

Religious Culture Development Model (SosPem-KPPB) for Improving Graduate Quality in *Madrasah*

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Abstract

Madrasah education is expected to shape both academic competence and religious character, yet many institutions struggle to move religious culture beyond routine and rules into something students genuinely internalize. This study examines how religious culture is formed, enacted, and developed, and how it bears upon the quality of graduates in two *pesantren*-based *madrasah*, *MTs* (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, Islamic junior secondary school) Darut Taqwa 02 Sengonagung Pasuruan and *MTs* Safinda Surabaya. A qualitative multi-site case study guided the inquiry. Data came from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, then underwent single-site and cross-site analysis, with triangulation used to secure data trustworthiness. The findings show that religious culture in both *madrasahs* began from the founders' ideals, which the heads of *madrasah* translated into vision, mission, and programs, and which took root through worship habituation, exemplary conduct, ethical communication, discipline, and Islamic character formation. Adapting Kurt Lewin's change model, the study formulates the SosPem-KPPB model, namely Socialization and Habituation through Exemplary Behavior, Strengthening of Organizational Culture, and Continuous Supervision. The model proved capable of creating a safe and conducive learning environment, sharpening students' reasoning, and lifting graduate achievement in academic and non-academic domains. These results imply that graduate quality depends not only on effective teaching but on an institution's capacity to embed religious values within its organizational culture, offering *madrasah* leaders a workable framework for sustainable quality improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in *madrasah* is expected to achieve more than academic attainment, since it also carries the mandate of forming character and religious culture as the defining feature of Islamic educational institutions. The formation of a religious culture matters because it shapes the attitudes, behavior, and personality of students, and because Indonesian law itself frames education as an effort to produce learners who are faithful, of noble character, knowledgeable, and responsible (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, 2003). Empirical conditions, however, reveal a persistent gap between this mandate and its realization. Recent evidence indicates that religious culture in many *madrasahs* remains confined to



religious rules and traditions and has not yet reached the affective dimension of students, so that it does not become a strong habit in daily life (As'ari et al., 2025). This gap between the normative aspiration of *madrasah* education and its uneven realization on the ground is precisely what makes the development of religious culture a pressing subject of inquiry.

Recent scholarship on religious culture in Islamic education converges on several themes while leaving important questions open. A first theme concerns leadership, where studies argue that strengthening religious culture depends on visionary and value-based leadership that integrates spiritual commitment with professional standards, as reflected in the proposal of an Islamic-oriented model of school leadership for *Muslim societies* (Alazmi & Bush, 2024). A second theme concerns quality, where research on Islamic spiritual leadership demonstrates that a *madrasah* quality culture is advanced through the internalization of religious values, disciplined habituation, and continuous monitoring (Mahmud & Ramli, 2025). A third theme concerns outcomes, where empirical work shows that pedagogical competence and religious culture exert a direct effect on the quality of *madrasah* graduates (As'ari et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies affirm that religious culture is consequential, yet they treat it largely as a variable or a leadership attribute rather than as a process that unfolds over time.

The reviewed literature therefore leaves a specific gap that this study addresses. Prior work has described programs, strategies, and leadership attributes associated with religious culture, but it has stopped short of formulating a replicable model that explains how such a culture is deliberately changed and stabilized from within an institution (Alazmi & Bush, 2024; Mahmud & Ramli, 2025). Existing studies also tend to examine a single site or to treat religious culture statically, so that the staged movement from a founder's conviction to an internalized organizational culture remains underexplored across contexts. The novelty of the present study lies in adapting Kurt Lewin's theory of planned change to the specific setting of *pesantren*-based *madrasahs*, and in deriving from cross-site evidence an integrated model of religious culture development that names its stages explicitly. This combination of a change-management lens, a multi-site design, and a graduate-quality focus has not been offered by earlier research.

The purpose of this study is accordingly threefold, namely to analyze the formation of religious culture, to examine its implementation, and to explain its development and implications for the quality of graduates in *pesantren*-based *madrasahs*. In pursuing these aims, the study seeks to extend the existing literature by moving beyond descriptions of strategy toward a conceptual model that other institutions can adapt. Its relevance is both academic and practical. Academically, it contributes a change-management perspective to the study of religious culture, a perspective that the current literature has largely left implicit. Practically, it offers heads of *madrasahs* and foundations a transferable framework in which the strengthening of religious culture becomes a deliberate route to improving graduate quality, uniting character formation and academic achievement rather than treating them as separate ends within the institution.

