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Practical Worship in Elementary Education: Implementation and Its Impacts on School Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

Public elementary schools are increasingly challenged by shifting parental preferences toward religion-based schools, requiring them to develop distinctive institutional strategies that enhance both educational quality and public trust. This study aims to describe the implementation of practical worship education, analyze its contribution to strengthening school competitiveness, and identify the challenges encountered in its implementation at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro, Jetis District, Ponorogo Regency. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews with the principal, Islamic Education teachers, homeroom teachers, parents, and students, as well as document analysis. The findings indicate that practical worship education, implemented through the systematic habituation of congregational Dhuha prayer, Dhuhr prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and memorization activities, contributes to strengthening students' character, spiritual competence, parental trust, the school's religious identity, and a conducive learning environment. These outcomes position practical worship not merely as a religious educational activity but also as an institutional strategy that differentiates the school from other public elementary schools and strengthens its competitiveness. The study also identified several implementation challenges, including limited worship facilities, uneven teacher supervision during peak periods, scheduling differences across grade levels, and the need for stronger continuity between school- and home-based worship practices through parental involvement. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that practical

worship can function as an institutional strategy for enhancing school competitiveness through the integration of character formation, parental trust, institutional reputation, and educational quality.

Keywords
Elementary Education
Impacts
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Introduction

Public elementary schools in Indonesia currently face increasingly intense competition as parental preferences shift toward religion-based schools and private educational institutions. Consequently, schools are required not only to improve academic quality but also to develop distinctive institutional characteristics that enhance their attractiveness and strengthen public trust [1],[2]. Within this competitive landscape, structured practical worship programs may function not only as religious learning activities but also as strategic institutional practices that strengthen character formation, reinforce school branding, enhance parental trust, and ultimately improve school competitiveness [3].

This trend is particularly evident in Ponorogo Regency, East Java, where Islamic traditions and pesantren culture strongly influence community life. Many parents prefer schools that integrate religious values into everyday learning because they believe such institutions are more effective in fostering students' moral character and religious commitment. As a result, public elementary schools increasingly compete with religion-based schools to attract and retain student enrolment.

Ponorogo is widely recognized as one of the regions in East Java with a strong Islamic sociocultural tradition, reflected in the presence of numerous pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), religious organizations, and community-based Islamic educational activities. Religious values are deeply embedded in everyday social life and significantly influence parents' expectations regarding their children's education. Consequently, many families expect schools not only to provide academic instruction but also to cultivate religious character, moral discipline, and Islamic values through daily educational practices. Within this sociocultural context, public elementary schools are increasingly encouraged to integrate religious programs into their institutional culture in order to remain relevant to community expectations while maintaining their identity as public educational institutions.

The increasing competition among public elementary schools has encouraged educational institutions to establish distinctive institutional identities that differentiate them

from competing schools. This strategic effort is commonly conceptualized as school branding. A strong institutional brand enhances parental trust, strengthens school reputation, and influences parents' school choice, thereby contributing to long-term school competitiveness [4].

The consequences of this shift are evident in the declining enrolment experienced by many public elementary schools. According to data from the Ponorogo Regency Education Office, since 2020 at least one public elementary school has closed each year due to insufficient student enrolment. This pattern reflects the increasing influence of parental school choice, in which families actively seek educational institutions that align with their expectations regarding academic quality, character education, and religious values. Consequently, public schools are required to strengthen their institutional competitiveness by developing distinctive educational programs that respond to community needs while maintaining their identity as public educational institutions.

From an educational management perspective, school branding refers to the strategic process through which educational institutions establish and communicate a distinctive institutional identity to prospective students, parents, and the wider community. Unlike commercial branding, school branding is not limited to logos, promotional campaigns, or physical facilities. Rather, it is constructed through consistent educational practices, organizational culture, leadership, educational quality, and the values embedded in everyday school life. A strong institutional brand enhances parental trust, strengthens school reputation, influences school-choice decisions, and ultimately contributes to long-term school competitiveness. Therefore, school branding has become an essential strategy for public elementary schools seeking to remain competitive in increasingly dynamic educational environments [5].

In response to increasing educational competition, many schools seek to differentiate themselves by developing distinctive flagship programs that reflect their institutional values and respond to community expectations. Such programs not only enhance educational quality but also function as strategic branding instruments that strengthen institutional identity and public trust. For public elementary schools located in religious communities, integrating religious values into everyday school practices represents one potential strategy for creating a unique institutional profile and improving competitiveness [6]. The rising demand for education has stimulated the proliferation of educational institutions, each presenting distinctive qualifications, programs, and institutional features as part of their competitive positioning [7].

