prerequisites for the internalization of meaning, so education that is overly centered on the transmission of norms risks producing shallow spiritual awareness. Therefore, integrating a reflective pedagogical approach with a commitment to spirituality is crucial in cultivating long-term commitment.

In contrast to previous studies that have investigated spiritual commitment through curricular or behavioral perspectives, this study draws upon Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Foucault's theory of disciplinary power to explain how institutional culture reproduces forms of symbolic religiosity. First, a number of studies focus on explaining the importance of instilling religious values through curriculum integration (Amalia, 2026; Fauzi et al., 2025; Hussain, 2025; Ikhwan et al., 2025; Muis, 2025; Sirojuddin et al., 2025; Zulfatmi, 2023). Second, several studies have focused on analyzing the role of teachers in supporting the development of spiritual attitudes and adherence to religious practices (A. Samad et al., 2023; Alimni et al., 2022a; Bakti et al., 2025). Third, other studies have evaluated the effectiveness of religious education programs using behavioral indicators, worship discipline, and students' moral outcomes (Astuti et al., 2024; R. Hidayah et al., 2021; Masturin, 2024). Overall, this body of literature has primarily addressed idealized dimensions and expected outcomes, while paying limited attention to institutional cultural dynamics, power relations, and everyday practices that, in fact, shape primary school students' spiritual experiences. As a result, current understandings of how spiritual commitment is formed remain partial and have yet to fully capture the complexity of the social contexts of primary education.

This study not only aims to respond to the shortcomings of previous studies, but also to explain and analyze the role of culture as a factor that limits the formation of long-term spiritual commitment among elementary school students. It foregrounds everyday practices, institutional orientations, and interactional patterns in order to understand how spiritual commitment is shaped within daily school life. Cultural constraints in the formation of students' spiritual commitment indicate that the normalization of administrative order and formal discipline often frames religious engagement at a largely symbolic level, while at the same time restricting students' space for personal reflection (Eaude, 2025). These conditions underscore that educational culture does not merely function as a social backdrop but also operates as a mechanism that mediates the internalization of religious values among primary school students. In other words, this study focuses on explaining and critically examining cultural barriers in shaping the religious values and orientations of students in faith-based primary schools, in order to better grasp the complexity of long-term spiritual commitment formation.

Cultural barriers in shaping spiritual commitment among students in faith-based primary schools constitute a significant phenomenon that warrants careful and in-depth analysis. To address this issue, the present study organizes its inquiry around three central questions. First, this study examines how religious practices are carried out as administrative obligations, in which worship activities are positioned more as fulfilling a schedule than as spaces for reflective meaning-making. Second, it explores how the school's orientation emphasizes the orderly execution of worship as an indicator of success, thereby shaping students' personal interpretations of spiritual experiences. Third, it analyzes how educators' role modelling is not always consistently enacted in everyday practice, which ultimately influences how students understand religious values as formal symbols. This study is also grounded in the argument that such cultural barriers have shaped spiritual experiences that tend to be procedural and shallow in character. Spiritual commitment does not develop as a form of reflective awareness, but rather as a response to the structural demands and institutional routines that surround students' daily school life.

METHOD

This study adopts cultural barriers in shaping spiritual commitment as its unit of analysis, because the main issue lies not merely in the formal curriculum, but in the ways values are produced in the everyday life of educational institutions in Palembang City. Cultural barriers allow analysis to be directed at patterns of habits and thought processes that are often unconscious, yet precisely determine how students interpret the spiritual practices they engage in. This study seeks to examine why practices that appear orderly and routine do not necessarily translate into the formation of internal and sustainable commitment. Primary education is selected as the research context because this stage represents a formative period in the construction of meaning, habits, and value orientations in children's lives. At this stage, students are highly dependent on role models and their environment as primary sources of learning; therefore, inconsistency, formalism, and symbolic approaches tend to have deeper and more enduring effects. Elementary school thus becomes a strategic context for understanding how cultural barriers operate from an early age in shaping, as well as limiting, the development of students' spiritual commitment.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative case study design in order to examine causal relationships and to develop an in-depth understanding of the constraints operating within a particular institutional context. A descriptive qualitative approach enables the study to capture social realities as they are experienced by participants, including everyday practices that often remain invisible to quantitative approaches. The case study strategy is employed because the formation of spiritual commitment is inherently contextual, embedded in specific school cultures and institutional logics, and therefore cannot be separated from the setting in which it unfolds. Observation is used to examine concrete practices and everyday interactions that are not always verbally articulated by school actors. In addition, interviews are conducted to explore educators' and students' perceptions, experiences, and subjective interpretations of the practices they engage in. The combination of observation and interviews allows the study to assess the extent to which what participants report is consistent with what actually takes place in daily school life.

