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Implementation of Religious Extracurricular Programs in Shaping the Islamic Character of Religious Class Students

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ABSTRACT

Islamic character building is one of the primary goals of Islamic religious education in schools, but its implementation often faces time constraints and a cognitive-driven approach. This situation encourages the need for more applicable alternative educational strategies, one of which is through religious extracurricular programs. This study aims to analyze the implementation of religious extracurricular programs in shaping the Islamic character of students in religious classes at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh Pemalang, while also identifying the challenges and opportunities that accompany them. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data were analyzed through systematic stages of reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that religious extracurricular programs contribute significantly to strengthening students' Islamic character through habituation of worship, deepening of religious material, and developing attitudes of discipline, responsibility, and noble character. However, the program's effectiveness still faces obstacles such as time constraints, uneven student participation, and limited infrastructure support. The implications of this study emphasize that religious extracurricular programs need to be managed sustainably, adaptively, and integrated with school culture to be a strategic instrument in strengthening Islamic character education in public schools.

Keywords: Islamic Character, Religious Class Students, Religious Extracurricular

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I. INTRODUCTION

Character education constitutes an imperative pillar within the Indonesian national education framework, explicitly mandated by Article 3 of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. The legislation asserts that national education functions to develop capability, build character, and advance dignified civilization in order to elevate the nation's intellectual capacity, aiming for students to become individuals who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, possess noble character, and act as responsible democratic citizens (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2003). In the epistemology of Islamic education, character formation (*tarbiyat al-akhlāq*) extends beyond conventional moral cognitive acquisition; it denotes the systematic habituation of Islamic personality traits (*shakhṣiyyah Islāmiyyah*), uniting internal faith (*imān*), outward compliance (*islām*), and virtuous excellence (*iḥsān*) into continuous behavioral disposition (Ali, 2021).

Nevertheless, empirical realities across Indonesian public secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama Negeri*/SMPN) indicate persistent structural discrepancies between the normative objectives of character education and actual student behavior. Formal Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) within the national curriculum is officially allocated a mere two to three instructional hours per week. This restricted instructional duration obliges teachers to prioritize cognitive syllabus completion, theoretical mastery, and written academic evaluation, leaving negligible space for affective mentoring, spiritual contemplation, and guided moral action (Rahmawati, 2021; Sutrisno, 2020). Consequently, while students often achieve commendable academic marks on conceptual Islamic jurisprudence and doctrine, they frequently demonstrate an ethical disconnect in everyday life, manifesting in punctuality issues, interpersonal disrespect, academic dishonesty, and waning religious observance. This vulnerability is severely exacerbated by pervasive digital exposure and secularized popular cultures, which constantly challenge students' moral orientation (Hidayat, 2020).

To overcome this pedagogical deficit, scholars emphasize the critical function of non-formal, school-based religious extracurricular programs (Fadilah, 2019; Lubis et al., 2023). Extracurricular religious activities provide experiential, practice-centered learning spaces where theoretical tenets taught in formal classrooms are converted into persistent moral habits (*'ādah*). Through activities such as Qur'anic memorization (*tahfīẓ*), classical legal text reading (*qirā'at al-kutub*), and communal worship, students internalize ethical imperatives via direct engagement, social modeling, and continuous reflective reinforcement (Firmansyah et al., 2022).

Extensive scholarly inquiries have investigated religious extracurricular activities and character cultivation in secondary schools. For instance, Samsul, (2020) demonstrated that extracurricular Islamic programs at SMP Negeri 1 Pacet Mojokerto fostered student piety and Qur'anic literacy, yet suffered from the absence of formal written curriculum guidelines and inadequate logistical facilities. In an Islamic madrasah context, Rofia, (2024) observed that spiritual extracurricular activities at MTs Bustanul Ulum Malang enhanced Islamic values and devotional consistency, though operating within an institutional environment that was already confessionally Islamic. Similarly, Holilurrohman, (2020) explored religious habituation in urban public schools at SMPN 31 Surabaya, highlighting urban environmental constraints, while Marlina & Usmaidar, (2023) and Cheloh, (2023) examined boarding and Islamic junior high schools where religious habituation was integrated into mandatory residential life. However, critical gaps persist in the extant literature. Most previous inquiries focus either on Islamic madrasahs where religious coursework is inherently extensive or on urban public schools conducting intermittent, voluntary religious assemblies.