Guided by these aims, the study focuses on understanding how religious culture is constructed, enacted, and sustained across two *pesantren*-based *madrasahs* that share a common origin yet differ in their delivery systems. The central argument is that the quality of graduates is determined not only by effective instruction but by the institution's capacity to internalize religious values into its organizational culture through a traceable sequence of change. Rather than measuring variables, the inquiry explores the meaning that *madrasah* members attach to the formation and

development of their religious culture, and it traces how the ideals of the founders are transformed into shared and self-reproducing conduct. To capture this process in depth, the study adopts a qualitative multi-site design, the details of which are elaborated in the following section on method.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design, chosen to obtain deep and comprehensive information about the process and concept of religious culture development for improving graduate quality at *MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, Islamic junior secondary school) Darut Taqwa 02 Sengonagung Pasuruan and *MTs Safinda Surabaya*. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research sought the essential meaning of events and human interaction within natural settings, analyzed inductively rather than through measurement (Ritter, 2022). The case study design followed Creswell's understanding that a case study focuses on a specific reality within a bounded phenomenon, while the multi-site design, in the sense described by Yin, permitted an intensive investigation of two or more subjects and settings within their real-life context (Tenreiro et al., 2022; Tulpule, 2021). The two *madrasahs* were selected because they share a common character, namely *madrasahs* born within a *pesantren* community and managed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs in synchronization with their respective foundations, yet each possesses a distinctive way of developing *madrasah* culture that bears upon the quality of its graduates. The two sites are profiled in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the research sites

Aspect	<i>MTs Darut Taqwa 02 Sengonagung, Pasuruan</i>	<i>MTs Safinda Rungkut, Surabaya</i>
Institutional basis	<i>Pesantren</i> -based <i>madrasah</i> under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the foundation	<i>Pesantren</i> -based <i>madrasah</i> under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the foundation
Management	Organizational management integrated with the <i>pesantren</i>	Boarding system managed autonomously by the <i>madrasah</i>
Distinctive character	Religious culture rooted in the founder's ideals, integrating <i>madrasah</i> and <i>pesantren</i> programs	Religious culture organized around the <i>dzikir, fikir, and amal shaleh</i> formula within an <i>Islamic boarding system</i>
Orientation of study	Religious culture development for improving graduate quality	Religious culture development for improving graduate quality

Data were collected through three complementary techniques, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, carried out between January and March 2025. In this qualitative inquiry, the researcher served as the key human instrument, in the sense articulated by Sugiyono, responsible for determining the focus of the research, selecting informants as data sources, collecting data, assessing data quality, analyzing and interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions from the findings (Collett, 2024; Henson, 2021). Following Bogdan and Biklen, the researcher was present directly in the field to grasp the meaning of events and to interact with local values, since such understanding cannot be obtained through questionnaires alone. Informants were drawn from the elements of each *madrasah*: the principal, the deputy heads for curriculum and student affairs, teachers, a foundation and *pesantren* administrator, students, and parents, so that the account of religious culture would reflect converging perspectives rather than a single vantage point. To protect the

identity of informants, particularly the students, each informant is referred to by an anonymized code throughout this article, as set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Informant codes

Code	Informant	Site
KM-DT	Head of <i>madrasah</i>	Darut Taqwa
WKur-DT	Deputy head for curriculum	Darut Taqwa
WKes-DT	Deputy head for student affairs	Darut Taqwa
GPAI-DT	Islamic education teacher	Darut Taqwa
YAY-DT	Foundation and <i>pesantren</i> representative	Darut Taqwa
SW-DT	Student	Darut Taqwa
OT-DT	Parent	Darut Taqwa
KM-SF	Head of <i>madrasah</i>	Safinda
WKur-SF	Deputy head for curriculum	Safinda
WKes-SF	Deputy head for student affairs	Safinda
GQH-SF	Qur'an and Hadith teacher	Safinda
PP-SF	<i>Pesantren</i> administrator	Safinda
SW-SF	Student	Safinda
OT-SF	Parent	Safinda

Data analysis proceeded in two stages consistent with the multi-site design, beginning with single-site analysis and continuing with cross-site analysis (de Lima & Marks, 2025; Ouyang & Cao, 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). Data collection began at the first site, *MTs* Darut Taqwa 02, and was followed by the second site, *MTs* Safinda, with observation of specific events conducted simultaneously where necessary, so that the conceptual findings of each *madrasah* could first be established on their own terms. The conceptual findings of the two sites were then subjected to comparison and conceptual development to obtain an abstraction of the religious culture development model for improving graduate quality, after which a modified analysis was carried out as a means of developing and testing the emerging theory. Throughout the process, triangulation served as the final analytical instrument for verifying the validity of the data, achieved by cross-checking information across different sources so that the conclusions of the study could be accounted for (Gulgun et al., 2025; McCauley & Fosco, 2022; Yuan & Wang, 2023). This sequence, moving from single-site abstraction to cross-site synthesis, allowed the study to arrive at the integrated model reported in the following sections.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Emergence of Religious Culture from the Founders' Ideals toward Institutional Internalization