Participants in this study were selected based on their direct involvement in, and positional roles within, the everyday practices of primary school life. The primary informants included classroom teachers and assistant teachers, who act as the main implementers of daily practices; students, as those who directly experience these processes; and the school principal, as a structural actor who shapes policy orientations and school culture. Teachers were chosen because they function both as role models and as intermediaries between institutional regulations and students' lived experiences. They were asked about their interpretations of practice, behavioral consistency, workload, and guidance strategies, in order to examine how values are enacted and negotiated in practice. Students were included as the main recipients of the formative process; questions focused on their experiences, perceptions, and ways of making sense of the practices they encounter, to explore how values are understood and internalized. The principal was selected to clarify

institutional orientations, priorities, and evaluation mechanisms, thereby illuminating how school structures and culture either support or constrain the development of spiritual commitment.

Data collection in this study was conducted over a three-month period in order to enable the researcher to capture recurring patterns of practice, interaction, and shifts in everyday school dynamics. Throughout this period, the research process consistently documented converging narratives, recurring themes, and the stability of behavioral patterns emerging across different informants. Data collection was concluded when additional interviews no longer generated new categories but instead reinforced patterns that had already been identified, particularly with regard to the consistency of role modelling and the ways students made sense of their experiences. The process of collecting and using data in this study has also obtained verbal consent from all informants. To uphold research ethics and protect confidentiality, participants' names are not disclosed and are instead represented by initials. This measure was taken to ensure that the data are used solely for scholarly and academic purposes, without posing personal or institutional risks to any of the individuals involved in the research process.

Data analysis in this study followed the three-stage framework proposed by (Miles & Huberman, 2014): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, all observation and interview materials were transcribed, then selected and sorted to focus attention on information relevant to cultural barriers in the formation of students' spiritual commitment. This process involved initial coding, thematic clustering, and the removal of data that were repetitive or not directly related to the research focus. The next stage involved data display, in which the reduced findings were systematically organized into matrices, thematic tables, and analytical narratives to allow relationships across categories to be clearly examined. At this stage, the data were not only presented but also compared across informants in order to identify patterns of consistency as well as variations in perspectives. The final stage consisted of conclusion drawing and verification, carried out iteratively by returning to the field data, cross-checking across sources, and ensuring that the interpretations produced were firmly grounded in empirical evidence rather than in the researcher's assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Cultural barriers in shaping spiritual commitment among students in faith-based primary schools do not arise solely from individual factors, but are also shaped by institutional patterns that develop within the school environment. The findings indicate that religious practices tend to be positioned as administrative obligations to be fulfilled, rather than as processes of value internalization. In addition, school orientations place greater emphasis on the formal orderliness of worship than on deeper spiritual meaning. This condition is further reinforced by educators' role modelling, which has yet to be enacted consistently in everyday practice. Together, these three findings constitute cultural barriers that shape the process of students' spiritual commitment formation, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Religious Practices Implemented as Administrative Obligations

Religious practices in the faith-based primary schools examined in this study show a strong tendency to be carried out as administrative obligations that must be fulfilled by all members of the school community. Various religious activities are organized in a systematic manner and are primarily oriented toward meeting institutional regulations. In addition, school orientations place greater emphasis on the formal orderliness of worship as a benchmark for the success of religious formation. This pattern is evident in daily routines, school rules, and the monitoring mechanisms that are put in place. Detailed findings related to these practices are presented below (*see Table 1*).

