

## Enhancing Students' Religiosity in Educational Context: A Mixed-Methods Study in Islamic High School

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### ABSTRACT

Cultivating religiosity among students in schools is a crucial initiative that should be implemented. The research aims to evaluate the impact of school climate on students' development of religiosity. The research methodology used mixed-method explanatory models to evaluate theories on school climate's influence on religiosity and explore teachers' strategies to develop students' religiosity within schools. Quantitative data was collected from 482 students at junior and senior schools, and qualitative data was gathered from six randomly selected teachers. Quantitative data was collected using school climate and religiosity scales. Descriptive and regression analyses were used to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data. The regression analysis results showed a value of  $R = 0.338$ ,  $R^2 = 0.114$ ,  $p < 0.005$ , indicating a positive impact of school climate on students' religiosity. Teachers employ six approaches to achieve this goal: habituation, guidance, leading by example, attention to individual students' needs, creating a positive atmosphere, and providing educational sanctions. These results highlight the importance of improving teachers' expertise in promoting student religiosity. Experimental research could be an effective alternative for further advancing this type of study.

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## INTRODUCTION

Investigating student religiosity in secondary schools is increasingly important to scholars and education policymakers. This importance is supported by several cases that demonstrate low levels of religiosity among students (Bigalke, 2022; Gez, 2022). The impact of low religiosity on students' psychological well-being, morality, and mental health has been established (Akin, 2018; Itzhaki, 2020). Therefore, studies focusing on the development of religiosity can assist schools in addressing students' difficulties. The advancement of student religiosity in educational institutions can be achieved through the crucial role that instructors play in the academic practices of schools (Baños, 2020; Bhana, 2022). Therefore, instructors are vital in promoting student religiosity in educational institutions.

Recent studies have identified three main trends in the growth of students' religiosity. The first trend investigates the role of schools in promoting student religiosity (Lafrarchi, 2020; Muhtar, 2019). The second trend explores extramural forces that shape students' religiosity, including family, social environment, and media. This approach recognizes the significant role played by the external environment in shaping the religious beliefs and values of students (Elshof, 2019; Hill, 2019), as well as the importance of collaboration between families and schools in fostering students' religiosity (Lubis & Arlina, 2023; Susilo et al., 2022). This article focuses on the first approach by exploring the role of teachers in promoting religious development within schools. The novelty of this research lies in applying mixed-method explanatory models that provide extensive insight into the development of student religiosity in schools.

Religiosity refers to the level of individuals' involvement in religious practices, beliefs, and spiritual experiences, as discussed by Hanif (2021) and Kress (2015). Indications of religiosity may involve participating in religious activities such as worship services, prayers, and religious celebrations, along with a personal acceptance of religious principles. Measuring religiosity also includes gauging loyalty to religious beliefs, support from religious communities, and profound mystical or spiritual experiences (Huber and Huber, 2012; Kress, 2015). Generally, religiosity indicates how people relate to their lives spiritual and religious aspects and may vary significantly among individuals.

School climate pertains to the ambiance, customs, and general atmosphere within a school that influences all individuals engaged in educational activities (Grazia, 2021; Larson et al., 2020; Rohatgi & Scherer, 2020). As a psychological construct, a positive school climate is characterized by five indicators: positive relationships between students, positive interactions between teachers and students, the educational climate at school, a sense of belonging, and interpersonal justice (Grazia and Molinari, 2020). In essence, schools play a crucial role in fostering students' potential by creating positive conditions based on these five school climate indicators.

Schools play a significant role in fostering students' religiosity. Firstly, they can create an atmosphere that encourages religious values, helps students

understand moral principles, and reinforces their beliefs (Utami et al., 2022; Zhao, 2022). Secondly, educators can provide constructive guidance and impart religious values during educational activities (Imaduddin et al., 2022; Tambak et al., 2023). Thirdly, by incorporating religious teaching into the curriculum, schools can provide a deeper understanding. Introducing religion in schools can help students explore their beliefs and promote interfaith understanding (Muhandis et al., 2020; Shekitka, 2022). Moreover, schools can facilitate religious activities such as worship or prayer groups, allowing students to express their beliefs daily. Consequently, schools play a crucial role in promoting the development of students' religiosity.

