



Building Nationalist-Religious Character through Mosque Youth Organizations: Insights from Senior High Schools in Bandung, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: Character education is a strategic agenda in Indonesia's nation-building, particularly in responding to globalization, moral degradation, and youth intolerance. Within secondary education, religious extracurricular organizations such as the Mosque Youth Association (*Ikatan Remaja Masjid*) play a vital role in fostering religiosity while strengthening nationalism. This study investigates the role of the Mosque Youth Association in cultivating nationalist-religious character among students in three high schools in Bandung.

Methodology: Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and field notes. Seventeen respondents were selected purposively: school principals, association mentors, leaders, members, government officials, and academic experts. Data analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing validated through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time.

Main Findings: The findings indicate that the Mosque Youth Association functions as a behavioral laboratory, shaping students' nationalist-religious character through regular activities such as religious studies, congregational prayers, social service, and leadership training. Consistent habit formation occurs through positive reinforcement (recognition, trust, leadership opportunities) and negative reinforcement (warnings, social sanctions). Key challenges include fluctuating participation, limited resources, repetitive content, and digital demands addressed through program innovation, collaboration, and technology use.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The study concludes that character development through the Mosque Youth Association aligns with behavioristic learning theory and provides insights for reinforcement-based character education compatible with the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education in the current era of globalisation is increasingly occupying a strategic position in national education policy [1], [2]. Along with the rapid flow of globalisation marked by developments in information technology, social media, and the penetration of popular culture, Indonesia's younger generation faces various complex challenges [3], [4]. On the one hand, globalisation opens up great opportunities for the younger generation to access knowledge, expand their networks, and improve their 21st-century competencies.

However, on the other hand, globalisation also has negative impacts in the form of moral degradation, high individualism, consumptive behaviour, and increased intolerance and radicalism among students. This situation is exacerbated by an identity crisis among teenagers who are vulnerable to the influence of transnational ideologies that often separate or even pit religiosity against nationalism [5], [6].

Various studies and reports from national institutions indicate the urgent need to strengthen character education. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission suggests that there are still high rates of gang fights, drug abuse, and bullying among secondary school students [7]. The Setara Institute also reports a tendency toward intolerance among some students, both in the form of rejection of interfaith activities and exclusive attitudes toward friends of different faiths. This phenomenon shows that even though formal education includes religious and Pancasila lessons, student character building still needs additional space that is more applicable, participatory, and contextual. In this situation, non-formal education and extracurricular activities become essential media that can complement the shortcomings of the formal curriculum in schools [8], [9].

Religious extracurricular programs, which have the potential to play a strategic role, are often only used as a forum for spiritual development and religious rituals without being linked to the formation of national identity [10], [11]. The activities of the Mosque Youth Association usually include regular studies, thematic discussions, leadership training, Islamic holidays, social community actions, and the use of digital media as a means of preaching. The Mosque Youth Association provides a space for students to learn to lead, organise activities, and familiarise themselves with religious practices [14], [15]. From a character education perspective, the Mosque Youth Association functions as a moral laboratory where students can internalise the values of religiosity and nationalism in real life, not just theoretical knowledge.

Previous studies have shown the contribution of student religious organizations in shaping students' religious and moral attitudes. For example, research has found that school mosque youth organizations play a role in increasing students' religious observance and morals [16]. Also confirmed that Mosque Youth Associations effectively foster students' religious character through socio-religious activities. In Indonesia, many studies have been conducted on character education in secondary schools, but most still focus on the dimensions of religiosity or nationalism separately [17]. For example, some studies highlight the role of religious education in instilling spiritual values, while other studies discuss the importance of nationalistic extracurricular activities such as Scouting in strengthening national identity [18]. Unfortunately, studies that integrate these two aspects are still minimal. Research that examines explicitly the *Ikatan Remaja Masjid* (Mosque Youth Association) mainly highlights religious elements, such as increasing understanding of worship, solidarity among fellow Muslims, or developing religious leadership. Only a few studies have linked the role of the Mosque Youth Association with the formation of an inclusive and nationalistic character. In fact, the issue of separation or even conflict between religion and the state is one of the crucial issues in the discourse on Indonesian nationality [19], [20].

This gap is both an academic gap and an opportunity for this research to contribute. International literature on character education also shows that integrating religious and national values remains challenging in many multicultural countries. Some countries with predominantly religious populations often face the same dilemma: how to build a national identity without sacrificing religious identity, or vice versa. In the context of Indonesia, where religion and nationalism have historically gone hand in hand since the independence movement era, the integration of the two should be the foundation of character education. Unfortunately, to date, there have not been many conceptual models or empirical studies that examine the best practices of this integration at the secondary school level.