Through high-quality education, parents aspire for their children to attain not only cognitive competence but also sound moral character and ethical integrity. An educational

model that integrates general and religious education is therefore expected to address and fulfil these parental expectations [8]. Such expectations require a balanced educational process between the mastery of general knowledge and the formation of religious character. Therefore, education that integrates general and religious instruction becomes highly relevant, as it is capable of shaping learners who are intellectually competent and grounded in strong moral and spiritual values.

Elementary schools that implement structured practical worship programs gain added institutional value within the community, as they provide students with consistent opportunities to engage in direct religious practices. Foundational knowledge and habits related to practical worship are considered essential to be cultivated from an early age. Schools that systematically integrate practical worship into daily routines tend to establish a favorable institutional image. Consequently, this strengthens their competitiveness in responding to societal expectations for religious-based education [9].

Practical worship education constitutes a systematic process of habituating students to actively perform daily religious practices, including congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, supplication before and after instructional activities, and the cultivation of virtuous character. Rather than being confined to theoretical instruction within the curriculum, practical worship is embedded in the school culture through structured daily routines and the exemplary conduct of teachers [10].

Practical worship education, grounded in the pedagogical approaches of habituation, exemplary modeling, and structured practice, exerts a substantial positive influence on character development. It is operationalized through activities such as supplication, Qur'anic recitation, congregational prayers, charitable giving, and other forms of religious observance. Through these structured engagements, students internalize and enact religious values in their lived experiences. Effective character formation necessitates processes of imitation, social modeling, and continuous habituation [11].

The primary objective of sustained practical worship education is to foster religious character formation from early childhood, which subsequently contributes to students' emotional, social, and spiritual development. The elementary school stage constitutes a formative and strategic period for the internalization and consolidation of positive character values, which are indispensable in nurturing a generation that is accountable, resilient, and holistically virtuous [12].

In an increasingly dynamic educational environment, schools are expected not only to provide effective learning but also to build and sustain their institutional competitiveness. In the educational context, competitiveness may be conceptualized as institutional excellence, reputation, and strategic positioning.

Table 1. Examples of Practical Worship Habituation Programs Implemented in Schools to Cultivate Students' Religious Character [13].

Types of Habituation	Character Values Developed	Illustrative Implementation Practices
Congregational Prayer	Discipline, Religious Observance, Responsibility	Implemented daily during the Dhuha and Dhuhr prayer sessions
Daily Supplications	Religious Observance, Discipline	Implemented daily prior to and following instructional activities
Qur'anic Recitation and Memorization (Tahfidz)	Religious Commitment, Discipline, Responsibility	Implemented daily.
Zakat and Voluntary Charity (Sadaqah)	Care, Politeness, and Respectfulness	Implemented weekly

Its primary indicators encompass student enrollment capacity, institutional reputation, the quality and professionalism of teachers and staff, the adequacy of facilities and infrastructure, curriculum relevance to contemporary societal demands, and measurable student achievement [14]. Highly competitive schools demonstrate the capacity to adapt to evolving societal and global demands while fulfilling community expectations for high-quality educational services. Accordingly, initiatives to strengthen institutional competitiveness should be undertaken systematically through integrated processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation grounded in quality assurance principles.

Existing studies have predominantly examined religious education as a component of curriculum implementation or character education in Islamic schools. However, little is known about how routine practical worship functions as an institutional strategy for enhancing competitiveness in public elementary schools operating within religious communities. Consequently, the relationship between practical worship, school branding, parental trust, and institutional competitiveness remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is important because public elementary schools increasingly require distinctive institutional strategies that respond to community expectations while maintaining their public educational identity.

Based on this research gap, the present study positions practical worship education as an institutional strategy to enhance the competitiveness of public elementary schools. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of practical worship education as a daily practice integrated into the culture of a public school, as well as in its analysis of its impact on the formation of students' religious character, the school's institutional image, and community trust. This research focuses on SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro, Jetis District, Ponorogo Regency, as a representative case of a public school that implements practical worship education amid the growing public preference for religion-based schools.

In line with these objectives, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) How is practical worship education implemented at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro? (2) What are the impacts of implementing practical worship education on enhancing school

competitiveness? and (3) What challenges are encountered in the implementation of practical worship education in public elementary schools? This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of scholarship on religious character education and practically to provide insights for schools, educators, and policymakers in formulating strategies to improve the quality and competitiveness of public elementary schools within religious communities.

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the implementation of practical worship education at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro. The case study approach was chosen because the research examines a single public elementary school within its real-life institutional context. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of how practical worship is implemented, how it influences school competitiveness, and what challenges emerge during its institutionalization. By focusing on one bounded case, the study provides a contextualized understanding of practical worship as a pedagogical practice and as an institutional strategy within a religiously oriented community setting.