Religious culture at *MTs* Darut Taqwa 02 Sengonagung and *MTs* Safinda Rungkut did not arise as an administrative program imposed from outside the institution. In both *madrasahs* it grew from the founding aspiration of the *pesantren* and was gradually transformed into the organizational fabric of the school. Because both institutions operate on a *pesantren* basis, Islamic values function at once as conviction and as the working code of everyday conduct. At *MTs* Darut Taqwa 02, the head of the *madrasah* located the origin of this culture in the vision of the founder, KH Sholeh, whose intention explains why the school exists at all. The following statement from the head of the *madrasah* evidences this origin.

"As far as I recall, there were several things that underlay the formation of

religious culture at MTs Darut Taqwa 02. It was KH Sholeh's wish to establish a *madrasah* that would not only make the coming generation intelligent, intellectually and above all spiritually, but also fortify them with the creed of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* amid the many currents that lately try to erode the creed of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* that we feel today. Thus the Islamic values, the convictions, and the ideals of KH Sholeh as founder and caretaker of this *pesantren* we made the basis for forming religious culture as the culture of MTs Darut Taqwa 02. The values, convictions, ideals, and the demands of society's needs formed the vision, mission, and goals of MTs Darut Taqwa 02." (KM-DT, 19 March 2025)

The account frames the process of formation as an act of translation, in which the private conviction of a founder becomes an institutional charter. The deputy head for curriculum reinforced that the aim was never to modernize the *madrasah* by discarding its *pesantren* identity, but rather to make that identity the very thing being cultivated, since *pesantren* values such as worship, sincerity, and honesty were meant to become the students' behavioral convictions rather than mere subject matter (WKur-DT, 9 March 2025). The deputy head for student affairs connected this to the *madrasah*'s mission of nurturing the religious practice of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah*, observing that basic Islamic values together with *aswaja* values such as fairness and tolerance were deliberately developed as the baseline of student conduct (WKes-DT, 9 March 2025). The same aspiration appeared at the second site. The head of MTs Safinda held that the improvement of educational quality was itself an obligation that had to be pursued without erasing the *pesantren* tradition that had taken root.

The head of MTs (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, Islamic junior secondary school) *Safinda* conveys this position in the following statement:

"The development of educational quality at MTs Safinda must be carried out consistently and continuously. This effort is undertaken without removing the characteristics or the *pesantren* tradition that has taken root. One fundamental element that we still maintain is the religious *pesantren* culture, that is, making Islamic values the foundation of the conviction, attitude, and behavior of students throughout the educational process. That religious culture becomes the main capital for empowering educators and students so that a conducive, harmonious, and Islamic educational environment is created." (KM-SF, 22 March 2025)

What distinguishes the formation of this culture in both *madrasahs* is its mechanism, which worked primarily through the emulation of an exemplary figure rather than through instruction alone. At MTs Darut Taqwa 02, a representative of the foundation described the process as almost disarmingly simple, since educators and students at first did no more than imitate the habits of the *kiai*. The following statement of the foundation representative evidences this mechanism.

"The implication of developing religious culture at MTs Darut Taqwa 02 was at first very simple. The educators, the students, and the others only imitated the habits of the *kiai*, in this case KH (*Kiai Haji*, honorific title for a *kiai*) Sholeh, the founder of *pesantren* Darut Taqwa. We all already know that a *kiai* is a figure worthy of being emulated and imitated, because a *kiai* or scholar is an heir of the Prophet, and thus the noble character he applied was carried into the environment of the *pesantren* and MTs Darut Taqwa 02. Besides his simplicity, sincerity, honesty, discipline, and constancy, he is a visionary leader. Naturally,

these things can inspire the students and the *santri* to behave as he does. Likewise, on various occasions, especially after the five daily prayers, he always equipped the *santri* with religious values, so that this could give a conviction that pushed them to behave with noble character whenever and wherever they were." (YAY-DT, 17 March 2025)

At *MTs Safinda*, the same reliance on an exemplary figure was evident, with the founder KH Choirul Anam serving as the model whose daily practice students spontaneously followed. The head of the *pesantren* administration explained that student conduct was formed and habituated simply through imitating what the *kiai* did, especially his constancy in leading the five obligatory prayers, and that the regular study of classical texts after the sunset and dawn prayers gave students an understanding of Islamic teaching that eventually produced an inner awareness to behave in an Islamic manner (PP-SF, 22 March 2025). This convergence indicates that in both institutions the modeling of a central figure was coupled with an internalized rationale, so that conduct was not merely copied but believed.