Table 1. Religious Practices as Administrative Obligations in the School Environment

Informant	Focus	Statement
G-01	Formalized Worship Routines	“Indeed, students in this school participate in daily religious activities on a regular basis. However, most of them do so mainly because of schedules and rules. They follow instructions without truly understanding the meaning behind the practices. As a result, worship is performed merely as an act of compliance rather than as a reflective experience that nurtures inner awareness through understanding, reflection, and lived experience in everyday life.”
G-02	Rule-Compliance Orientation	“I observe that many students are diligent in performing religious activities because they are afraid of being reprimanded or sanctioned by teachers. We rarely explain why these practices actually matter. In the end, they comply simply because of the rules. Once they are outside school and no longer supervised, the habit fades away and does not become an inner awareness. As a teacher, I feel this is something we need to address together as soon as possible.”
G-03	Inconsistent Educator Role Modelling	“I realize that there is sometimes a gap between what I demand from students and what I practice myself. I often ask them to be disciplined, yet I also tend to rush and lose focus. Students surely notice this, and they come to see discipline as a mere formality rather than as a genuine habit.”
KS-01	Academically Oriented School Culture	“Our school is still very strongly focused on academic achievement. Teachers spend much of their time pursuing curriculum targets and students’ grades. Religious activities are still present, but they tend to function more as a complement. Going forward, we actually want to create more space for long-term character development so that students can grow in a more balanced way and develop a stronger commitment.”
G-04	Limited Dialogue and Reflection	“Religious activities at school often just run as routine. Students are rarely invited into discussion or reflection. They are not given much space to ask questions or to connect these activities with their own experiences. As a result, these activities do not really touch their inner lives, and their commitment persists mainly because of school regulations rather than from personal awareness and intrinsic motivation.”

Source: Interviews with informants. 2026

Table 1 indicates that the formation of commitment to religious practice in primary schools operates within a framework that places greater emphasis on institutional order than on the deepening of meaning. Three important patterns can be identified from these findings. First, there is a dominance of procedural compliance, in which practices are understood as activities that must be followed because of school regulations and teachers’ directives, rather than out of value-based awareness. This pattern is evident in mechanical routines, sanction-oriented orientations, and student participation that remains at a formal level. Second, the internalization of values appears to be weakened by both actor- and structure-related factors, as reflected in the inconsistency of educators’ role modelling and the academically centered culture of the school. Teachers do not always function as symbolic figures who legitimize these practices, while the institution tends to prioritize academic achievement over the long-term process of commitment formation. Third, the absence of spaces for dialogue and reflection means that practices are not connected to students’ personal experiences. Without reflective processes, emotional attachment fails to develop, and commitment remains shallow and dependent on school-based control.

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of religious character formation depends less on the frequency of religious activities than on the institutional culture through which such practices acquire meaning. When educational environments prioritize compliance over internal reflection, religious practices are more likely to function as mechanisms of behavioral regulation than as processes of personal transformation. This indicates that enduring spiritual commitment emerges not from external discipline alone but from a school culture that enables students to connect religious values with their own experiences, identities, and moral reasoning. Consequently, the central challenge lies in cultivating an institutional environment where values are consistently embodied, socially reinforced, and meaningfully interpreted rather than merely enacted. This finding extends previous research by demonstrating that the sustainability of students' spiritual commitment is fundamentally shaped by the cultural dynamics of the institution, highlighting that religious character formation is a collective and contextual process rather than solely an individual outcome.

A School Orientation That Prioritizes the Orderly Performance of Worship

The orientation of religious education in the faith-based primary schools examined in this study demonstrates a strong emphasis on the orderly performance of worship as the primary indicator of students' spiritual development. A range of religious programs and activities are designed to ensure compliance with prescribed schedules, procedures, and rules of worship. This focus is reflected in the routines of habituation, monitoring practices, and evaluation mechanisms that are regularly implemented by the school. The emphasis on these formal aspects shapes a mode of religious learning that is structured and standardized in character. Detailed findings related to this orientation toward orderly worship are presented below (*see Table 2*).