Therefore, this research aims to verify the main hypothesis regarding the growth of students' religiosity in schools. This article intends to analyze the impact of the school environment on students' religiosity. The hypothesis being evaluated is that the school environment influences students' religiosity levels. The more students perceive the school climate, the higher their religiosity. A detailed presentation of the hypothesis testing results is provided by elucidating qualitative data from teacher informants.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed-method explanatory model to investigate the impact of school climate on student religiosity. The choice of research design was based on the study's purpose, which required combining both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve its objectives. Quantitative data from students was utilized to measure their perception of school climate and religiosity levels. In contrast, qualitative data from teachers was used to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' strategies contribute to the development of student religiosity in schools. The mixed-method approach was selected to overcome the limitations of a single study, enhance the understanding of the influence of school climate on student religiosity, and shed light on the tactics employed to foster religiosity within the realm of school-based education.

### **Research Procedure**

According to Creswell et al. (2003), mixed-method sequential explanatory design research has two stages. In this study, two primary stages were conducted. The first stage involved quantitative research to describe the school climate variables and student religiosity. The second stage focused on hypothesis testing to determine the impact of school climate on students' religiosity. Additionally, qualitative data on teachers was evaluated to explain how school climate influences religiosity. The questions about teacher strategies for enhancing student religiosity addressed aspects of school climate that significantly impact religiosity. These strategies aim to improve the educational climate in schools and enhance teacher-student relationships.

## Research Subject

Before collecting data, informed consent was obtained from the subjects. The study focuses on students and teachers from two Islamic junior high schools (382 students) and one Islamic high school (100 students) in East Java. Four hundred eighty-two students aged between 12 and 17 (mean=14.05, SD=1.48) participated, with 222 boys and 260 girls selected randomly. Qualitative data were collected from six educators based on their teaching locations. In other words, two teachers from each school were selected as informants, making up the total number of participants.

## Data Collection

Data were collected using the school climate and religiosity scales. School climate is defined as everything related to the physical and psychological atmosphere of the school that affects all individuals involved in educational practice. The school climate scale comprises 22 items that uncover five dimensions related to student relationships. The scale assesses factors such as the relationship between students and teachers, the educational environment, a sense of belonging, and justice between individuals (Grazia, 2021). The scale has been utilized in various studies, displaying a reliability level of Alpha Cronbach 0.88 (Grazia & Molinari, 2020). Religiosity is an individual's involvement in everyday life's spiritual practices, beliefs, and experiences. The religiosity scale includes fifteen items. Huber and Huber (2012) developed a scale that identifies five dimensions: intellectual, ideological, common practice, individual practice, and consequent experience. This scale has been used in various studies and has a reliability of Alpha Cronbach 0.77 (Abbasi et al., 2019). The scales were chosen because they can be applied to high school students and have sufficient reliability.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis included descriptive, inferential, and thematic analysis techniques. In this study, descriptive analysis was used to determine the categories of school climate and religiosity among subjects in the high and low categories. This analysis method compares the average total score with the subject's observed averages based on their education level. Inferential analysis was conducted using regression analysis methods to investigate the impact of the school climate (independent variable) on student religiosity (dependent variable). Simple regression analysis was conducted both concurrently and partially. A qualitatively analyzed dataset was obtained from a purposively sampled group of teachers.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This section presents the findings of the data analysis, which describe the school climate and religiosity of the research participants at different educational levels. It explores the impact of the school climate on student religiosity and investigates

the teacher strategies implemented in promoting student religiosity within Islamic schools.

### Descriptive analysis results

This section presents the results of the descriptive analysis, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum data for each aspect of the school climate and religiosity variables. Tables 1 and 2 provide the complete data.