This study offers novelty by examining the *Ikatan Remaja Masjid* (Mosque Youth Association) as a character education space that integrates religious and nationalistic dimensions. Using a multi-case study approach in three different high schools in Bandung this study presents a comparative perspective that enriches the analysis. The selection of three schools with different backgrounds (public schools, vocational schools, and madrasas) allows researchers to observe the dynamics of the Mosque Youth Association in various institutional and cultural contexts. This provides essential contributions, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study expands the concept of character education by emphasizing the synergy between nationalism and religiosity in the framework of religious extracurricular activities. This study offers a model of student development based on the *Ikatan Remaja Masjid* that can be replicated or modified by other schools in Indonesia, and even in countries with similar multicultural contexts.

The justification for this research can also be seen from its contribution to national education policy. Through Strengthening Character Education, the Indonesian government has emphasized the importance of five core values: religious, nationalistic, independent, mutual cooperation, and integrity. However, implementing this policy has often not found an ideal format at the school level. The results of this study are expected to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities in realizing the synergy between religious and nationalistic values. Furthermore, this study also has implications for strengthening student development policies that are not only academically oriented but also develop soft skills, leadership, and national commitment.

Based on this background, this study was formulated to answer several essential questions: What is the role of religious extracurricular activities, notably the Mosque Youth Association, in shaping the nationalist-religious character of students in secondary schools? What factors support or hinder the effectiveness of the Mosque Youth Association in carrying out its character education function? How does the internalization of religious and nationalist values occur in the practice of the Mosque Youth Association in secondary schools? These questions are the focus of this study and will be answered through a case study approach in three different schools in the city of Bandung.

The main objective of this study is to describe and analyze in depth the role of the Mosque Youth Association in nationalist-religious character education among secondary school students. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the mechanisms, strategies, and practices the Mosque Youth Association applied in internalizing religious and nationalist values to its members. In addition, this study also aims to provide practical and theoretical recommendations that can enrich the character education model based on religious extracurricular activities. Thus, this study's results are expected to contribute to the development of academic literature and provide concrete input for education policymakers, schools, and practitioners in the field.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-case study design, as the issue of nationalist-religious character education is a complex social phenomenon that requires in-depth exploration of meanings, experiences, and interactions among actors. The case study design enabled the researchers to investigate intensively the dynamics of the Mosque Youth Association in three different types of secondary schools in Bandung: SMAN 18 (public senior high school), SMKN 12 (vocational high school), and MA Nurul Iman (Islamic senior high school).

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) having direct involvement in the Mosque Youth Association (as principals, advisors, leaders, or members), (2) representing policymaking or educational authority (officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Regional Education Office), and (3) possessing academic expertise in character education. In total, 17 respondents participated: three principals, three advisors, three student leaders, three student members, one official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, one official from the Regional Education Office, and three academic experts—this variation of informants allowed for data triangulation across multiple perspectives.

Although this study adopts a qualitative case study approach, the analysis was guided by three primary constructs that served as the conceptual variables of the research: religiosity, nationalism, and character formation. Religiosity refers to students' understanding, practice, and internalization of religious values manifested through congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, religious studies, and Islamic holiday celebrations. Nationalism denotes students' sense of belonging and commitment to the nation, which is reflected in discipline, cooperation, participation in flag ceremonies, social service projects, and tolerance toward peers of different backgrounds. Character formation represents the integration of religiosity and nationalism, operationalized as consistent behavioral patterns, leadership roles, and the ability to embody moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in daily school and community contexts. These constructs were translated into interview indicators that explored how principals, advisors, leaders, and Mosque Youth Association members perceive and enact character development processes. The study ensures theoretical rigor and contextual relevance by aligning the variables with established theories—such as Lickona's framework of character education, behavioristic learning theory, and Social Identity Theory.

Table 1. Interview Instrument Table

Respondent Category	Interview Question Indicators
School Principals	- School policies related to character education
	- Institutional support for Mosque Youth Association
	- Perspectives on the synergy between religiosity and nationalism in schools
Mosque Youth Association Advisors	- Strategies for mentoring Mosque Youth Association
	- Routine activities that foster nationalist-religious character
	- Challenges in guiding Mosque Youth Association members
Mosque Youth Association Leaders	- Leadership role in mobilizing the organization
	- Mosque Youth Association programs emphasizing religious and nationalist values
	- Relationship between Mosque Youth Association, the school, and the community
Mosque Youth Association Members	- Personal experiences in Mosque Youth Association activities
	- Changes in religious and nationalist attitudes after joining

Respondent Category	Interview Question Indicators
Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials (Bandung Office)	- Perceptions of Mosque Youth Association's role in daily life - The Ministry's role in supporting Mosque Youth Association in schools - National policies on strengthening character education - Challenges in implementing nationalist-religious character education - Education office support for religious extracurricular activities
Regional Education Office Officials (Branch VII)	- Relevance of Mosque Youth Association in the context of character education policy - Evaluation of Mosque Youth Association's effectiveness - Theoretical perspectives on integrating religiosity and nationalism - Relevance of Mosque Youth Association as a character education practice
Academics/Character Education Experts	- Potential development of a conceptual model based on Mosque Youth Association