Table 2. School Orientation toward the Orderly Performance of Religious Practices in Religious Formation

Informant	Focus	Statement
G-05	Emphasis on Scheduling and Attendance	"We focus primarily on ensuring that students attend according to the schedule and that their presence is properly recorded. We rarely explain the underlying reasons for coming on time, so students tend to see worship as an administrative routine rather than as an inner need that gradually grows from personal awareness."
G-06	Technically Defined Indicators of Success	"Religious formation is considered successful when students line up neatly, the atmosphere is calm, and they behave in an orderly manner during worship. Issues of personal engagement are not yet a major concern. What matters most is that things look orderly. Usually, this attitude only lasts as long as there is a teacher supervising."
KS-02	Orderliness as Institutional Image	"At school, we focus more on organizing worship activities so that they appear neat and orderly in the eyes of parents and supervisors. What matters is that discipline is visible. But to be honest, the cultivation of students' inner awareness is still far from optimal. Sometimes these activities remain largely formal and do not truly resonate with the students."
G-07	Limited Integration with Classroom Learning	"In my view, worship activities at school are still separated from what happens in the classroom. They are rarely connected to lesson content or to students' everyday habits. As a result, the emphasis is mainly on orderliness, and students find it difficult to relate these practices to real life."
G-08	Discipline without Deep Meaning-Making	"From the moment they enter school, students are accustomed to participating in worship in a disciplined way. However, to be honest, we rarely discuss its meaning in any depth. As a result, they tend to focus on complying with rules, and when supervision is absent, their commitment is not necessarily strong."

Source: Interviews with informants. 2026

Table 2 indicates that the cultivation of worship practices in primary schools tends to operate within a framework of formal orderliness that positions discipline as the primary objective. Three key patterns can be identified from these findings. First, worship practices are reduced to administrative and technical routines, as reflected in the emphasis on schedules, attendance, line formation, and orderliness as indicators of success, while the dimension of meaning-making is largely neglected. Second, orderliness is produced as part of the school's institutional image, in which the visible display of discipline and neatness in worship is oriented more toward meeting the external expectations of parents and supervisors than toward fostering students' inner awareness. Third, a strong separation exists between worship practices and the learning process, resulting in activities that stand apart from students' everyday experiences and ultimately cultivate a form of situational compliance. Taken together, these three patterns suggest that the orientation of religious formation places greater emphasis on control and symbolic order than on the development of commitment grounded in understanding and internal engagement.

These findings indicate that the institutionalization of worship practices is shaped more by organizational imperatives than by pedagogical goals of spiritual development. When worship is primarily framed as a mechanism for maintaining institutional order, its educational function shifts from fostering moral and spiritual growth to reinforcing conformity with established routines. Such an orientation limits opportunities for students to develop a personal understanding of religious practices and instead encourages engagement that remains dependent on external structures of supervision and regulation. This suggests that the quality of religious character formation is determined not only by the presence of worship activities but also by how these activities are embedded within the broader educational culture. The findings therefore extend previous research by demonstrating that the transformative potential of worship practices depends on their integration into meaningful learning experiences, rather than their effectiveness as instruments of institutional discipline alone.

Inconsistent Enactment of Educators' Role Modelling in Everyday Practice

Educators' role modelling within the context of religious education in faith-based primary schools constitutes a crucial element in the process of students' spiritual formation. However, the findings of this study indicate that such role modelling is not enacted consistently in everyday school life. Educators' behaviors, attitudes, and interactions across various situations do not always fully reflect the values they seek to convey to students. This pattern is evident in classroom instruction, non-academic activities, and social relations within the school environment. Detailed findings regarding this inconsistency in educators' role modelling are presented below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Inconsistency in Educators' Role Modelling in Everyday Practice