Accordingly, this study focuses on three main aspects: the implementation process of practical worship education, its impact on school competitiveness, and the challenges encountered during its implementation. This research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro, Jetis District, Ponorogo Regency. The research period was from September to October 2025. Primary data was obtained directly from informants who were actively involved in the worship education process at the school, including: the principal, Islamic education teachers, classroom teachers, students, and parents/guardians. Secondary data was obtained from supporting documents or written sources, such as: school program documents, attendance books or documentation of worship activities, and data on the number of new registrants (an indicator of competitiveness).

Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Non-participant observation was conducted to examine students' worship activities and institutional routines without direct intervention. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the principal, Islamic education teachers, classroom teachers, students, and parents to obtain in-depth perspectives on the implementation process, its impact, and its challenges. Document analysis included school program documents, attendance records of worship activities, and student enrollment data.

The collected data were analyzed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and school documents were first organized and condensed by identifying information relevant to practical worship implementation. The coded data were then grouped into categories and displayed in thematic

matrices to facilitate comparison across participants. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring patterns and verifying them through triangulation of multiple data sources.

Source triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from the principal, Islamic Education teacher, classroom teacher, students, and parents regarding the implementation of practical worship activities. The researchers also compared interview findings with observation records and school documents to ensure the consistency and credibility of the data. Table 21 shows the respondent characteristics.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Code	Participant	Role in the Study	Selection Criteria
P1	Principal	School leader	Responsible for policy and implementation of practical worship programs
T1	Islamic Education Teacher	Key informant	Directly supervised practical worship activities
T2	Classroom Teacher	Supporting informant	Assisted students during worship activities
S1–S4	Students (Grades IV–VI)	Student participants	Regularly participated in practical worship programs
PR1–PR3	Parents	Parent participants	Parents of students actively involved in the worship program

Participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in planning, implementing, or experiencing the practical worship program. This sampling strategy enabled the researchers to obtain rich, diverse perspectives on the implementation process and its perceived contribution to school competitiveness.

Results and Discussions

A. The Implementation of Practical Worship Education at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro

The findings indicate that SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro implements practical worship education through the habituation of Dhuha prayer, congregational Dhuhr prayer, dhikr activities, Qur'anic recitation (tadarus), and the memorization of short surahs as part of its daily routine. The school implements this systematically and consistently, in accordance with a standardized schedule established by the school. School documentation confirms that practical worship activities constitute a routine program that has been formally integrated into the institutional structure of school activities.

The Dhuha prayer is scheduled three times weekly (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) from 07:00 to 07:30 a.m. and is conducted congregationally under the supervision of Islamic Education teachers and homeroom teachers. Observational findings indicate that students arrive prior to the scheduled time, organize themselves in orderly queues for ablution, and enter the designated prayer area in rotation. Once positioned in the prayer rows (ṣaf), students

consistently follow the complete prayer sequence without disrupting the formation, reflecting structured discipline and collective engagement in the worship activity

This institutional orientation was clearly articulated by the principal:

> "Our objective is not simply to teach students the theory of worship but to make worship part of their daily routine. We want them to experience it directly so that it gradually becomes a lifelong habit." (P1)

The principal's statement demonstrates that practical worship is positioned as a continuous educational process through which students internalize religious values by engaging in repeated daily practice. Rather than emphasizing cognitive understanding alone, the school encourages students to develop consistent religious behaviour through structured routines integrated into the school schedule.

This finding can be interpreted through Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains that individuals acquire behaviour through observation, imitation, and repeated interaction with significant role models. During congregational prayer, teachers actively participated alongside students instead of merely supervising from a distance. Consequently, students learned appropriate religious practices by observing teacher behaviour, following established routines, and imitating correct worship practices. This process illustrates that practical worship functions not only as religious instruction but also as an experiential learning strategy that facilitates character formation through behavioural modelling.

The students participate in the practical worship programme through a structured and disciplined sequence of activities beginning with ablution. The orderly queues and teacher supervision demonstrate that religious practice is organized as a routine institutional activity rather than an occasional event. From the perspective of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, students learn disciplined behaviour by observing teachers' instructions and imitating their peers during collective worship activities. Thus, the figure provides visual evidence supporting the process of behavioural habituation described in the interview findings.

The principal emphasized that the activity is designed as a structured habituation process intended to facilitate experiential religious practice rather than solely theoretical instruction. Interview findings further reveal a significant shift in both the frequency and inclusivity of the Dhuha prayer program. Initially limited to specific days aligned with the Islamic Education (PAI) timetable—thereby restricting participation to selected classes—the program has, over the past two years, been institutionalized as a routine activity conducted three times weekly (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) and attended by all students from Grades I to VI. According to the Islamic Education teacher, the increased frequency has contributed positively to the internalization of worship habits. The consistent implementation of the Dhuha prayer has fostered greater punctuality and autonomous participation among students, reducing the need for repeated reminders and reinforcing disciplined religious engagement.