There remains a noticeable empirical void regarding how a rural-suburban public secondary school (*SMP Negeri*) systematically designs, legitimizes, and sustains a specialized "Religious Class" (*Kelas Khusus Agama* / KKA) underpinned by an intensive, multi-disciplinary religious extracurricular curriculum over an unbroken ten-year duration. SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh, situated in Pemalang Regency, Central Java, represents a distinct and compelling case. Established administratively in 1981 and awarded "A" accreditation status as well as Adiwiyata school recognition, SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh enacted a decisive institutional policy: establishing a dedicated Special Religious Class (KKA) supported by a mandatory, four-day weekly afternoon extracurricular program. Formalized through official Principal Decrees maintained continuously since July 2014, this program has operated uninterruptedly for a full decade, offering rural public school students rigorous instruction in Tahfiz Juz 30 and selected surahs (*Yasin, Al-Waqi'ah*), classical Shafi'i fiqh (*Kitab Safinatun Najah*), tajwid, tilawah, and Islamic rebana arts.

Investigating this institutional model is academically imperative to provide empirical evidence on how public schools can overcome the 2-hour curricular constraint and establish a sustainable ecosystem of Islamic character formation. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of the religious extracurricular program in shaping the Islamic character of students in the Special Religious Class at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh Pemalang, rigorously exploring its planning, execution, and multi-faceted evaluation mechanisms, as well as the concrete structural challenges and strategic opportunities that determine its long-term sustainability.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative field research design (*field research*) to explore and depict social phenomena within their authentic, naturalistic context without experimental manipulation (Garaika & Darmanah, 2019; Prayogi et al., 2024). A qualitative approach was deemed essential because the research seeks to uncover deep, interpretive meanings regarding the institutional mechanisms, pedagogical practices, affective transformations, and moral habituation patterns experienced by school actors (Prayogi et al., 2026; Sugiyono, 2017).

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh, located on Jl. Raya Kebandaran, Bodeh District, Pemalang Regency, Central Java. The empirical field investigation was formally executed from May to June 2025 during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, followed by data verification, member checking, and final analytical synthesis in July 2025. This timeline rectifies anachronistic drafting errors present in prior working manuscripts.

Research informants were selected through purposive sampling, with particular emphasis on individuals who possessed direct administrative authority, instructional responsibilities, or substantial participation in the Special Religious Class (Kelas Khusus Agama/KKA) program. During the 2024/2025 academic year, SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh had a total student population of 858, of whom 96 students were enrolled in the KKA program. These students were distributed equally across three grade levels, comprising 32 students in Grade VII, 32 students in Grade VIII, and 32 students in Grade IX. Based on their respective roles, responsibilities, and involvement in the program, five key informants were selected to provide comprehensive and contextually relevant information. These informants consisted of the Head of School, who provided insights into institutional policies, administrative oversight, and the formal legitimacy of the program; the Head Coach of the Religious Extracurricular Program, who also served as a