Students at both sites corroborated that the culture registered with newcomers as something attractive rather than coercive. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*, one student recalled being drawn to the school by its atmosphere of courtesy and simplicity, describing how he was habituated to greet and respect teachers, to shake hands, and to speak politely and honestly, and adding that he felt proud and happy to study there because he could learn both independently and alongside his friends (SW-DT, 17 March 2025). At *MTs Safinda*, a student similarly reported that the many guided activities, together with the direct example of the caretaker KH Choirul Anam in patience, sincerity, discipline, and constancy in leading the five daily prayers, made him feel glad and increasingly motivated to study (SW-SF, 22 March 2025). The parallel testimonies suggest that in both *madrasahs* the initial point of contact with religious culture was affective before it became normative.

Taken together, these accounts indicate that the religious culture in both *madrasahs* is constituted from converging elements, namely an initial affective attraction, a firm underlying conviction, and a settled body of values, habits, and rules. In each institution, the principal then consolidated these elements into the formal apparatus of governance, that is, the vision, mission, and goals, so that the founders' ideals would persist as an organizational culture rather than remain the charisma of a single person. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*, this custodial task produced the vision of forming superior *madrasah* achievement that is integrated in knowledge and practice and of noble character, while at *MTs Safinda* it produced the vision of shaping cadres who are Islamic, knowledgeable, environmentally conscious, and imbued with the spirit of the *pesantren*. In both cases, the vision reads as the institutional distillation of the founding intent.

Two documented instruments anchored this formation in practice, one at each site. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*, the instrument was the *Buku Budaya Disiplin Siswa*, an integrated *pesantren* and *madrasah* code of conduct governing punctuality, honesty, discipline, and responsibility. At *MTs Safinda*, the instrument was the *Buku Saku Jujur* together with a student liaison book, which guided the daily activities of students so that they would obey the rules and consistently practice good character. The following figures present these documents as field evidence of the structural approach adopted in the two *madrasahs*. Before the first document is presented, it should be noted that

the code of conduct at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* functioned as the written anchor of the top-down approach at the first site.

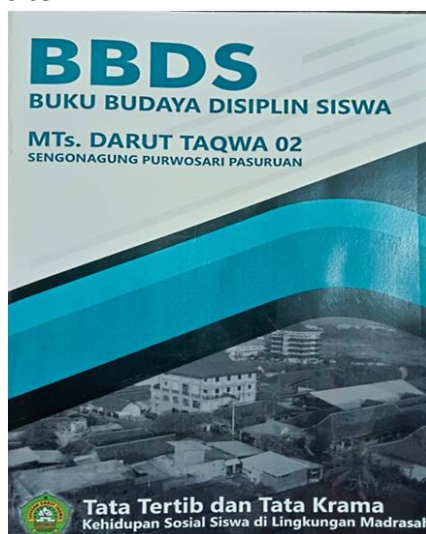


Figure 1. The student discipline code book at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*

The second document performed a comparable function at *MTs Safinda*, where the honesty pocketbook regulated conduct within the boarding system throughout the day and night.



Figure 2. The honesty pocketbook at *MTs Safinda Rungkut Surabaya*

On the basis of these accounts and documents, the formation of religious culture at both sites can be read as proceeding through two complementary models. The structural model operated top-down through binding instruments, that is, the codes of conduct and the institutionalized emulation of the *kiai*'s example. The organic model treated religious education as a living system expressed through routine acts of habituation until they hardened into tradition, evidenced by the program of religious habituation at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* and by community religious activities such as *manaqib*, *tahlil*, and the commemoration of *Islamic holy days* at *MTs Safinda*. The interplay of the two models is what allowed a founder's private conviction to become a

shared and self-reproducing culture in each *madrasah*.

The Actualization of Religious Values through Physical Symbols, Conduct, and Habituated Programs in Both *Madrasahs*

Once formed, religious culture in both *madrasahs* was actualized through a recognizable set of values that were then expressed in physical symbols, in behavior, and in speech. At *MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, Islamic junior secondary school) Darut Taqwa 02 the principal explained that the values developed to shape student behavior were fundamentally Islamic and were packaged within the programs of every activity, whether at the *madrasah* or the *pesantren*, so that the programmes focused on cultivating Islamic attitudes (KM-DT, March 17, 2025). These values were documented systematically, and the following table sets them out as the value base of religious culture at the first site.