The consistency of the practical worship programme was further emphasized by the Islamic Education teacher, who explained that the school had gradually transformed Dhuha prayer from an occasional classroom activity into a structured school-wide programme:

> "For the past two years, Dhuha prayer has been conducted regularly three times a week for all students. Previously, it was only carried out during Islamic Education (PAI) lessons, so each class practised it only when their PAI schedule took place. Alhamdulillah, over the last two years we have been able to implement it more consistently, with the programme being conducted more than once a week." (T1)

The teacher's statement indicates that the implementation of Dhuha prayer has evolved from an occasional classroom activity into a structured school-wide programme integrated into the weekly routine. This transformation reflects the school's institutional commitment to embedding practical worship within everyday educational practice rather than restricting it to formal Islamic Education lessons. The increased frequency of implementation also provides students with repeated opportunities to practise worship, thereby strengthening behavioural habituation and facilitating the internalization of religious values

Based on observational data, the recitations during the Dhuha prayer are performed aloud collectively by all students. The purpose of this approach is to enable students to directly practice the prayer recitations and to allow immediate correction in the event of errors. Observations further indicate that some students who were previously not yet fluent in the prayer recitations gradually began to participate with greater confidence after several weeks of routine implementation. The habituation of worship practices thus emerges as an effective strategy in fostering students' religious character. The habituation mechanism enables students to learn through the repetition of positive behaviors, allowing religious values to be internalized naturally [15].

The effectiveness of repeated practical worship was also reflected in the students' learning experiences. One student described how regular participation enabled him to memorize the prayer recitations through observation and interaction with classmates:

> "The prayer recitations are read aloud. At first, I didn't know them by heart, but over time I memorized them by listening to and following my classmates who already knew the recitations well. So, I didn't have to memorize them on my own." (S1)

The student's account demonstrates that practical worship facilitates learning through observation and peer interaction. Rather than relying solely on individual memorization, students gradually acquired the prayer recitations by listening to and imitating classmates who had already mastered them. This finding illustrates that peer modelling complements teacher guidance in supporting the acquisition of religious practices within authentic learning

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The congregational Dhuhr prayer is implemented daily at 12:15 p.m. for students in Grades IV–VI. Observational data reveal that immediately after the dismissal bell, students

move systematically to the ablution facilities and organize themselves into extended queues. Teachers supervise the process to ensure procedural order and behavioral discipline, including correcting students who display inattentive or disruptive conduct. Following ablution, students enter the designated prayer space and assume their positions in the prayer rows (ṣaf) in a structured and disciplined formation.

The Islamic Education teacher serves as the prayer leader (imam), while homeroom teachers assist in supervising and maintaining student order. These findings are corroborated by statements from parents, who reported that the habituation of congregational Dhuhr prayer at school has contributed to the development of students' discipline in performing obligatory prayers punctually within the family environment. The practice of congregational prayer in elementary school thus exerts a significant influence on the cultivation of discipline, reverence (taʿẓīm), and students' understanding of religious worship [10]

This finding further supports Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and repeated participation in meaningful social environments. In this context, classmates functioned as peer models who facilitated the internalization of prayer recitations through collaborative learning.



Fig. 1. The implementation of congregational Dhuhr prayers.

Following the Dhuhr prayer (Fig. 1), students participate collectively in Qur'anic recitation (tadarus) and the memorization of short surahs from Juz 'Amma within the prayer room. Observational data indicate that students sit in rows according to their prayer formation (ṣaf), holding copies of the Qur'an or Juz 'Amma, and recite in unison under the guidance of the Islamic Education (PAI) teacher. The teacher provides immediate corrective feedback on pronunciation errors and pauses the recitation when inaccuracies in tajwid are identified. The activity lasts approximately 15–20 minutes before students return to their classrooms or prepare to go home.

The Islamic Education teacher explained that this activity is designed to strengthen students' Qur'anic reading proficiency and memorization as part of their spiritual development. Nur Intan further stated that the implementation of a Qur'anic literacy program through the

habituation of tadarus and memorization has demonstrated measurable improvement in students' Qur'anic reading abilities [16].



Fig. 2. Students collectively reciting and memorizing selected surahs from Juz 'Amma after the congregational Dhuhr prayer.

The implementation of practical worship education at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro is carried out systematically and consistently, supported by the managerial leadership of the principal, teacher supervision, and parental participation. Empirically, the program has been integrated into the institutional structure of school activities and has shaped students' daily routines. As such, it is no longer incidental in nature but has become an integral part of the school culture.