Informant	Focus	Statement
G-09	Discrepancy between Words and Actions	"To be honest, we often advise students to be serious and committed. Yet at times we ourselves appear rushed. Students notice this difference between what is said and what is done. They come to feel that these expectations apply only to them, not to us as well."
G-10	Situational Role Modelling	"There are indeed some teachers who seem to demonstrate good examples mainly when evaluations are taking place or when supervisors are present. In everyday situations, it can be different. Students are quite perceptive, so they start to think that worship is merely a formality, dependent on the situation rather than a way of life."
S-01	Students' Responses to Inconsistency	"Nowadays, many of my friends tend to mirror the teachers' attitudes. When teachers are inconsistent, we also become less serious. We still perform worship, but it feels more like a

KS-03	Educators' Workload Pressures	formality—what matters is simply being present. We trust and prefer concrete examples rather than just advice.” “As a principal, I can see firsthand how teachers are burdened by administrative work and multiple responsibilities. At times, they become so focused on completing reports, programs, and targets that they neglect their everyday conduct. As a result, the role modelling they provide becomes inconsistent, and students do not always receive a coherent example. This is an important issue for us to address in improving the system.”
G-11	Normalization of Inconsistency	“I honestly see that our attitudes are sometimes inconsistent, but over time this comes to be seen as normal. There is no specific evaluation of this issue. Students then pick up the message that role modelling is not a priority. Religious activities continue, but they do not sufficiently cultivate long-term inner commitment.”

Source: Interviews with informants. 2026

Table 3 illustrates the fragile dynamics of educators' role modelling in everyday school practice and its consequences for how students make sense of religious practices. Three key patterns can be identified. First, there is a clear discrepancy between educators' words and actions: values related to sincerity and commitment are articulated normatively, yet they are not consistently embodied in daily conduct. This situation leads students to understand that these values are instructional and one-sided, applying only as a requirement for students rather than as a shared ethos embraced by the entire school community. Second, role modeling tends to be situational and ceremonial, appearing mainly in formal moments such as evaluations or supervision, so religious practices are perceived as a contextual obligation depending on the situation, rather than a habit embedded in everyday life. Third, this inconsistency is reinforced by structural factors, including educators' administrative workloads and the absence of systematic evaluation of everyday conduct, which together contribute to the normalization of such inconsistencies.

These findings demonstrate that educators' influence on students' spiritual development is fundamentally shaped by the credibility of the institutional culture they represent rather than by instructional authority alone. Religious values are more likely to be internalized when they are experienced as authentic social norms consistently enacted within the school community. Conversely, inconsistencies between institutional expectations and everyday practice weaken the legitimacy of those values, reducing them to symbolic ideals rather than lived commitments. This suggests that role modelling should be understood as a cultural mechanism through which institutions establish the moral coherence of their educational environment. The findings therefore extend previous research by arguing that the effectiveness of religious character formation depends not merely on educators' individual commitment but on the institution's capacity to sustain a culture in which shared values are continuously reinforced through consistent everyday interactions.

Discussion

Administrative Compliance and the Crisis of Meaning in Spiritual Education

The institutionalization of compliance without the internalization of meaning in religious practices often takes place unnoticed in primary schools. (Ansyah et al., 2024) emphasize that schools tend to function more as agents for managing behavioral order than as spaces for cultivating value-based awareness. This context indicates a shift in the role of educational institutions from shaping life orientations to regulating symbolic compliance. The inconsistent modelling by educators further reinforces the message that such practices are merely formal and that the degree of seriousness attached to them is negotiable. Inconsistent role modelling by educators further reinforces the message that such practices are merely formal and that the degree of seriousness attached to them is negotiable. (Karwadi et al., 2025) argue that an academically

centered culture has produced structures that marginalize processes of deep engagement, thereby stripping religious practices of their pedagogical legitimacy. The limited presence of dialogue exacerbates this condition, as students are not provided with opportunities to interpret and connect these practices with their social worlds (Barkah et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2023; Rohid et al., 2026). Accordingly, the difficulties in fostering students' long-term spiritual commitment stem not only from a lack of individual awareness, but also from an epistemic crisis in how schools conceptualize and enact religious practice itself.