Table 3. Religious values at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*

No	Religious Value	Indicator
1	Worship (Ibadah)	Practicing the values of <i>hablum minallah</i> and <i>hablum minannas</i> solely for the sake of Allah
2	Character and Struggle (Akhlaq and Jihad)	Honesty in speech, trustworthiness, courtesy, and discipline in seeking knowledge
3	Devotion	Devotion to parents, educators, and society
4	Sincerity (Ikhlas)	Performing every act of worship solely for the sake of Allah
5	<i>Aswaja</i>	<i>Tawasuth</i> (moderation), <i>I'tidal</i> (justice), <i>Tawazun</i> (balance), <i>Tasammuh</i> (tolerance), and <i>amar ma'ruf nahi munkar</i> in daily life

At *MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, Islamic junior secondary school) Safinda, a comparable value base was affirmed by the principal, who identified five religious values that were consistently cultivated in order to guide the educational process. He explained that the value of *tauhid* was implanted to strengthen the students' faith, the value of worship so that whatever the students did would be solely for the sake of Allah, the value of devotion so that students would be of benefit to others, and the value of sincerity so that every act would gain its worth from Allah (KM-SF, 17 March 2025). The vice principal for curriculum added that alongside these five religious values the *madrasah* applied educational values of discipline, sincerity, independence, simplicity, and *Islamic brotherhood*, which were put into practice in the conduct of every activity (WKur-SF, 22 March 2025).

The actualization of these values took a threefold form in both *madrasah*, encompassing the physical dimension, the behavioral dimension, and the dimension of speech. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* the vice principal for student affairs described this actualization in concrete terms, and the following statement evidences the threefold expression.

"Viewed as a whole, the actualization of Islamic values at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* is realized in concrete form, in conduct, and in speech. These three aspects are implemented in religious and non-religious programs. In physical form, for example, there is the manner of dress and the availability of places of worship, while the aspect of conduct and speech, for instance, appears in the commemoration of Islamic holy days and in the culture of the six courtesies, that is, greeting, salutation, smiling, politeness, and courtesy." (WKes-DT, 17 March 2025)

Field observation at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* confirmed that this actualization operated through a structured program of habituation. The researcher documented nine habituation activities intended to implant religious values, which included the recitation of prayers before and after learning, the reading of books beyond the set subjects, the disposal of waste in its proper place, orderly and modest uniform dress, congregational prayer especially the midday prayer, the habit of giving alms particularly on Fridays, the practice of the six courtesies, the culture of queuing and mutual respect, and the observance of Blessed Friday and Clean Friday, alongside a scheduled morning recitation of the Qur'an aimed at ensuring that graduates would leave with a memorized portion of the text. The following figure presents documentation of these habituation activities as they were carried out at the first site.

At *MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Islamic junior secondary school) Safinda* the same threefold actualization was organized around the formula of *dzikir, fikir, and amal shaleh*, which the principal identified as the values instilled by the founder from the moment the *pesantren* was established. He explained that the activity of *dzikir* was expressed in the *manaqib* recitation, *tahlil*, the mid-morning prayer, and the night prayer, that *fikir* was expressed in activities sharpening the intellect such as *tahfidz*, the study of classical texts, and bilingual learning, and that *amal shaleh* was expressed in communal work, blood donation, and mutual assistance (KM-SF, 17 March 2025). The deputy head for student affairs added that in order to cultivate and make these values a tradition, weekly, monthly, and annual programs were designed in an innovative and enjoyable manner, and that the whole was managed within an *Islamic boarding* system that afforded round-the-clock supervision (WKes-SF, 22 March 2025). The following figures present documentation of the *tahfidz* and communal work activities that embodied the *fikir* and *amal shaleh* dimensions at the second site.



Figure 3. Qur'an memorization activities at *MTs Safinda Rungkut Surabaya*



Figure 4. Communal work activities at *MTs Safinda Rungkut Surabaya*

The second figure documents the dimension of righteous deeds, in which communal work expressed the value of devotion and mutual care. The convergence between the two sites is instructive. In both *madrasahs* the actualization of religious culture did not rest on isolated ceremonies but on a dense schedule of recurring activities that occupied the physical environment, the students' conduct, and their speech. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* this density was achieved through cooperation between the *madrasah* and the *pesantren*, with programs at the school referring to the *pesantren* code and programmes at the *pesantren* forming part of the *madrasah's* own activities (WKur-DT, 17 March 2025). At *MTs Safinda* the density was achieved through the autonomy granted by the boarding system, which allowed the *madrasah* to manage and supervise every activity across the full day and night, so that the absorption of Islamic values became, in the words of the deputy head for curriculum, more optimal (WKur-SF, 22 March 2025). The difference in delivery, cooperative integration at the first site and autonomous boarding management at the second, points to two viable routes toward the same end, namely the conversion of professed values into lived habit.