Evidence from parent interviews further indicates that the habituation of practical worship at school has influenced students' religious behaviour at home. As one parent stated:

> "Since joining this programme, my child reminds us when it is time to pray at home. Previously, we always had to remind him first." (PR1)

The parent's statement indicates that the influence of practical worship extends beyond the school environment and contributes to the continuity of students' religious practices at home. This finding suggests that school-based habituation has begun to shape students' behaviour across different social contexts, thereby strengthening the long-term sustainability of religious character formation.

The principal further emphasized that the ultimate purpose of the practical worship programme extends beyond teaching religious rituals, aiming instead to cultivate sustainable religious habits that continue beyond the school environment. As the principal explained:

> "We do not expect students merely to know the procedures of prayer. Our goal is for them to practise it every day until it becomes a habit. When religious practices become routine at school, students are more likely to continue them at home." (P1)

The principal's statement demonstrates that the school's practical worship program is designed as a process of behavioural habituation rather than simply delivering religious knowledge. This finding supports Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that repeated observation and participation facilitate the internalization of desired behaviours.

B. The Impact of Practical Worship Education on School Competitiveness

The findings of the study indicate that the implementation of practical worship education contributes to strengthening the school's competitiveness, as reflected in several key indicators, namely:

1. The Development of Students' Character and Discipline

The habituation of worship practices conducted on a scheduled basis establishes patterns of behavioral regularity among students, particularly in terms of punctuality and adherence to rules. These findings indicate that worship practices function not only as ritual activities but also as mechanisms for the internalization of disciplinary values. Homeroom teachers reported that students tend to become calmer and more focused after performing the prayer. This observation was consistently confirmed by a homeroom teacher, who described the behavioural changes that became evident after students participated in the practical worship programme:

> "After the prayer, students become more orderly, calmer, and the classroom atmosphere becomes more conducive. This greatly supports the teaching and learning process." (T2)

The teacher's statement indicates that the impact of practical worship extends beyond students' religious observance to their behaviour in the classroom. Regular participation in congregational prayer appears to foster self-discipline, emotional regulation, and learning readiness, creating a more orderly and supportive learning environment. These behavioural improvements suggest that practical worship functions as a religious activity and as a pedagogical strategy for strengthening students' character through consistent behavioural habituation.

The finding suggests that practical worship contributes to character development through a process of behavioural habituation rather than through explicit moral instruction alone. The structured repetition of congregational prayer provides students with regular opportunities to practise discipline, emotional self-regulation, and respect for shared routines. These behavioural dispositions subsequently transfer to classroom learning, creating a more orderly learning environment.

This finding supports previous studies demonstrating that religious habituation strengthens students' character through repeated practice rather than cognitive instruction alone [13],[17] . However, the present study extends earlier research by showing that improved student discipline also generates institutional benefits. A more orderly classroom climate enhances instructional quality and contributes to parents' positive perceptions of the school, thereby strengthening institutional competitiveness.

2. Strengthening Spiritual Competence as a School Advantage

Observational findings indicate an improvement in students' Qur'anic reading and memorization skills, as well as their understanding of routinely performed worship practices. The daily repetition embedded in tadarus and memorization activities constitutes a gradual and structured process for internalizing religious skills. Consequently, students' spiritual competence develops as an integral component of a school-based, institutionalized learning culture.

The improvement in students' spiritual competence was also emphasized by the Islamic Education teacher, who observed that the combination of congregational prayer and daily memorization activities had significantly enhanced students' mastery of prayer recitations and short surahs. The teacher stated:

> "Congregational prayer and daily memorization activities enable students to master prayer recitations and short surahs more quickly. This has become one of the school's distinctive strengths, as not every public elementary school provides such consistent religious practices." (T1)

The teacher's statement indicates that students' spiritual competence develops through continuous participation in structured religious activities rather than through isolated classroom instruction. The integration of congregational prayer with daily Qur'anic recitation and memorization provides repeated opportunities for students to practise, reinforce, and internalize essential religious knowledge and skills. Consequently, spiritual competence becomes an institutional outcome that is systematically cultivated through the school's daily educational routines.

In the context of primary education competitiveness, the strengthening of spiritual competence functions as a form of institutional differentiation. Amid the relatively uniform administrative characteristics of public elementary schools, a consistently integrated religious program represents an added value that reinforces the school's identity. This differentiation not only impacts individual student outcomes but also shapes the school's positioning within the local competitive landscape in the Jetis area. Schools with robust religious programs therefore enjoy a higher competitive advantage in student admissions [18].