**Table 1.** The result of descriptive analysis of school climate

	School climate	Student relations	Student-teacher relations	Educational Climate	Sense of belonging	Interpersonal justice
Senior high school (N=100)						
Mean	84.48	20.43	20.43	21.60	20.31	11.59
SD	11.08	2.90	2.90	2.55	2.70	2.95
Min.	47	13	13	11	10	3
Max.	104	25	25	25	25	15
Junior high school (N=382)						
Mean	90.68	20.51	20.51	20.34	17.91	10.25
SD	9.74	3.48	3.48	3.21	2.94	2.84
Min.	50	8	8	9	9	3
Max.	108	25	25	25	24	15
Total (N=482)						
Mean	89.39	20.45	20.45	21.34	19.81	11.31
SD	10.33	3.03	3.03	2.74	2.92	2.97
Min.	47	8	8	9	9	3
Max.	108	25	25	25	25	15

Table 1 presents the ratio of means for upper secondary education students (84.48) to total means (89.39), indicating a lower perception of the classroom climate. On the other hand, junior secondary education students (90.68) have a higher perception. These findings support that upper-education students perceive the classroom climate less favorably than junior high school students. Overall, high school students have a generally low perception of the classroom climate. However, it is worth noting that two indicators of classroom climate, educational climate (21.60:21.34) and interpersonal justice (11.59:11.31), are rated highly in junior high school. In terms of academic performance, students perform well in the subject. Nevertheless, three indicators of school climate, specifically educational climate (20.34:21.34), sense of belonging (17.91:19.81), and interpersonal justice (10.25:11.31), are rated low.

**Table 2.** The result of descriptive analysis of student religiosity

	Spirituality	Intellect	Ideology	Public practice	Private practice	Experience
Senior high school (N=100)						
Mean	64.39	11.35	12.18	12.53	13.53	13.22
SD	5.64	2.09	2.27	2.05	2.02	2.04
Min.	26.00	4	3	4	3	5
Max.	75.00	15	15	15	15	15
Junior high school (N=382)						
Mean	64.81	12.02	12.39	13.19	13.84	12.94
SD	8.20	1.66	2.33	1.56	1.35	1.73
Min.	19.00	6	6	3	5	5
Max.	75.00	15	20	15	15	15
Total (N=482)						
Mean	64.06	11.88	12.34	13.05	13.79	13
SD	6.28	1.78	2.32	13.05	13.78	1.3
Min.	19.00	4	3	3	333	5
Max.	75.00	15	15	15	15	15

Table 2 shows that the mean ratio of religiosity among upper secondary education students is 64.39, higher than the total mean of 64.06 and the mean for junior secondary education students of 64.81. The level of religiosity among students at both educational levels is high. The study revealed that high school students generally had high religious devotion. However, four indicators of religiosity were classified as low among these students: intellectual (11.35:11.88), ideology (12.18:12.34), public practice (12.53:13.05), and private practice (13.53:13.79). On the other hand, junior high school students generally had a high level of religious devotion, with only one area classified as low: experience (12.94:13).

### The Effect of School Climate on Religiosity

The regression analysis results revealed that  $R = 0.338$  and  $R^2 = 0.114$  ( $p < .005$ ), indicating a significant effect of school climate on student religiosity. More specifically, school climate impacts 11.4% of student religiosity. Additional findings from the partial analysis can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 clarifies that only two of the five school climate indicators significantly impact educational climate and student-teacher relations. The self-of-belonging effect is insignificant ( $>0.050$ ); therefore, subjective evaluations have been excluded. While interpersonal justice negatively affects religiosity ( $\beta = -0.125$ ), student relations exhibit coloniality with other indicators, which results in an inconsequential influence because other indicators have already represented it.