The Systematic Development of Religious Culture and Its Bearing on the Quality of Graduates in Both *Madrasahs*

Beyond formation and actualization, both *madrasahs* pursued a deliberate development of religious culture whose ultimate reference point was the quality of graduates. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* the principal described this development as resting on two components, that is, the strengthening of religious values until they were firmly rooted, and the practice of those values in daily life through socialization, application, and the rewarding of those who remained committed to them (KM-DT, 17 March 2025). The deputy head for curriculum situated this within a wider understanding of quality in which the outcome was held to depend on the quality of the process, so that a conducive learning environment became the object of deliberate design, and he reported that this effort had borne fruit in the many competitive achievements the students had gained at local and even national levels (WKur-DT, 17 March 2025).

The mechanism by which religious culture bore upon quality passed through the learning environment and the motivation of students. One educator at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* gave a concrete account of student engagement, and the following statement evidences this effect.

"In my estimation, nearly 95% of the students are active and enthusiastic during my lessons. This is evidenced by their diligence, participation, completion of every assigned task, attentiveness, careful listening during my explanations, active questioning, expression of opinions, freedom from boredom, and enjoyment of learning. This occurs because, in general, the students are immersed for nearly 24 hours a day in an atmosphere of Islamic values within the *pesantren*" (GPAI-DT, 17 March 2025)

At *MTs Safinda*, a parallel account was offered by an educator who tied the students' engagement directly to the round-the-clock supervision afforded by the boarding system. He reported that student engagement was visible in an attendance rate reaching 99%, enthusiasm during lessons, active questioning, and consistent completion of assignments. He attributed this to the fact that students were guided and supervised throughout the day and night according to the honesty pocketbook (GQH-SF, 22 March 2025). The two accounts, drawn from institutions with different delivery systems, converge on the same causal claim: an immersive religious environment sustains the motivation on which learning quality depends.

The development effort at both sites was framed as a systematic change process led by the *madrasah* principal. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* the deputy principal for student affairs described a first stage of planning, in which the head communicated the plan for implementing religious culture and involved all elements of management, educators, and the *pesantren* in formulating the programmes, followed by a stage of realization in which the poor habits of students, such as lateness and dishonesty, were gradually replaced by disciplined and honest habits through exemplary modeling and the integrated code of the *pesantren* (WKes-DT, 17 March 2025). At *MTs Safinda* the deputy head for student affairs described a comparable sequence that began with a change of mindset achieved by deliberating with and involving the *madrasah* community in planning, and proceeded to the application of Islamic values through programmes accompanied by strict and systematic supervision, so that undesirable habits were removed and replaced through the five educational methods set out in the honesty pocketbook, namely exemplary conduct, guidance, habituation and training, the creation of an environment, and the assignment of tasks (WKes-SF, 22 March 2025).

This development produced discernible effects on the quality of graduates in both academic and non-academic domains. At *MTs Darut Taqwa 02* the deputy principal for student affairs reported that improvement in learning outcomes could be seen from two sides, namely the academic aspect reflected in report-card scores meeting the standard and a 100% graduation rate, and the non-academic aspect reflected in the winning of various competitions. The following table summarizes the non-academic achievements recorded at the first site across three years.

Table 4. Student achievements at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*, 2023 to 2025

Level	2023	2024	2025
Sub-district	50	39	38
Residency	5	5	9
Province	11	22	8
National	-	1	1
International	-	-	1
Total	66	67	57

At *MTs Safinda* a corresponding record of achievement was maintained, and the

principal of the affiliated senior *madrasah* testified that around forty-five percent of the graduates of the junior secondary *madrasah* continued to the affiliated senior *madrasah*, where their competence, especially in *tahfidz*, was regarded as beyond doubt. The following table summarizes the achievements recorded at the second site across the same period.

Table 5. Trophies obtained by MTs Safinda Rungkut Surabaya, 2023 to 2025

Level	2023	2024	2025
Sub-district (KKM)	8	11	11
Regency	7	10	13
Residency	5	4	6
Province	1	3	3
National	-	1	3
International	-	1	1
Total	21	29	31

The satisfaction of parents and receiving institutions reinforced these figures at both sites. At MTs Darut Taqwa 02, a parent expressed contentment that the child, though ranked within the top ten rather than at the very top, had come to memorize a portion of the Qur'an, and affirmed the intention to continue the child's education at the affiliated senior *madrasah* (OT-DT, 17 March 2025). At MTs Safinda, a parent reported satisfaction with the child's consistent class ranking and with the ability to read classical texts such as *Fathul Qorib* and *Sulam Safinah*, attributing this to the educational pattern applied at the *madrasah* (OT-SF, 22 March 2025). The convergence of internal indicators and external testimony indicates that in both institutions the development of religious culture operated as a genuine determinant of graduate quality rather than as a peripheral adornment of the curriculum.