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which is widely recognized as a rigorous strategy for qualitative research. This model was selected because it allows for a cyclical and iterative process of meaning-making, enabling researchers to refine interpretations as new insights emerge from the field continuously. The analysis consisted of three interconnected stages. First, data reduction was conducted by transcribing all interviews, coding significant statements, and categorizing them into thematic clusters such as institutional support, mentoring strategies, student experiences, and challenges of the Mosque Youth Association. Second, data display was carried out by organizing themes into matrices, charts, and narrative summaries, which facilitated the identification of relationships and patterns across cases. Third, conclusion drawing and verification involved interpreting the findings, cross-checking emerging themes with multiple sources, and aligning the results with theoretical frameworks such as behavioristic learning theory, Lickona's character education, and Social Identity Theory. To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, triangulation of sources, methods, and time was employed, alongside member checking and peer debriefing. Unlike statistical approaches such as SmartPLS or AMOS, which are used in quantitative hypothesis testing, this study relied on qualitative thematic analysis to construct contextualized and theory-informed insights into how nationalist-religious character is developed through the activities of the Mosque Youth Association.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Approaches and Methods of Youth Mosque Association Development

The study's results show that the Mosque Youth Association at Senior High School 18 Bandung, Vocational High School 12 Bandung, and Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman Bandung use various approaches in guiding students. The main activities include thematic studies, problem-solving discussions, congregational prayers, social projects, leadership training, and simple digital innovations. From a behavioristic perspective, each activity serves as a repeated stimulus, eliciting a response in the form of changes in student behavior.

At Senior High School 18, the mentors emphasize the methods of problem-solving discussions and studies based on verses from the Qur'an and hadiths on morals. According to Fahmi, a counselor at the Senior High School 18 Bandung Mosque Youth Association, "the methods used are problem-solving discussions and thematic studies. In the discussions, students are allowed to raise religious issues they face, which are then discussed together to find solutions. "Thematic studies are conducted by examining selected verses from the Qur'an and hadith related to morals, so that members not only gain theoretical knowledge but also practical understanding that can be applied in their daily lives" [21]. These discussions and studies are stimuli that train students to respond to religious issues rationally and ethically.

This problem-solving discussion method aligns with the cognitive domain in Bloom's taxonomy [22], in which students receive knowledge and are trained to analyze and solve problems. Thematic studies related to daily life show the integration of the cognitive and affective domains, as students are expected to understand the teachings and feel them as moral guidelines. In other words, the guidance provided by the Mosque Youth Association at Senior High School 18 reflects the holistic learning model proposed by Gane [23], emphasizing the importance of learning conditions that combine knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

At Vocational High School 12 Bandung, the coach emphasizes a broader variety of activities, including weekly studies, discussions, involvement in hadroh, and social activities in the community. Egi, the advisor of the Vocational High School 12 Bandung Mosque Youth Association, explained that "the Mosque Youth

Association is also active in carrying out social projects, such as the involvement of the Mosque Youth Association's hadroh group in community activities, ranging from celebrations, PHBI, to events at other schools. Meanwhile, leadership training is conducted at least twice a year at the beginning and end of the period" [24]. These social projects are external stimuli that train students' social behavior. The response is an increase in empathy, cooperation, and social skills.

Meanwhile, Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman's coaching method integrates discussion, leadership, and the pesantren approach. The principal, Mohammad Fuad Syafi'i, emphasizes the importance of integrating religiosity and nationalism through religious moderation: "The integration of religious values and nationalism is carried out simultaneously, through an understanding of religious moderation as promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs" [25]. Stimuli in the form of religious moderation teachings are repeatedly given, so the students' response is one of tolerance and nationalism. When viewed from Skinner's behavioristic theory [26], the *Ikatan Remaja Masjid* uses positive reinforcement in the form of symbolic rewards (the opportunity to lead prayers, become an imam, be trusted in the committee) and negative reinforcement in the form of reprimands or consequences for violating discipline.

This pattern of stimulus–response–reinforcement fosters religious and nationalistic behavior. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory Tajfel and Turner, the Mosque Youth Association's coaching method forms a dual identity in students [27]. Students internalize a religious identity through study and worship, while building a nationalist identity through social activities, leadership, and national ceremonies. This dual identity is not contradictory but rather mutually reinforcing, as demonstrated by the activities of the Mosque Youth Association, which combine prayer in flag ceremonies with religious recitation. These findings are in line with the research by Zilhadia et al, which found that mosque youth organizations play a significant role in fostering students' religious character through worship and social activities [28]. However, this study expands on these findings by emphasizing that the Mosque Youth Association also functions as an arena for integrating nationalism, which has not been studied in depth.

In addition to study methods, discussions, and social projects, the Mosque Youth Association also emphasizes leadership development. