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Effectiveness of Religious Extracurricular Activities in Enhancing Students' Spirituality: A Case Study of SMP Negeri 23 Makassar

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities in enhancing students' spirituality at SMP Negeri 23 Makassar. The background of this research lies in the phenomenon of students' low spiritual awareness and limited participation in religious activities, despite the presence of Islamic education in formal classes. The purpose of this study is to analyze how extracurricular programs can improve students' spiritual practices, moral behavior, and social awareness through structured non-formal education. A qualitative descriptive approach was applied, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving students, extracurricular mentors, Islamic education teachers, and school leaders. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing). The results show that activities such as Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, sermon training, and Islamic commemorations have significantly enhanced students' worship habits, discipline, politeness, and social concern. The active role of teacher-mentors as role models and the school's institutional support emerged as key factors for success, while limited time and unequal student participation remain challenges. In conclusion, religious extracurricular activities proved effective in enhancing students' spirituality, indicating that non-formal programs are essential to strengthen character education in inclusive public schools.

1. Introduction

Education does not merely function as a medium for knowledge transfer, but also serves as a means for shaping students' character and spirituality (Suraji & Sastrodiharjo, 2021). In this era of globalization and rapid advances in information technology, a phenomenon of moral degradation and a spiritual identity crisis is emerging among youth, including secondary school students (Hairiyah, Aida Hayani, 2022). Many students experience value disorientation, a decline in social

concern, and minimal participation in worship and religious activities (Kagame, 2022). This condition indicates that formal education in classrooms is not yet sufficient to form a holistic and integrated personality (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Therefore, additional intervention is needed through non-formal activities such as religious extracurricular programs (Suraji & Sastrodiharjo, 2021).

Religious extracurricular activities in schools have great potential to strengthen students' spiritual character due to their flexible, interactive, and contextual implementation (Lahmi et al., 2025a). These programs serve not only as spaces for worship but also as platforms for internalizing values of faith and piety (Lahmi et al., 2025a). Through activities such as religious study sessions, sermon practice, and the habit of congregational prayer, students are encouraged to internalize and practice religious values in their daily lives (Karlina, 2024). However, the success of such programs heavily depends on activity management, the quality of mentors, and institutional commitment (Hadi, 2020). Without careful planning and evaluation, these activities risk becoming mere administrative routines without significant transformational impact (İleritürk, 2023).

A common issue that arises is the lack of scientific studies evaluating the effectiveness of religious extracurricular programs. Many schools run these activities as routine supplements without assessing their actual impact on the enhancement of students' spirituality (Karlina, 2024). Moreover, the role of extracurricular mentors is often limited to administrative supervision and has not been optimized as agents of value transformation and spiritual role models (Fathan et al., 2024). In fact, interactions within extracurricular settings offer substantial opportunities for character building through personal and inspirational approaches (Sosiden & Viraek, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the strategic role of these activities in strengthening students' spiritual dimensions (Sadykova et al., 2018).

Previous studies tend to focus on classroom learning effectiveness or the impact of religious education within the formal curriculum (Lahmi et al., 2025b). Research on religious extracurricular activities, especially in inclusive public school settings, remains limited (Alfarikh et al., 2021). This creates a gap in the literature regarding how non-formal activities such as extracurricular programs can effectively serve as media for spiritual formation among students (Anton et al., 2025). Participation in extracurricular activities has been shown to contribute positively to character development (Firdaus et al., 2023). On the other hand, implementing such programs in public schools poses unique challenges due to the diverse backgrounds of students and limited time for activities (Hadi, 2020). Therefore, this study is relevant and important to enrich the scientific discourse on contextual Islamic education (Diana et al., 2024).

This study offers a new approach to assessing the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities through participatory narrative exploration from various stakeholders. Its novelty lies in positioning mentors not merely as facilitators, but as spiritual educators who shape students' religious habits and values through mentoring, habitual practice, and role modeling. The focus is not merely on

program implementation but also on the transformation of values that occurs throughout the process. Thus, this study positions extracurricular activities as strategic and meaningful educational spaces in enhancing students' spirituality.

In the context of SMP Negeri 23 Makassar, religious extracurricular programs have been formally integrated into school policy. However, there is still a lack of empirical data regarding their impact on students' spirituality. Therefore, this study is not only theoretically relevant but also practically valuable for providing policy recommendations and developing more effective programs. The public school context is particularly important because it reflects the diversity of students' backgrounds and the reality of formal education in Indonesia. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities in enhancing students' spirituality at SMP Negeri 23 Makassar, focusing on three dimensions: worship practices, moral and behavioral discipline, and social awareness.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to explore the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities in enhancing students' spirituality. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 23 Makassar during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of students actively involved in extracurricular activities, teacher-mentors, Islamic education teachers, and the school principal. Data were collected through direct observation of extracurricular programs, in-depth interviews, and documentation of school religious activities.

To determine effectiveness, three indicators were used:

1. Religious practices (consistency in prayer, Qur'an recitation, and participation in worship).
2. Moral and behavioral changes (discipline, politeness, honesty, and respect toward teachers and peers).
3. Social awareness (empathy, cooperation, and participation in religious events).