3. The Enhancement of Parental Trust and Satisfaction

Interview data reveal that parents observe behavioral transformations in their children at home, especially regarding consistency in Qur'anic memorization and punctuality in performing prayers. Such perceptions contribute to the construction of trust in the effectiveness of the school's religious programs. Within an institutional framework, parental trust functions as social capital that reinforces the school's reputational standing in the broader community. This perception was clearly reflected in the interviews with parents, who described how the practical worship program had positively influenced their

children's religious habits and increased their confidence in the school. One parent explained:

> "Since the school introduced the congregational prayer and daily memorization programme, my child has become more diligent in reviewing short surahs at home. We are very pleased because not every school provides this kind of religious habituation." (PR1)

The parent's statement indicates that the practical worship programme has generated benefits that extend beyond the school environment into students' daily lives at home. The continuity of Qur'anic memorization outside school suggests that religious practices introduced through structured school routines have begun to be internalized by students. More importantly, parents' positive experiences strengthen their confidence in the school's educational approach, reinforcing trust in the institution's ability to foster both academic and moral development.

Institutional data demonstrate a rise in student enrollment applications over the past two years following the consistent implementation of the worship program. While this trend is influenced by multiple variables, the evidence indicates that systematically organized religious programs play a contributory role in shaping parental school-choice preferences. These findings can be interpreted through the perspective of school branding. Parents' observations of positive behavioural changes at home reinforce their confidence in the school's educational quality. Such positive experiences encourage favourable word-of-mouth communication within the local community, which may influence future school-choice decisions. Consequently, parental trust operates not merely as an interpersonal outcome but also as a form of institutional social capital that strengthens school competitiveness. This finding extends previous studies on parental satisfaction [19] by demonstrating that trust is not only an educational outcome but also a strategic mechanism through which public elementary schools strengthen their institutional reputation and attract prospective students.

4. Strengthening the School’s Religious Image

The systematic implementation of congregational worship and memorization programs generates sustained patterns of religious practice embedded within the school’s daily routines. This consistency fosters the consolidation of an institutional identity as a public elementary school that meaningfully integrates religious values into its pedagogical culture. Sociologically, collectively enacted and visibly structured religious practices function as symbolic capital, shaping the school’s representation within the community. The internalization of this religious identity transcends routine observance and evolves into a distinctive institutional marker that differentiates the school from its local counterparts. Consequently, the institutional image constructed through daily religious praxis enhances the school’s competitive positioning in the local primary education market.

A strong religious brand identity further increases institutional visibility and stakeholder appeal in inter-school competition [20].

5. The Establishment of a Conducive Learning Climate

The findings demonstrate that the consistent implementation of worship practices contributes to the consolidation of a more disciplined and regulated school culture. Collectively enacted religious activities cultivate more respectful and structured patterns of social interaction among students in their daily routines. These developments indicate a positive shift in the institutional climate toward a more conducive and academically supportive learning environment.

In the context of the national Education Quality Assurance System, as regulated under Ministerial Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 28 of 2021, a safe and supportive learning environment is embedded within process and school governance standards. Accordingly, the disciplined and conducive school culture cultivated through structured religious habituation contributes to the consolidation of internal quality assurance mechanisms. This internal quality strengthening, in turn, enhances the school's competitive standing within the local primary education landscape.

C. The Challenges in the Implementation of Practical Worship Education at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro

Despite the overall effective implementation of practical worship education at SD Negeri Wonoketro 1, the study identified several constraints faced by the institution, namely:

1. Inadequate Worship Infrastructure

The observations reveal that the restricted capacity of the prayer facility represents a structural limitation that influences the effectiveness of congregational worship activities. This situation reflects an insufficiency in infrastructural provision to accommodate the entire student body optimally, with implications for students' comfort and devotional focus during religious habituation. Such spatial constraints are frequently encountered in public primary schools [21].

2. The Need for Ongoing Student Assistance and Guidance

Observational evidence suggests that some students require structured guidance to sustain orderly conduct during congregational prayer, particularly in maintaining proper formation (ṣaf) and ensuring accuracy in ritual movements. Homeroom teachers confirmed that a minority of students occasionally display playful behavior prior to the initiation of prayer. This observation was confirmed by a homeroom teacher, who explained that although most students were able to follow the worship activities in an orderly manner, a small number still required continuous reminders and supervision before the prayer began:

> "Some students still need to be reminded not to joke around during the prayer, but in general they can be guided and follow the worship activities properly." (T2)

The teacher's statement indicates that the successful implementation of practical worship depends not only on students' participation but also on continuous teacher guidance. Although most students have adapted to the established routines, differences in maturity and self-regulation mean that some still require direct supervision and behavioural reminders. This finding suggests that teacher assistance remains an essential pedagogical component in maintaining students' discipline and ensuring that worship activities are conducted respectfully and in accordance with established procedures.

These findings highlight the need for sustained disciplinary reinforcement, especially in cultivating attentiveness and devotional focus before worship activities commence. Differences in levels of religious maturity and self-regulatory capacity among primary school children underscore the importance of a staged and consistent pedagogical strategy [22].