senior Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) teacher and contributed perspectives on instructional planning, pedagogical implementation, and program evaluation; and three KKA students representing Grades VII, VIII, and IX, respectively, who were selected based on their active participation in the program. The inclusion of informants from administrative, instructional, and student backgrounds enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives on the planning, implementation, and perceived outcomes of the KKA program, particularly its contribution to students' character development.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the KKA program and its role in fostering students' character development. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Head of School, the program coach, and the selected student representatives using interview guidelines designed to explore several interconnected aspects of the program. These included the institutional planning framework, curriculum content, implementation procedures, students' experiences and perceptions of character transformation, evaluation mechanisms, and challenges encountered during program implementation. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain consistency across interviews while providing sufficient flexibility to explore emerging issues and obtain detailed explanations from participants. In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted during extracurricular religious activities at the school mosque, Masjid At-Taqwa SMPN 1 Bodeh. Through direct observation, the researcher examined the organization and implementation of afternoon assemblies, the recitation of Asmaul Husna, lecture-demonstration activities based on the Islamic text Safinatun Najah, peer-assisted Qur'anic memorization assessments, and interpersonal interactions among students and instructors. These observations provided contextual evidence of the program's pedagogical practices, students' participation, and the ways in which religious values and character-building practices were incorporated into routine activities. Documentation was also employed to complement and verify the information obtained through interviews and observations. The documents examined included official student registers, curriculum rotation schedules, institutional profiles, photographic records of Tahfiz examinations, and official certificates documenting achievements in religious competitions during 2024. Collectively, these three data collection techniques enabled the researcher to compare participants' accounts with observed practices and institutional records, thereby developing a more comprehensive understanding of the program within its actual educational context.

Data analysis followed the interactive analytical model proposed by Miles et al., (2014) which encompasses data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification as interconnected and iterative processes. Data condensation involved transcribing interview recordings, compiling observational field notes, examining documentary evidence, and systematically selecting, focusing, abstracting, and categorizing information relevant to the research objectives. The data were organized around four principal analytical dimensions: the institutional and administrative foundations of program planning, the pedagogical processes involved in program implementation, indicators of students' character development, and the mechanisms used to evaluate program effectiveness. This process enabled the researcher to identify relevant information while reducing material that did not directly contribute to answering the research questions. Subsequently, data display was undertaken by organizing the condensed information into contextual descriptive narratives, matrices containing verbatim interview excerpts, and structured categorical tables, including representations of weekly activity rotation schedules and program evaluation instruments. These displays facilitated the comparison of information across informants and data sources, allowing similarities, differences, and recurring patterns to be identified more systematically. The final analytical stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by interpreting the emerging findings in relation to the theoretical framework of character education proposed by (Lickona, 1991) and the perspectives on Islamic moral and spiritual development associated with (Al-Ghazali, 2023). The conclusions were developed progressively through repeated examination of the collected evidence, comparison of findings across analytical categories, and verification of interpretations against the available empirical data. This iterative process helped ensure that the interpretations remained grounded in the research evidence and relevant to the study's theoretical foundations.

To establish data trustworthiness and credibility (keabsahan data), the study employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation, drawing on the principles discussed by (Sugiyono, 2013). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the Head of School, the program coach, and student informants to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, or discrepancy in their accounts of the KKA program. This approach enabled the researcher to examine the consistency of information across administrative,

instructional, and student perspectives rather than relying exclusively on the testimony of a single informant. Methodological triangulation was implemented by systematically comparing interview findings with evidence obtained through direct participant observation and the examination of primary documentary records. For example, statements concerning program planning and implementation were examined against relevant administrative documents and observed activities, while accounts of students' participation and religious learning experiences were considered alongside observational field notes and available documentation. By integrating evidence from different informants and data collection methods, the researcher sought to strengthen the credibility of the findings, identify inconsistencies requiring further examination, and develop interpretations that more accurately reflected the implementation of the KKA program at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the religious extracurricular program for Special Religious Class (KKA) students at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh constitutes an integrated, purposeful pedagogical process. Following public policy and educational management frameworks, effective program implementation requires continuous synchronization between strategic planning (*perencanaan*), organized execution (*pelaksanaan*), and reflective evaluation (*evaluasi*) (Agustino, 2016; Jones, 1984).