Religious practices that are implemented as administrative obligations in schools, as noted by (Aliyyani et al., 2025), represent a form of external compliance that is, obedience driven by regulatory pressure and sanctions rather than by value-based awareness. This condition resonates with (Bourdieu, 1986) concept of habitus, which suggests that the repeated enactment of practices devoid of symbolic meaning is unlikely to produce deeply embedded dispositions. The habitus that emerges under such conditions tends to remain shallow and situational, as it is not supported by a coherent structure of meaning. In this sense, role modelling becomes inconsistent when educators' conduct weakens the teacher's authority as a symbolic agent in transmitting values through everyday practice. (Mujiburrahman, 2016) similarly argues that the dominance of institutional control may be effective in maintaining short-term discipline, but is not conducive to long-term internalization. Accordingly, the implementation of religious practices as administrative obligations in schools points to a potential failure in fostering students' spiritual commitment not because of learners' resistance, but rather because of the way pedagogical processes are configured.

Spiritual education that is focused primarily on administrative obligations carries implications not only for the quality of religious life, but also for the orientation and depth of students' understanding. (Utami et al., 2025) emphasize that compliance constructed in a procedural manner, without the internalization of values, risks producing a generation that comes to view religious practice as an administrative burden. In a broader social context, educational patterns that center on administrative demands may also reinforce instrumental attitudes, whereby compliance is performed only in the presence of institutional control. The role model of educators that is not improved also further degrades the moral legitimacy of schools as spaces for character development, making students potentially choose to separate normative guidance from actual practice (Suwija et al., 2022). In other words, habituating an academic-centric culture in the process of strengthening students' spiritual character risks degrading the ethical dimension in education, thereby turning schools into mere spaces for producing cognitive achievements. This context, according to (Aningsih et al., 2022), is emphasized as something that should not be ignored because it can lead to fragile commitments.

The dynamics of strengthening moral commitment among primary school students indicate that the core issue lies not in students' capacities, but in how institutions construct and convey religious meaning. When practices are reduced to administrative routines, schools inadvertently communicate that religious commitment can be performed formally without the need for genuine engagement (Ahmed, 2020; Barkah & Andriyani, 2020). Inconsistent role modelling by educators and an academically centered school culture further exacerbate this condition, as they generate tensions between the discourse of character formation and the realities of everyday educational practice (A. H. Azhar & Halwati, n.d.; Budiyo et al., 2024; Dewi et al., 2025; Febrianti et al., 2025; Jaedun et al., 2024; Lukman et al., 2021). If schools seek to cultivate students' long-term spiritual commitment, then the logic of efficiency, targets, and control must be implemented contextually. This reflection underscores that the formation of spiritual commitment cannot be imposed through regulation alone; it must also be embodied through consistent and sustained exemplarity. In this way, schools can reduce the risk of symbolic and superficial practices and instead foster more enduring forms of students' spiritual commitment.

Institutional Formalism as a Cultural Constraint on Students' Spiritual Commitment

A school orientation that focuses solely on the regularity of worship indicates the presence of structural problems in understanding the cultivation of worship practice, where the educational process is reduced to a mechanism for managing order. Emphasis on schedules and technical discipline shows that worship practice is treated as an activity that must be monitored, rather than as a space for shaping personal awareness (Purnomo, 2022). This orientation indicates that the dominance of administrative logic prioritizes visibility and formal compliance as indicators of success. (Aimang, 2024) states that when orderliness is portrayed as the school's institutional image, religious practices will function as symbolic activities to demonstrate performance and discipline in front of external parties. The limited integration of these practices with the learning process further reinforces the idea that they stand apart from students' everyday lives, thereby contributing little to the development of sustained dispositions. In this sense, as (Khoirunnisa & Tumin, 2025) note, the situation points to a widening gap between the normative aims of character education and educational practices that remain oriented toward formalism.