3. Variations in Implementation Time Across Grade Levels

Variations in instructional timetables across grade levels generate disparities in students' access to structured worship experiences, especially among Grades I–III, who are unable to participate in congregational Dhuhr prayer. This situation reflects a structural limitation in fully embedding the religious program within the school's comprehensive instructional framework. Consequently, scheduling disparities impede the equitable distribution of character habituation initiatives across grade cohorts [26].

4. Insufficient Supervisory Support During Peak Periods

The insufficiency of teaching personnel during concurrent worship sessions generates disparities in the provision of guidance and supervision. Educators must allocate their attention between classroom conditioning and oversight of ablution practices, which, in turn, limits supervisory effectiveness under peak conditions. While internal task allocation mechanisms have been introduced, a more robust supervisory framework is required to optimize program implementation.

The teacher's statement indicates that the successful implementation of practical worship depends not only on students' participation but also on continuous teacher guidance. Although most students have adapted to the established routines, differences in maturity and self-regulation mean that some still require direct supervision and behavioural reminders. This finding suggests that teacher assistance remains an essential pedagogical component in maintaining students' discipline and ensuring that worship activities are conducted respectfully and in accordance with established procedures.

> "When several activities take place at the same time, teachers have to divide their responsibilities to ensure that students remain orderly during ablution." (T2)

The teacher's statement demonstrates that the implementation of practical worship requires substantial supervisory support, particularly during periods when multiple school activities occur simultaneously. Dividing responsibilities among teachers helps maintain students' discipline; however, it also reflects limitations in available human resources. Consequently, teachers are required to manage several tasks concurrently, reducing the intensity of individual guidance that can be provided to students throughout the worship preparation process.

These findings suggest that the successful implementation of school-based religious programmes depends not only on institutional commitment but also on adequate staffing capacity. From the perspective of educational management, teacher availability constitutes a critical organisational resource that directly influences programme quality and implementation consistency. Although collaborative task-sharing among teachers serves as an effective short-term strategy, additional supervisory support would enable more intensive guidance during ablution, prayer preparation, and congregational worship. Therefore, strengthening human resource allocation represents an important managerial consideration for sustaining the quality of practical worship education.

5. Parental Perceptions and Engagement

The study demonstrates that the institutionalized habituation of worship practices at school has not yet achieved full continuity within the domestic sphere. Despite the school's structured scheduling and supervisory mechanisms, parents acknowledged that children continue to rely on external prompting to sustain religious routines at home. This suggests that, at the primary education level, religious habituation remains externally regulated rather than fully internalized as self-directed practice.

This challenge was also acknowledged by parents, who explained that although students had become accustomed to practising worship at school, consistent implementation at home still depended on parental supervision. One parent stated:

> "At school, my child has become accustomed to performing the prayers, but at home we still have to remind him regularly so that he remains consistent." (PR2)

The parent's statement indicates that the habituation of worship developed at school has not yet been fully internalized as an autonomous behaviour. Although students demonstrate positive religious practices within the structured school environment, the continuity of these practices at home remains dependent on external reinforcement from parents. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of practical worship education is influenced not only by school-based programmes but also by the consistency of parental guidance in the family environment.

The findings highlight a structural discontinuity between school-based religious formation and home-based religious practice. While the school provides a formalized system of regulation and monitoring, the persistence of these practices in the household context is contingent upon active parental engagement. In the absence of consistent parental reinforcement, the durability of religious habits cultivated at school may be compromised. Accordingly, the effectiveness of school-based religious education necessitates sustained alignment and cooperation between institutional and familial environments [19].

From the standpoint of character education theory, these findings suggest that the cultivation of religious character necessitates institutional–familial synergy. The school alone cannot effectively internalize religious values without sustained parental engagement that reinforces worship practices within the domestic sphere. Accordingly, the difficulties encountered by parents are not merely attributable to children limited self-regulation, but also point to the need for enhanced communicative alignment and cooperative mechanisms between school and family in sustaining students' devotional consistency [23].

The evidence further highlights that the effectiveness of structured worship habituation programs is contingent upon continuous reinforcement beyond the formal school setting. In the absence of such continuity, disparities emerge in students' mastery of prayer recitation and ritual movements. Teachers observed that uneven parental involvement necessitates renewed institutional reinforcement to maintain the consistency and accuracy of students' religious practices.

The findings indicate that practical worship at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro has developed beyond the function of formal religious instruction and has become embedded in the everyday culture of the school. The routinisation of Dhuha prayer, congregational Dhuhr prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and memorisation illustrates how repeated religious practices can facilitate the internalisation of religious values through behavioural habituation. This interpretation is consistent with recent studies showing that structured religious routines contribute to the development of religiosity, responsibility, discipline, and other character-related behaviours among students [24]–[29]. Similar evidence from public-school settings also indicates that religious character can be strengthened when religious values are incorporated into routine and programmed school activities rather than confined to classroom instruction [25], [26], [30]. Thus, the present findings reinforce the view that practical worship is most educationally meaningful when it operates as a sustained component of school culture.