**Table 3.** The effect of schools climate on students' religiosity

		Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	45.653	2.553		17.883	.000	
	STR	.336	.095	.162	3.537	.000	
	EC	.568	.126	.248	4.511	.000	
	SB	.122	.119	.056	1.024	.306	
	IJ	-.264	.109	-.125	-2.427	.016	

a. Dependent Variable: Religious

		Excluded Variables				Collinearity Statistics
Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Tolerance
1	SR	. <sup>b</sup>	.	.	.	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Religious

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), IJ, STR, EC, SB

### Teacher strategies for developing student religiosity

Qualitative data were collected from six teachers representing three schools in the study. The questions asked aimed to focus on two indicators of school climate that influence student religiosity. All six teachers were asked the same two questions: Firstly, what strategies do teachers use to develop students' religiosity in and outside the classroom? Secondly, how do teachers interact with students to optimize their religious development? These two questions were the focal points for elucidating the outcomes of quantitative data analysis. The responses were then categorized, and the most pertinent were chosen for the research question.

The analysis indicated that three educators provided views on developing religiosity strategies based on the academic setting of the school. The teachers specified that the approaches include instilling habits, offering religious guidance, demonstrating good practice to students, and fostering a positive atmosphere. The subsequent assertion conveys this perspective:

*I have assisted in fostering students' spiritual growth through religious activities in class. For instance, students read the Qur'an each morning before the start of class, recite asmaul husna and shalawat, engage in istighosyah, and participate in congregational prayers (R1).*

*I always give religious advice as a form of motivation and strive to be an example to students. In addition, during learning activities, I always remind students to strengthen their faith, pray diligently, and greet teachers when meeting them (R2).*

*I approach students by building open and flexible communication to create a comfortable classroom environment. After that, I convey religious messages about living as a student (R5).*

The results of the data analysis on teacher statements regarding aspects of teacher-student relationships that aim to develop student religiosity indicate the use of three teacher strategies. These strategies include guiding students, paying personal attention to student characteristics, and implementing educational sanctions. The following three statements provide further insight:

*I guide students to prioritize religiosity as a moral compass or constraint when engaging in activities that may contradict religious values. I strive to instill ethical and moral basics by promoting proper conduct and fostering a noble character within and outside school (R3).*

*In developing students' religiosity, I make a conscious effort to take note of their characteristics. By doing so, I am better equipped to support their religious growth. Additionally, I encourage their interests, whether related to school or personal pursuits (R4).*

*During interactions with students, I occasionally implement educational sanctions in response to their actions. For instance, sanctions may be imposed when students fail to participate in congregational prayer. The severity of the sanctions can vary from mild to severe, with the ultimate goal of promoting religious dedication among students (R6).*

Based on this data, teacher strategies for developing student religiosity are carried out in two ways: through the school's educational climate and teacher-student relationships or social interactions. Firstly, three strategies used by teachers were identified, namely developing habituation, being a role model, and creating a positive environment. In the second way, three strategies for developing student religiosity were found: guiding students, paying attention to student characteristics, and providing educational sanctions.

## Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the hypothesis that school climate affects students' religiosity is supported. The findings indicate that the theory of school climate influencing students' religiosity is valid. Specifically, students who perceive a more positive school climate tend to have stronger religious beliefs. Out of the five school climate factors examined, the educational climate and the relationship between teachers and students significantly impact students' religiosity. Teachers implement six strategies to promote student religiosity: fostering positive habits, serving as role models, cultivating a positive environment, guiding students, addressing individual traits, and using educational sanctions.

This research aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of school climate in shaping students' religious development. It has been found that a positive school climate is associated with increased religiosity among students (Cook-Cottone et al., 2017; Ihsan et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' religious beliefs within and beyond the classroom



(Imaduddin et al., 2022; Pronina, 2022). This study expands on previous research by providing insights into effective teaching methods for promoting religiosity.