Program Planning

Comprehensive planning serves as the indispensable structural foundation for educational initiatives, directly determining instructional consistency and character outcomes (Fuad et al., 2023). At SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh, the religious extracurricular program is meticulously designed, deriving directly from the school's overarching vision: *"Berkualitas, Mandiri, dan Berbudi"* (Quality, Independent, and Virtuous Character). The institutional objective explicitly identifies the dimension of *berbudi* as the internalization of Islamic moral values to produce graduates who are not only academically competitive but fundamentally grounded in noble character (*akhlāq al-karīmah*).

Institutionally, the program possesses robust legal legitimacy grounded in an official Principal's Decree. Rather than operating as an informal, ad-hoc student gathering, the program is formally enacted at the inception of each academic year. Remarkably, this formal decree has been re-authorized continuously for ten consecutive years, having first been promulgated in July 2014 under the leadership of SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh. This decadelong continuity validates the school's unwavering commitment to character education, aligning directly with Minister of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 62 of 2014 concerning Extracurricular Activities in Primary and Secondary Education (Nasrudin et al., 2023).

In an interview, the Head of SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh., articulated the strategic background of this institutional policy:

> *"The school organizes additional activities outside school hours as a deliberate effort to support comprehensive Islamic character formation. The formal basis is the Principal's Decree covering all school extracurriculars, re-issued every academic year. Specifically for the religious extracurricular, it has been officially promulgated for ten years, since July 2014. This policy was instituted because formal PAI instruction is allocated only two hours per week, which is structurally insufficient to fulfill students' spiritual needs and practical religious habits."*

The planning phase is executed collaboratively between the principal and the senior religious extracurricular coach. This collaborative synergy ensures that instructional goals remain pedagogically viable, culturally contextualized, and fully integrated with the school's master academic calendar (Syah & Rais, 2024). As explained by the coach:

> *"In the planning phase, we calibrate instructional materials according to student developmental readiness, encompassing Qur'anic memorization (tahfīẓ), fiqh, tajwīd, and rebana. Weekly and annual syllabi are drafted jointly with the principal to ensure activities run smoothly without disrupting formal academic schedules."*

The planned curricular materials encompass three core domains designed to strengthen students' Qur'anic literacy, understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, and skills in Islamic arts and religious communication. The first domain focuses on Qur'anic Literacy and Memorization, emphasizing students' ability to read, understand, and memorize Qur'anic passages, particularly those contained in Juz 30 (Juz 'Amma), as well as selected surahs, including Surah Yāsīn and Surah Al-Wāqi'ah. Through regular recitation and memorization activities, students are expected to develop greater familiarity with the Qur'an, improve their recitation skills, and cultivate religious

discipline. The second domain addresses Foundational Islamic Jurisprudence, which involves the systematic study and practical application of the classical Shafi'i legal text Safīnat al-Najāh. The materials cover essential aspects of Islamic religious practice, including purification (ṭahārah), the prescribed prayers (ṣalāt), fasting (ṣawm), zakat, and the rites of pilgrimage. This domain aims to equip students with foundational knowledge of Islamic law and enable them to apply religious teachings appropriately in their daily lives. The third domain focuses on Islamic Arts and Oratory, encompassing the practical application of tajwid rules, melodic Qur'anic recitation (tilāwah), Islamic public speaking and preaching (muḥāḍarah or pidato), and traditional Islamic musical arts using tambourines (rebana or hadrah). Through these activities, students are encouraged to improve their religious communication skills, develop confidence in public performance, appreciate Islamic artistic traditions, and strengthen their capacity to convey Islamic values within their school and community environments.

Program Execution

Program execution represents the operational actualization of designed curricula into authentic educational praxis. The religious extracurricular program at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh is conducted routinely outside formal class hours, running four days a week from Monday through Thursday, beginning precisely at 14:00 WIB until completion at the school mosque (*Masjid At-Taqwa*).

To ensure pedagogical depth and prevent overcrowding across the 96 KKA students, the program implements a structured weekly material rotation schedule across grade cohorts, as delineated in Table 1.