The development at both sites also encountered supporting and inhibiting factors that shaped its implementation. At MTs Darut Taqwa 02, the head of the *madrasah* identified the *pesantren* environment under the direct oversight of the caretaker as the most influential supporting factor, since the *pesantren* activities already carried a high content of Islamic values, while the principal constraint lay in the follow-up evaluation of existing programs, owing in part to limited human resources competent in evaluation (KM-DT, 17 March 2025). At MTs Safinda, the head of the *madrasah* likewise identified the figure of the *kiai* and the autonomously managed boarding system as the decisive supporting factors, since the union of school and *pesantren* programs facilitated planning, implementation, and above all supervision (KM-SF, 22 March 2025). The candid acknowledgment of constraints alongside strengths lends credibility to the finding that neither institution treated its religious culture as beyond the need for continual refinement.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that religious culture in both *madrasahs* cannot be separated from the wider fabric of organizational culture, since the culture of an institution is born from and sustained by the values its members hold in common. This position aligns with Kotter and Heskett, who define organizational culture as a set of shared beliefs and values that shape the behavioral patterns of an organization's members. What the two sites demonstrate is that the shared beliefs in question are

specifically Islamic, and that they operate simultaneously as conviction and as the working code of daily conduct (Adiguzel & Shoenfeld, 2022; Huang & Yuan, 2025; Xiromeriti, 2025). The values documented at *MTs Darut Taqwa 02*, namely worship, character, devotion, sincerity, and *aswaja*, and the five values cultivated at *MTs Safinda*, converge on what Sahlan describes as religious culture, that is, the way members of a *madrasah* think, act, and behave on the basis of religious values. The originality of the present finding lies not in restating this definition but in showing how such values are converted from the private conviction of a founder into a self-reproducing institutional culture through a traceable sequence of stages (Colonna et al., 2022).

That sequence begins with the founder and passes to the head of the *madrasah*, a movement the data render with unusual clarity. In both institutions, the religious culture originated in the aspiration of the *kiai*, KH Sholeh at the first site and KH Choirul Anam at the second, whose convictions and ideals furnished the seed of the culture. This corroborates the view that the founder occupies a central position as the primary source in the formation of organizational culture, since the values, basic assumptions, and outlook of the founder become the foundation later inherited by the whole organization (Beni et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2023; Yang, 2023). The data show a first phase in which the founder's assumptions are merely communicated and shared, then imitated and demonstrated, and a second phase in which the head of the *madrasah* transforms those ideals into the vision, mission, and goals of the institution. This transition reflects the argument of Harrison and Carroll that the continuity of organizational culture rests on three forces, namely selection, the role of top management, and the method of socialization (Elder, 2025; Harrison, 2025; Ternes et al., 2024). The finding therefore extends the existing literature by locating precisely where the charisma of a single figure is institutionalized, that is, at the moment the head of the *madrasah* encodes the founder's conviction into formal governance so that it survives beyond the founder himself.

The mechanism through which this culture is formed and expressed corresponds to the two models identified by Muhaimin, and the data give each model an empirical face. The structural model, which is top-down and driven by binding rules and instructions, appears in the codes of conduct that anchor both sites, the *Buku Budaya Disiplin Siswa* at Darut Taqwa and the *Buku Saku Jujur* at Safinda (Moosavi et al., 2022). The organic model, which treats religion as a system for actualizing a religious way of life, appears in the dense schedules of habituation, the nine habituation activities at the first site and the *dzikir*, *fikir*, and *amal shaleh* formula at the second (Vegter et al., 2023). This dual patterning also echoes Sahlan's distinction between a prescriptive pattern, formed through obedience to rules and imitation of an exemplar, and a learning-process pattern, formed through internal conviction expressed in consistent practice (Frommeyer et al., 2022). The contribution here is to show that the two models are not alternatives but interdependent, since the binding rule supplies the structure within which habituation becomes routine, and the imitated example supplies the conviction that makes the rule felt rather than merely obeyed (Frommeyer et al., 2022; Campolo & Schwerzmann, 2023).