From a behavioristic perspective, the influence of the school climate on student religiosity can be explained as a result of the formation of religious behavior and attitudes through the learning process in the school environment. A school climate that supports religious values, such as religious instruction, religious rituals, and norms that respect religion, can influence students by strengthening their religious responses (Muhandis et al., 2020; Tambak et al., 2023). When students experience positive reinforcement or reward for religious behavior or attitudes, they tend to be more active in practicing religion and internalizing these values. Conversely, if the school climate does not support religious aspects, students may be less likely to exhibit religious behavior (Aziz et al., 2022; Rizal & Rahmat, 2019; Salmia & Yusri, 2022). Therefore, behaviorism emphasizes the role of the environment in shaping students' religiosity through the learning process and behavioral reinforcement.

Schools play a vital role in fostering students' religiosity. The educational institution serves not only as a conduit for instilling religious values but also as an arena for cultivating a favorable environment that facilitates the development of religiosity (Hirsch-Luipold, 2019). The school provides a steady base for students to comprehend and honor religious values and investigate their personal beliefs. Teachers within schools play a significant role in guiding students and setting positive examples associated with religious values (Haracemiv, 2018; Herbstrith, 2020). Additionally, schools can serve as a location to facilitate religious activities, such as prayer or worship groups, which aid students in realizing their beliefs in their day-to-day lives.

Schools must adopt a holistic approach to various strategies to improve teachers' classroom management skills. Firstly, schools should provide ongoing training to teachers in classroom management, teaching strategies, and understanding student needs (Aziz, Mangestuti, et al., 2023; Feizuldayeva et al., 2018). Additionally, facilitating collaboration between teachers to share experiences and best practices is recommended (Äärelä, 2018; Alonso et al., 2017). Additionally, schools must offer comprehensive assistance to teachers by providing access to appropriate teaching materials and adequate educational technology (Downie et al., 2021; Naylor, 2018). Equally valuable is creating an atmosphere that encourages positive discipline, effective communication between educators, students, and parents, and recognition of teachers' achievements and contributions in effectively managing their classrooms (Aziz, Susilowati et al., 2023; Thompson, 2018). With this approach, schools can help teachers become more competent in managing classes and improving students' learning experiences.

The findings of this study have important implications for educational practice. Firstly, there is a need to enhance the integration of religious values into the curriculum, providing more comprehensive religious instruction or developing

educational programs incorporating religious aspects across different subjects (Ramakrishnan, 2015). Additionally, teachers should receive adequate training to understand and facilitate the development of students' religiosity. Educational institutions should offer impartial advice on ethical and spiritual principles (Amrulloh & Galushasti, 2022; Aziz & Mangestuti, 2023). Furthermore, schools should collaborate with families and communities to promote a balanced approach to cultivating students' religiosity (Aziz, Susilowati, et al., 2023; Syriopoulou-Delli, 2016). Therefore, the findings of this investigation lay the foundation for creating a welcoming academic atmosphere and addressing the spiritual needs of students.

Research findings showing that teachers strategically promote students' religiosity have significantly contributed to educational psychology. By identifying and analyzing the impact of the school climate, particularly teachers' support, on student religiosity, this study can provide valuable insights for Islamic educational psychologists. It can help them shape interventions and programs more effectively and suit the changing social landscape, emphasizing enhancing religiosity. Moreover, the discoveries of this study could contribute to promoting changes in social and cultural norms within schools, thereby creating a more supportive learning environment that fosters students' religious growth in educational institutions.

## CONCLUSION

This investigation demonstrated the importance of creating a supportive school environment to enhance students' religious development. Schools should incorporate religious education into their curriculum to help students better understand their faiths. Furthermore, teachers play a crucial role in fostering a positive environment. Therefore, schools should provide teachers opportunities to improve their skills and expertise. The study's results offer practical guidance that schools can use to establish a favorable atmosphere that promotes the growth of students' religious beliefs.

The limitation of the study is that it relies solely on student questionnaire data. Additionally, although the principal's impact on the success of the school's educational program is acknowledged, their role is not thoroughly examined. Further research should consider incorporating the principal's role as a research variable. The study has produced a theoretical finding that suggests a correlation between school climate and student religiosity; however, these findings need to be experimentally tested for verification.

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