Education oriented toward formalism is conceptualized by (Foucault, 2016) as a form of disciplinary power that operates through the regulation of time, space, and bodies. The emphasis on schedules and orderliness illustrates how worship practices are mobilized as technologies of discipline designed to produce compliance that can be monitored and measured. (Moser, 2016) likewise argues that orderliness no longer functions primarily as a pedagogical means, but rather as a mechanism of normalization that assesses success through formal obedience. This context also reflects the logic of performativity in modern institutions, in which educational activities are presented as evidence of institutional performance. (Fernando et al., 2026) further suggest that the dominance of disciplinary rationality tends to generate situational compliance that depends on control, rather than commitment grounded in personal awareness. In other words, education that is oriented towards formality can create a fundamental tension between the normative goals of character development and, in the context of institutional practices that still operate within the logic of supervision and the normalization of schools towards students.

Worship practices that emphasize orderliness alone in schools risk remaining confined to symbolic activities that lose their transformative potential. Compliance constructed through schedules and technical discipline tends to remain situational and easily collapses once institutional control is no longer present, leaving schools ill-prepared to equip students to carry spiritual values into broader social spaces (N. Hidayah et al., 2021; Masrurroh et al., 2026). In the long term, this condition may also produce students who become accustomed to formal rule compliance, resulting in minimal spiritual commitment alongside limited reflective capacity and personal responsibility. (Chanifah et al., 2021) note that religious devotion oriented primarily toward maintaining an appearance of order risks reinforcing a culture of institutional manipulation, in which what is evaluated is the display of performance rather than the quality of habitual practice. These conditions not only weaken the long-term formation of students' spiritual commitment, but also risk reproducing educational models that normalize compliance without awareness, at the expense of cultivating autonomous and responsible subjects (Fernando et al., 2025; H. Hidayat et al., 2026; Larasati et al., 2025; Lingga et al., 2026; Syukur et al., 2025; Tamjidnor et al., 2025).

A school orientation that focuses solely on the orderly performance of worship signals a fundamental need to reconsider how schools conceptualize religious practice as part of the educational process. (Marini et al., 2018) argue that when orderliness and compliance are positioned as final goals, they can open up modes of meaning-making that are insufficiently responsive to the needs of learners as subjects. Reflecting on school orientations in shaping students' spiritual commitment is therefore essential, particularly to reassess an understanding of formation that cannot rely on behavioral regulation alone, but also requires meaningful engagement and consistent role modelling (R. Hidayah et al., 2021). Educators also need to position themselves not merely as guardians of order, but as facilitators who are able to connect spiritual commitment with students' everyday experiences and social dynamics. (Alimni et al., 2022b) likewise note that schools play a

crucial role in shifting orientations away from performance-based image-making toward the cultivation of more substantive pedagogical relationships. In this way, students' spiritual commitment can be sustained beyond mere formalism.

Fragile Role Modelling as a Cultural Constraint in Spiritual Formation

The inconsistent enactment of educators' role modelling in everyday practice signals an institutional failure to transform religious practices into meaningful learning experiences. (Baba et al., 2021) argue that such inconsistency suggests religious values are more likely to be understood as instruments of behavioral regulation rather than as shared ethical orientations to be lived collectively (Bogdanova et al., 2022; Lestari et al., 2025; Nisa et al., 2025; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). This condition indicates that educational goals have shifted from the cultivation of spiritual commitment toward the maintenance of administrative compliance (R. Azhar et al., 2026; Fernando & Larasati, 2026; Saumur et al., 2025). The inconsistency of educators' role modeling can also have implications for the weakening of critical reflection and evaluation of the educator's role as a moral figure, so that the practices in place are never tested for their significance to students' spirituality. The implication is that students' understanding of religious learning does not significantly impact their spiritual commitment, making it difficult for them to develop awareness and personal responsibility continuously. Thus, students' spiritual commitment only persists within the classroom.