Table 1. Weekly Extracurricular Schedule and Material Rotation for KKA SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh

Day	Time	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade IX	Lead Instructor / Venue
Monday	14.00-Finish	Fiqh (*Safinatun Najah*)	Fiqh (*Safinatun Najah*)	Tahfiz (Juz 30 / Selected Surahs)	The Head Coach of the Religious Extracurricular Program/Mosque
Tuesday	14.00-Finish	Tahfiz (Juz 30)	Tajwid Mastery	Fiqh (*Safinatun Najah*)	The Head Coach of the Religious Extracurricular Program/Mosque
Wednesday	14.00-Finish	Tajwid Mastery	Tahfiz (Juz 30)	Tajwid & Advanced Tilawah	The Head Coach of the Religious Extracurricular Program/Mosque
Thursday	14.00-Finish	Islamic Arts	Islamic Arts	Islamic Arts	Instructor & Senior Peers / Hall

Source: Empirical Field Documentation and Interview with Extracurricular Coach (2025).

Every instructional session commences uniformly with spiritual habituation practices, notably the collective chanted recitation of the 99 Divine Names (*Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*) and guided Qur'anic *tadarrus*. This consistent ritual creates a sacred learning atmosphere, anchoring students' psychological readiness before engaging with intellectual texts.

The inclusion of the classical text *Safīnat al-Najāh* represents an exceptional pedagogical feature within an Indonesian public secular school. Typically reserved for traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) or madrasahs, teaching this classical manual provides public school students with systematic legal reasoning (*fiqh*) regarding purity, valid prayer conditions, and personal hygiene. As Widiawati (2021) observed, utilizing *Safīnat al-Najāh* via the *talaqqī* (direct oral transmission) method establishes strong legal comprehension and fosters spiritual discipline among junior secondary learners.

Furthermore, integrating rebana music and public oratory (*muḥāḍarah*) enriches the program's affective appeal. Rebana playing builds aesthetic appreciation, motor coordination, and communal solidarity (*ukhuwwah*), while oratory training develops communicative poise, civic courage, and dakwah leadership. This multidimensional structure corroborates Lickona (1991) foundational triad of character education: moral knowing (*knowing the good* through fiqh and tajwid), moral feeling (*desiring the good* through Asmaul Husna and aesthetic rebana chants), and moral action (*doing the good* through disciplined prayer and virtuous behavior).

Student testimonies confirm the tangible benefits derived from this holistic structure. A Grade VII student, stated:

> *"Through this program, I have expanded my understanding of Islam, particularly reciting the Qur'an with correct tajwid, nun-sukun rules, and proper prayer movements. It greatly helps students who were not yet fluent readers to improve step by step with the teacher's patience."*

Similarly, a Grade IX student, emphasized moral-cognitive gains:

> *"I am very grateful because I can memorize Juz 30 and understand fiqh more deeply. Beyond knowledge, I feel more disciplined in my daily prayers, more consistent in applying religious values, and much more patient."*

A Grade VIII student added:

"This program builds our faith and character. It taught me time management and self-control. I feel more respectful toward teachers and parents, more caring toward classmates, and confident when reading the Qur'an publicly."

These student responses demonstrate that the program operates far beyond ceremonial compliance; it fosters an authentic, transformative internalization of values (Ashari et al., 2025; Samad et al., 2023).

Program Evaluation

A critical weakness in preliminary drafts of this research was the erroneous assertion that program evaluation was undocumented and informal. On the contrary, rigorous empirical triangulation of skripsi archives and field interviews reveals that SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh enforces a robust, multi-tiered evaluation system that combines cognitive verification, psychomotor testing, and affective behavioral monitoring.