A further finding concerns the depth at which these values operate, which the study reads through Schein's three levels of organizational culture. The physical symbols recorded at both sites, the manner of dress and the places of worship, function as artifacts. The stated values of worship, sincerity, discipline, and *Islamic brotherhood*

function as espoused values (Krüger Bridge, 2025). The taken-for-granted conviction that honesty and courtesy bring success because of Allah, expressed spontaneously by students and staff, functions as the underlying assumption. The significance of this reading is that the religious culture of these *madrasahs* is not confined to visible ceremony but reaches the level of basic assumption, which is why students described their first contact with the culture as affective attraction before it became normative obligation (Harsh, 2022). This depth explains the motivational effect the teachers reported, since a culture operating at the level of assumption shapes conduct without the constant need for external enforcement.

The central contribution of this study, and its principal point of departure from prior work, is the synthesis of these findings into a single developmental model that adapts Kurt Lewin's theory of planned change. Where earlier studies describe programs and strategies for managing religious culture, they stop short of formulating a replicable model of cultural change. The present study fills that gap by mapping the two *madrasahs*' practice onto Lewin's three stages and reformulating them into the SosPem-KPPB model, that is, Socialization and Habituation through Exemplary Behavior, Strengthening of Organizational Culture, and Continuous Supervision. *Unfreezing* corresponds to the socialization and communication through which students come to understand, believe, and become aware of the importance of religious values; changing corresponds to the enactment of religious programs, habituation, and the exemplary conduct of the *kiai*; and refreezing corresponds to the stabilization of the new conduct through power strategy and continuous supervision until it settles into tradition (Gebremariam et al., 2024). The following figure presents this synthesis as the novelty of the study. Before the figure is presented, it should be noted that it integrates the formation, actualization, and development of religious culture across both sites into one framework, tracing the movement from the founder's ideals through the three stages of change to the quality of graduates.

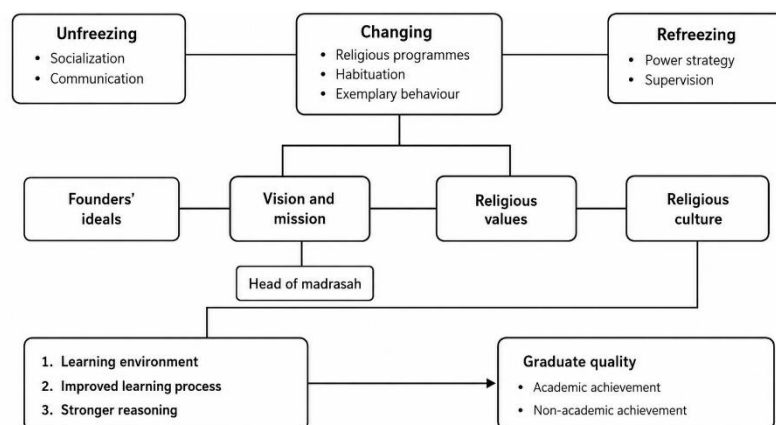


Figure 5. The SosPem-KPPB model of religious culture development in *madrasahs*, adapted from Kurt Lewin's change model

Finally, the value of the SosPem-KPPB model extends beyond the management of culture into the transformation of learning itself, which is where its strongest practical contribution lies. This resonates with Sallis, who argues within the framework of total quality management that achieving educational quality requires a change of culture, since the evidence here indicates that the internalization of religious values did not remain a matter of ritual but altered the conditions of learning, producing the high

engagement and attendance the teachers reported and, in turn, the academic and non-academic achievements recorded at both sites. In this sense the model contributes to transformational education by showing that the exemplary leadership of the *kiai* operates as a transformative force, one that reshapes not only conduct but the motivation and reasoning on which learning quality depends (Bao, 2024; Kang, 2021). The study therefore offers Islamic educational institutions a concrete and transferable framework in which the strengthening of religious culture becomes a deliberate strategy for improving the quality of graduates, uniting character formation and academic achievement within a single sustainable process rather than treating them as separate ends.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the formation, implementation, and development of religious culture and its bearing on graduate quality in two *pesantren*-based *madrasahs*, and it found that religious culture in both institutions originated in the ideals of their founders, was internalized into vision and mission by the heads of the *madrasah*, and was actualized through structural and organic patterns until it settled into a shared tradition that shaped the learning environment and the achievements of graduates. The development of that culture followed a staged process of socialization, habituation through exemplary conduct, reinforcement of organizational culture, and continuous supervision, which together sustained the quality of graduates in both academic and non-academic domains. Nevertheless, the study carries several limitations that qualify its findings. It was confined to two *madrasahs* sharing a *pesantren* character in East Java, so its conclusions cannot be generalized to *madrasahs* with different governance or regional contexts, and its qualitative design privileged depth of meaning over measurable effect. Future research could therefore examine the model across more varied institutions, test its relationship to graduate quality through quantitative or mixed-methods designs, and trace the durability of the internalized culture through longitudinal study, so that the framework proposed here may be validated and refined in wider settings.

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