Spiritual commitment that exists only within the classroom, as (Hsieh et al., 2022) argue, reflects a failure on the part of educators to fulfill their normative role as moral exemplars, arising from a mismatch between role expectations and actual role performance. When educators demand sincerity and commitment from students but do not display congruent conduct themselves, their role risks losing its moral legitimacy. This condition is further reinforced by (Amsari et al., 2024), who draw on Bandura's social learning theory to argue that individuals learn primarily through observed behavior rather than through verbal instruction. In other words, educators' inconsistency in providing concrete examples becomes a negative model that students reproduce in the form of superficial compliance. (Maksum et al., 2025) also state that religious practices may function as mechanisms of symbolic discipline rather than as processes of value internalization. This context indicates that the main problem underlying students' weak spiritual commitment lies not in the absence of rules, but in a crisis of roles, exemplarity, and meaning within educational structures that operate through everyday modelling.

The central problem in the formation of students' commitment does not lie in the intensity of religious practices or the completeness of institutional regulations, but rather in the fragility of role-modeling relationships embedded in everyday school life. (Damopolii et al., 2023) state that educators are not only present as subjects who also practice the values being taught, but schools implicitly convey the message that values can be separated from personal behavior and can be fulfilled merely through formal compliance. This situation calls for a shift in the perspective of educational institutions from the logic of managing order to strengthening the role of educators as reflective and consistent learning figures. (Ma'arif et al., 2022) also emphasize the importance of self-evaluation spaces and ethical dialogue among educators so that role modeling is not understood as an abstract moral demand but as something practiced together with students. Without such a paradigm shift, character education risks remaining trapped in routines and the appearance of orderliness, while students learn to display situational compliance without developing autonomous and long-term moral awareness, thereby potentially weakening the overall goals of education (Alhassan et al., 2025; Bayu Astra et al., 2024; R. Hidayat et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the formation of spiritual commitment among students in faith-based primary schools is often shaped by cultural barriers operating as a hidden layer that influences how practices are carried out and interpreted in everyday school life. This context is reflected in three major findings. First, when religious practices are implemented as administrative obligations, students tend to perceive these activities merely as formal routines that must be followed to comply with rules, rather than as reflective experiences that cultivate inner engagement and value awareness. Second, a school orientation that emphasizes the regularity of worship makes indicators of success more dependent on technical discipline, such as attendance, line formation, and procedural compliance, which in turn leads to the neglect of meaning internalization in daily learning. Third, educators' role modelling is not consistently enacted in everyday practice, leading students to perceive a disconnect between discourse and action, which ultimately undermines the credibility of the values being taught. Taken together, these three findings indicate that the resulting commitment is largely symbolic, situational, and dependent on institutional control, rather than developing into sustained personal awareness.

This study makes a significant contribution to the development of scholarship in Islamic religious education by offering a critical reading of how commitment to religious practice is shaped in primary education contexts. The findings not only enrich ongoing discussions on values learning but also demonstrate that the formation of commitment is not merely a matter of curriculum design or instructional content. Rather, it is deeply embedded in the institutional arrangements that structure students' everyday experiences. By drawing attention to practices that have been reduced to administrative routines, to orientations centered on technical orderliness, and to inconsistencies in educators' role modelling, this study broadens the analytical lens of Islamic religious education from a predominantly normative approach toward a more contextual and practice-oriented reading. Another contribution lies in providing a reflective framework for understanding the importance of meaning-centered pedagogy, dialogue, and exemplary relationships as foundations for the cultivation of sustained commitment. Furthermore, this study may serve as a reference point for the development of educational policies that are more attentive to the cultural dynamics of school life and to students' subjective experiences.

The limitations of this study lie in the selection of research sites, which were confined to three faith-based primary schools. As a result, the empirical scope remains limited and does not yet fully capture the diversity of educational practices across broader settings. This condition leaves open the possibility that variations in students' experiences, instructional management patterns, and other forms of institutional cultural dynamics have not been fully reflected in the findings. Moreover, the restricted number of sites has implications for the generalizability of the results, which should therefore be interpreted in a contextual manner rather than as a universal account of how student commitment is formed in Islamic religious education. Nevertheless, these limitations can serve as a reflective point of departure for future studies to extend the scope of inquiry by involving a wider range of schools from diverse geographical, social, and institutional backgrounds. Future research may also benefit from combining different methodological approaches, including longitudinal observation or comparative analyses across educational models, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

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