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves three main stages:

- Data Reduction: selecting and categorizing relevant data according to the research focus.
- Data Display: organizing the data into thematic categories, including enhancement of spirituality, implementation process, mentorship quality, and supporting or inhibiting factors.
- Conclusion Drawing: interpreting the findings by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the field data.

The trustworthiness of data was ensured through triangulation of sources (students, teachers, documents) and methods (observation, interviews, documentation), as well as member checking with key informants.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

At the time of the study, SMP Negeri 23 Makassar had a total of 878 students, distributed across three grade levels: 315 students in grade VII, 257 in grade VIII, and 306 in grade IX. The school implements the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes character building, independent learning, and the integration of academic knowledge with spiritual values. In daily practice, besides classroom learning, students actively participate in various non-formal activities, particularly religious extracurricular programs. Regular activities include Qur'an recitation before classes, dhuha and dhuhur congregational prayers, as well as involvement in major events such as the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid Nabi*) and Ramadan *pesantren kilat*.

Classroom observations revealed a high level of enthusiasm among most students in participating in religious activities, although a small portion remained less engaged. Islamic education teachers and extracurricular mentors play a crucial role in guiding students to integrate academic achievements with moral and spiritual development. Consequently, the overall school environment fosters a conducive religious atmosphere that supports the cultivation of students' spirituality. In addition to observations and documentation, interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with students, Islamic education teachers, extracurricular mentors, and the school principal.

This approach enabled the researcher to capture not only factual information but also personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by participants in implementing and participating in religious programs. The interviews highlighted the active role of teachers as spiritual role models, the enthusiasm of students in engaging with religious practices, and the institutional support provided by the school. These findings enriched the data by providing contextual understanding of how extracurricular activities contributed to students' spiritual, moral, and social development.

Table1. Interview Questions

No	Interview Questions
1	What is your opinion about the importance of religious extracurricular activities in school?
2	Which religious activities are most favored by students, and why?
3	To what extent do these activities influence students' daily worship practices?
4	What is the role of teachers or mentors in encouraging student participation?
5	What challenges are commonly encountered in implementing these religious activities?
6	What kinds of institutional support does the school provide for these programs?
7	How do students respond to social activities integrated with religious programs?
8	In your view, what improvements are needed to make these activities more effective in the future?

Data Reduction

The collected data from observations, interviews, and documentation were categorized into three thematic dimensions: religious practices, moral and behavioral changes, and social awareness. These themes were consistently mentioned across multiple sources, which confirmed their validity. For example, both students and teacher-mentors reported similar patterns of change after participation in extracurricular activities.

Data Display

a. **Enhancement of Religious Practices**

Initially, many students admitted that they often neglected daily prayers and only occasionally read the Qur'an. Observations also revealed that during the early stages of the program, some students joined group prayers merely out of formality, without deep engagement. However, after several months of consistent involvement in activities such as Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), congregational prayers, and religious study sessions, a visible improvement was noted. Students became more punctual in attending prayers, voluntarily led recitations, and demonstrated greater fluency in Qur'an reading. Interviews with parents also confirmed that students carried these practices into their homes, showing increased commitment to worship beyond school hours.

b. **Moral and Behavioral Changes**

A noticeable transformation occurred in students' discipline and ethical behavior. Mentors observed that students who previously displayed disobedience or frequently arrived late gradually showed more responsibility. For instance, during sermon practice (*khitabah*), students not only improved their public speaking skills but also learned to respect rules, take turns, and listen attentively to their peers. Teachers highlighted reduced incidents of conflicts and bullying, and instead, an improvement in honesty and cooperative behavior. Several students openly admitted during interviews that the mentoring provided by teachers encouraged them to avoid lying, respect school regulations, and practice patience.

c. **Social Awareness and Community Engagement**

Religious extracurricular activities also encouraged students to engage in collective and social practices. Participation in Islamic holiday commemorations, charity drives, and group Qur'an competitions cultivated a stronger sense of solidarity. Documentation records revealed that students became more active in voluntary service during Ramadan events, mosque clean-up activities, and organizing religious festivals. Both peers and teachers noticed an increased willingness among students to help friends in need, share learning materials, and contribute positively to group discussions. These patterns suggest that extracurricular programs not only affected individual spirituality but also promoted collective responsibility and empathy.

Conclusion Drawing

The integration of findings from multiple data sources clearly indicates that religious extracurricular activities are effective in enhancing students' spirituality across three interrelated domains:

- **Religious practices:** stronger commitment to prayer, Qur'an recitation, and worship routines.
- **Moral and behavioral changes:** improved discipline, honesty, politeness, and respect for others.
- **Social awareness:** greater empathy, cooperation, and active participation in religious and community programs.