Evaluation in Islamic character education cannot be restricted to pen-and-paper examinations; it must appraise long-term habituation and genuine behavioral transformation (Sudijono, 2013). At SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh, evaluation is executed across four distinct mechanisms:

For the Qur'anic memorization domain, the school administers formal oral examinations (*Ujian Tahfīẓ Al-Qur'an*) specifically for students completing Juz 30 and mandatory daily liturgical prayers. These testing sessions are formally convened at the school auditorium/mosque before an examination panel comprising the extracurricular coach and school leadership. Students who successfully demonstrate fluent, tartīl recitation from memory without prompts are formally awarded an official Tahfiz Certificate (*Syahadah Tahfīẓ*). This *syahadah* serves as official institutional credentials, providing immense psychological validation, elevating student self-worth, and serving as documentary credentials for higher educational advancement. The head coach, detailed this examination structure:

"Evaluation is conducted periodically by both the coach and the principal. Specifically for tahfīẓ, we routinely organize official oral examinations. This is essential not only to assess student mastery of Juz 30 and daily prayers, but also serves as the formal prerequisite for issuing the school's official graduation certificate (syahadah), recognizing their dedication and achievement."

Daily moral action (*moral action*) is appraised through observational monitoring by teachers and school staff. Assessment parameters encompass punctuality in congregational Dhuhr prayers, courtesy towards educators and peers (*budaya 5S: Senyum, Salam, Sapa, Sopan, Santun*), academic integrity, and personal accountability. Informant testimonies reveal that KKA students demonstrate marked improvements in humility, patience, and social empathy compared to their pre-enrollment baselines.

A unique evaluative indicator discovered at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh is the voluntary, rotating practice of reciting the *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* and communal *dhikr*, conducted both during morning school openings and independently organized within students' home neighborhoods. The spontaneous willingness of students to sustain this devotional recitation without punitive administrative compulsion reflects authentic moral feeling (*moral feeling*), fulfilling Al-Ghazali's classical definition of virtue as an established soul state from which actions flow effortlessly.

The efficacy of the program is further validated by external objective benchmarks. In the 2024 academic cycle, KKA students representing SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh successfully secured competitive championship trophies in religious contests (*Lomba Mata Pelajaran dan Seni Islami*/MAPSI and MTQ) at both the Pemalang Regency and Central Java Provincial levels. These verified achievements provide empirical proof that the instructional regimen produces high-order competencies recognized by regional educational authorities.

This comprehensive evaluation framework is confirmed by the Head of School:

"Periodic evaluation is conducted collaboratively between the coach and the principal to assess both process and substantive outcomes. We evaluate student attendance, devotional discipline, Qur'anic memorization milestones, and daily behavioral manners. The outcomes show that the program contributes significantly to shaping Islamic character, proven by student behavioral improvements, official tahfīẓ certification, and our students winning religious championships at regency and provincial levels in 2024."

Challenges and Opportunities in Shaping Students' Islamic Character

Despite its demonstrated achievements, the extracurricular religious program at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh continues to encounter several pedagogical, logistical, and structural challenges that influence its implementation and effectiveness in shaping students' Islamic character. One of the primary challenges concerns the limitations of instructional time. Although the extracurricular program is scheduled for afternoon sessions from Monday to Thursday, the effective duration available for learning and character habituation remains relatively limited.

Activities begin at 14:00 Western Indonesian Time (WIB), immediately after students have completed a full day of formal schooling, when both teachers and students may experience considerable physical and cognitive fatigue. Furthermore, students must balance their regular academic assignments with the demands of Qur'anic memorization and evening review (murāja'ah). These competing responsibilities can reduce the consistency of students' participation and limit opportunities for sustained character habituation. As suggested by broader educational research, restricted instructional time may constrain the development of deeply internalized values when opportunities for repeated practice and reflection are insufficient (Rahmawati, 2021; Sari et al., 2025). This challenge was also confirmed by student informants Sri Mulyani and Inassalena, who identified the difficulty of balancing general academic examinations with Qur'anic memorization targets as one of the most significant obstacles they encountered throughout the program.