A more distinctive finding of this study concerns the potential relationship between practical worship and institutional competitiveness. Previous research has largely examined

religious habituation in relation to character development, whereas the present study suggests a broader institutional mechanism. Regular religious practices appear to strengthen discipline and contribute to a more orderly and conducive educational environment. This interpretation is compatible with wider school-climate research demonstrating that school culture encompasses relationships, discipline, safety, academic expectations, and organisational practices, which together influence students' educational experiences [31], [32]. In this study, these internal outcomes also appear to have an external institutional value. When a school demonstrates educational practices that correspond with community expectations, particularly within a religious sociocultural environment, such practices may become part of how parents evaluate the quality and distinctiveness of the school. Research on school reputation has shown that parents consider institutional reputation, teacher characteristics, student outcomes, and school conditions when evaluating schools [34], while empirical evidence in Indonesia similarly confirms an association between school reputation and parental school choice [35]. More recent evidence also suggests that religious value orientation and perceived school image can contribute to parental decisions regarding school selection [36]. Practical worship may therefore contribute indirectly to competitiveness by strengthening a socially valued institutional identity and reinforcing parental confidence in the school.

The findings concerning implementation challenges provide an important qualification to this mechanism. Religious habituation cannot be sustained merely through the existence of scheduled activities. Previous studies have identified limited facilities, variations in student characteristics, teacher-related constraints, and inconsistent support as barriers to the implementation of religious character programmes [26]–[29]. The limited worship facilities and supervisory capacity identified at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro therefore represent organisational issues that may influence programme consistency and educational impact. Of particular importance is continuity between school and home. A large second-order meta-analysis has demonstrated the broader educational value of parental involvement, although its effects vary according to the form of engagement [33]. In the specific context of character education, effective family–school partnerships require shared expectations, communication, and coordinated responsibilities between teachers and parents [37]. Consequently, practical worship is more likely to become internalised as a student disposition when religious practices promoted at school are reinforced within the family environment.

Taken together, these findings extend the discussion of practical worship from the individual level to the institutional level. The contribution of practical worship to school competitiveness should not be interpreted as a direct causal effect or as implying that religious programmes automatically increase student enrolment or institutional performance. Rather,

the findings suggest a context-dependent pathway in which consistent religious habituation contributes to student character and discipline; these outcomes support a positive school climate; and the resulting educational experience may strengthen parental trust and institutional reputation. This mechanism is particularly relevant to public schools located in communities where religious values constitute an important dimension of parental expectations. The study therefore positions practical worship not merely as a religious programme, but as a potentially strategic component of school culture and institutional development, provided that its implementation is supported by adequate facilities, teacher supervision, and sustained school–family collaboration.

Conclusion

This study concludes that practical worship education at SD Negeri 1 Wonoketro has been systematically integrated into the school's daily educational practices through the habituation of Dhuha prayer, congregational Dhuhr prayer, Qur'anic recitation (tadarus), and memorization. Rather than functioning solely as a religious instructional activity, practical worship has become an integral component of the school culture that supports the continuous development of students' religious character and spiritual competence.

More importantly, this study extends previous research by conceptualizing practical worship as an institutional strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of public elementary schools. The findings demonstrate that practical worship contributes to school competitiveness through an interconnected institutional mechanism. Behavioural habituation strengthens students' character and spiritual competence, which in turn fosters a more disciplined and conducive learning environment. These positive educational outcomes reinforce parental trust, strengthen the school's institutional reputation, and enhance its competitiveness within a religious community. This integrated perspective represents the principal theoretical contribution of the study.

The study also identifies several challenges, including limited worship facilities, variations in implementation across grade levels, insufficient supervisory support during peak periods, and the need for stronger continuity between school- and home-based religious practices. These findings indicate that the sustainability of practical worship education depends not only on programme consistency but also on adequate infrastructure, effective educational management, and active collaboration between schools and families.

Practically, the findings suggest that public elementary schools may adopt structured practical worship programmes as part of broader institutional development and school improvement strategies. However, successful implementation requires adequate facilities, sufficient teacher supervision, and sustained parental engagement to ensure that religious habituation is consistently reinforced beyond the school environment.

This study is limited to a single public elementary school within a specific sociocultural context; therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and are not intended for broad generalisation. Future research may examine the implementation of practical worship education across diverse educational settings or employ comparative and mixed-methods approaches to further validate the institutional mechanism proposed in this study.

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