This triangulated evidence highlights that extracurricular religious activities function as transformative spaces that foster both individual and social dimensions of spirituality. While challenges such as limited time allocation and uneven participation remain, the overall impact strongly demonstrates the effectiveness of these programs in shaping students' character and spiritual development.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that extracurricular religious activities have a significant role in the enhancement of students' spirituality. By applying Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, the results demonstrate clear patterns that emerged through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The effectiveness of these activities can be seen across three main dimensions: religious practices, moral and behavioral changes, and social awareness. First, the enhancement of religious practices confirms that consistent engagement in Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, and sermon training has strengthened students' spiritual routines both in school and at home. This finding supports Karlina (2024), who argues that structured religious activities improve students' commitment to worship and reduce the gap between formal religious education and daily practice. From a pedagogical perspective, repeated exposure and habituation in religious rituals are essential in developing spiritual consciousness, which resonates with the theory of character formation in Islamic education.

Second, the improvement in moral and behavioral attitudes indicates that extracurricular religious programs provide not only knowledge but also direct moral training. Students' enhanced discipline, honesty, and politeness suggest that learning takes place not merely cognitively but also behaviorally. This supports Firdaus et al., (2023), who found that teacher mentorship in religious activities serves as a powerful influence in cultivating students' ethical behavior. These results are also consistent with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of observation and modeling. In this case, teacher-mentors and peers act as role models, and students imitate their positive behaviors in daily school life.

Third, the findings highlight the role of extracurricular programs in fostering social awareness. Students became more empathetic, cooperative, and active in religious

community events, such as charity drives and Islamic holiday commemorations. This reflects Alfariikh et al. (2021), who reported that extracurricular religious activities foster solidarity and a sense of collective responsibility among students. The social dimension of spirituality is crucial in preparing students not only to be religiously observant individuals but also to become socially responsible citizens.

The overall effectiveness of the program can be explained by three supporting factors: (1) the active involvement of teacher-mentors who provide guidance and role modeling, (2) institutional support from the school that ensures program continuity, and (3) student enthusiasm and voluntary participation. However, some challenges were also noted, such as limited time allocation, unequal participation, and the absence of systematic training for mentors. These limitations echo İleritürk (2023), who emphasized that the sustainability and impact of extracurricular programs depend on adequate planning, resource allocation, and structured evaluation.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that extracurricular religious activities are not peripheral but central to the holistic development of students' spirituality. They bridge the gap between formal Islamic education and daily practice, while simultaneously cultivating moral discipline and social responsibility. Therefore, extracurricular programs should be recognized as a strategic component of character education, especially in inclusive public schools where students face diverse social and cultural challenges. The participatory nature of these activities provides students with opportunities to be actively involved not just as participants but also as organizers.

This nurtures a sense of responsibility and increases students' emotional engagement with the program. This approach corresponds with the findings of (Alfariikh et al., 2021), who emphasized that the internalization of religious character values is more effective when students are given active roles in religious school activities. In this context, non-formal activities such as extracurricular programs become an essential medium for developing the affective and spiritual dimensions of students, which are often underrepresented in formal classroom instruction.

However, the effectiveness of these activities is strongly influenced by the quality of the mentors and the management of the programs. Supervising teachers who serve as role models in religious behavior and who are capable of fostering good communication with students tend to be more successful in creating a positive spiritual climate. This is supported by the findings of (Firdaus et al., 2023), who stated that teachers actively engaged in spiritual mentoring significantly impact the strengthening of students' character. Nonetheless, challenges remain, particularly in terms of limited time availability, the lack of specialized training for mentors, and the diversity of students' religious backgrounds which require adaptive mentoring strategies.

Overall, the results of this study support Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. In

the context of religious extracurricular activities, students emulate the religious behaviors of their teachers and peers who are actively involved in spiritual practices. This process fosters the gradual formation of spiritual attitudes and values. Furthermore, the habituation of worship and interactions within religious activities encourages affective and reflective internalization of values. This aligns with character education approaches based on habituation and experiential learning.

Thus, it can be concluded that religious extracurricular activities play a strategic role in supporting students' character and spiritual education, particularly in inclusive public school settings. It is essential to improve the capacity of supervising teachers and optimize institutional support to ensure that the program is implemented more effectively, measurably, and sustainably. This study offers a valuable contribution to the literature on contextual Islamic education and can serve as a reference for school policy development based on religious and spiritual values.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities in enhancing students' spirituality at SMP Negeri 23 Makassar. Grounded in Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing the study revealed that extracurricular programs are effective in addressing the problem of students' low spiritual awareness. The findings show that effectiveness can be seen in three main dimensions. First, religious practices were strengthened, as students became more consistent in performing prayers, Qur'an recitation, and other acts of worship. Second, moral and behavioral changes were evident in their increased discipline, politeness, honesty, and responsibility toward teachers and peers. Third, social awareness was enhanced through participation in collective religious activities that promoted empathy, cooperation, and solidarity.

These results confirm that extracurricular religious activities, supported by teacher mentorship and institutional commitment, provide a transformative non-formal strategy for spiritual formation. While limited time and unequal participation remain as challenges, the overall impact demonstrates that extracurricular programs are essential in fostering students' character and spirituality. In conclusion, strengthening religious extracurricular activities represents an effective and practical approach to addressing the problem of low spirituality in inclusive public schools.

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