Another operational challenge relates to differences in students' motivation and initial religious learning abilities. The 96 students enrolled in the Special Religious Class (Kelas Khusus Agama/KKA) come from diverse primary educational backgrounds, including general elementary schools (Sekolah Dasar/SD) and Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah/MI). These differences contribute to variations in students' prior exposure to Islamic religious education, particularly their Qur'anic reading proficiency and familiarity with tajwid principles. While some students enter the program with relatively strong recitation skills, others continue to experience difficulties in recognizing Arabic letters and articulating them correctly according to their respective points of articulation (makhārij al-ḥurūf). Such disparities create instructional challenges, particularly during group-based learning activities that require students to progress toward common learning objectives. Without appropriate differentiation and individualized guidance, students with stronger initial competencies may progress more rapidly, while those who require additional assistance may experience frustration, reduced confidence, or declining motivation. These differences highlight the importance of adaptive pedagogical strategies, differentiated instruction, and continuous mentoring to accommodate students' varying learning needs (Cheloh, 2023; Rofia, 2024).

The program also faces limitations in facilities and the availability of specialized instructors. Although SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh provides access to its school mosque, Masjid At-Taqwa, as the primary venue for religious extracurricular activities, the available facilities do not include specialized rooms with adequate acoustic separation for conducting several activities simultaneously. Consequently, Qur'anic memorization assessments (tasmi'), rebana percussion rehearsals, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) lessons may interfere with one another because of overlapping sounds and differences in instructional requirements. Such conditions can affect students' concentration, reduce the effectiveness of learning sessions, and limit opportunities for more intensive practice. In addition to these physical constraints, the program faces a shortage of instructors with specialized qualifications in advanced melodic Qur'anic recitation (tilāwah). As explained by the program's head coach, the existing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must accommodate multiple instructional responsibilities, including areas that require specific technical expertise. This situation increases the demands placed on existing educators and may restrict the development of students' advanced competencies in particular religious and artistic disciplines (Holilurrohman, 2020).. Addressing these constraints requires gradual improvements in learning facilities, more effective scheduling of activities, and opportunities to recruit, collaborate with, or provide professional development for instructors with relevant specialized expertise.

Despite these operational constraints, the extracurricular religious program at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh possesses several institutional and pedagogical strengths that provide a solid foundation for its sustainability and future development. One of its most significant advantages is its long-standing institutional legitimacy and sustained leadership commitment. The program has operated continuously for approximately ten years, with its formal institutional foundation established through Principal Decrees beginning in July 2014. This continuity demonstrates that the program is not merely a temporary extracurricular initiative but has become an established component of the school's educational practices. The commitment of the Head of School, together with the professional dedication of Islamic Religious Education teachers, contributes to maintaining the program's organizational stability and integration into the school's broader educational objectives. Such institutional support is particularly important for ensuring that religious character education remains a consistent priority despite potential changes in school leadership, staffing arrangements, or administrative policies. The program's established history and continued administrative recognition therefore constitute important assets for strengthening its implementation and expanding its contribution to students' moral and spiritual development (Khadapi, 2025).

A further opportunity lies in the program's integration of experiential religious learning and a living pesantren culture within a public-school environment. By combining the study of classical Islamic texts, particularly Safīnat al-Najāh, with Qur'anic memorization (tahfiz), religious oratory, and traditional Islamic

musical activities such as rebana and hadrah, the program creates a learning environment that extends beyond conventional classroom instruction. Students are encouraged not only to acquire knowledge of Islamic teachings but also to translate that knowledge into observable religious practices and everyday conduct. Activities such as practicing ablution, participating in communal prayers, reviewing Qur'anic memorization, cooperating during group performances, and engaging in structured religious learning provide opportunities for students to develop discipline, responsibility, perseverance, cooperation, and respect for others. This practice-oriented approach reflects the principles of experiential learning, in which knowledge is reinforced through repeated participation and practical application. It also aligns with Lickona's (1991) perspective on character education, which emphasizes the integration of moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action. By incorporating elements commonly associated with pesantren-based religious education into a public-school setting, the KKA program offers a distinctive model for connecting Islamic knowledge with habitual religious practice and character formation (Lickona, 1991; Wajdi et al., 2025)..

The program's development is further supported by strong parental participation and endorsement from the school community. In the Bodeh area, parents and community members who value Islamic moral education may regard the KKA program as an accessible means of strengthening their children's religious knowledge and practices while allowing them to continue receiving a comprehensive general education in a state secondary school. From this perspective, the program offers an educational arrangement that combines formal academic learning with structured religious instruction without requiring students to leave the public-school system. Parental confidence in the program can encourage students to participate consistently, reinforce religious habits at home, and maintain motivation in pursuing Qur'anic memorization and other learning targets. In addition, active collaboration with the School Committee can help strengthen communication between the school and families, mobilize community support, and identify opportunities to improve program facilities and learning resources. Such cooperation is particularly valuable because character formation is unlikely to depend exclusively on school-based activities; rather, it is reinforced when educational expectations and behavioral practices are supported across school, family, and community environments. The positive relationship between institutional implementation and parental involvement therefore represents an important opportunity for sustaining the KKA program and strengthening its contribution to students' Islamic character development (Kaputra et al., 2021; Shania et al., 2026).

The operational challenges and strategic opportunities demonstrate that the effectiveness of the KKA program at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh depends not only on the availability of religious learning materials but also on the quality of instructional management, the responsiveness of teaching strategies to students' diverse abilities, the adequacy of facilities, and the strength of institutional and community support. Although limitations in instructional time, student preparedness, and specialized teaching resources may affect implementation, the program's established institutional foundation, experiential learning practices, and supportive community environment provide important conditions for continued development. Strengthening these existing advantages while addressing the identified constraints may help the program achieve more consistent learning outcomes and promote the sustainable internalization of Islamic values in students' everyday behavior.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on comprehensive empirical investigation and data triangulation, this study concludes that the implementation of the religious extracurricular program for Special Religious Class (*Kelas Khusus Agama*/KKA) students at SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh represents a highly effective, sustainable pedagogical model for Islamic character building within a public secondary school. The program operates through three integrated stages: (1) Planning, legitimized by annual Principal Decrees sustained continuously for a full decade (2014–2025) and grounded in the school's vision of virtuous character (*berbudi*); (2) Execution, structured through a four-day weekly rotation (Monday to Thursday at 14:00 WIB) combining Tahfiz Juz 30 and selected surahs, classical Shafi'i jurisprudence via *Safīnat al-Najāh*, tajwid, tilawah, and rebana arts, initiated uniformly with *Asmaul Husna* recitations; and (3) Evaluation, which is proven to be systematically executed through multi-faceted assessments, including formal oral Tahfiz examinations awarding certified graduation (*syahadah*), daily affective behavioral monitoring, voluntary domestic *dhikr* habituation, and documented championships in regency- and provincial-level religious competitions in 2024.

Although the program confronts operational challenges -namely student afternoon fatigue, restricted instructional time, baseline literacy disparities, and physical facility limitations- these are effectively mitigated by decisive leadership support, experiential pedagogy, dedicated PAI teachers, and strong parental backing. The

pedagogical implication of this research confirms that religious character formation in secular public institutions cannot rely solely on the constrained 2-hour formal curriculum; it necessitates an institutionalized, practice-centered extracurricular framework. For future development, it is recommended that SMP Negeri 1 Bodeh establish strategic partnerships with Islamic higher education institutions or local *pesantren* to supply specialized *tilāwah* mentors and expand acoustic learning facilities. Furthermore, future academic researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal and comparative quantitative inquiries to measure the long-term impact of KKA alumni character trajectories across subsequent educational tiers.

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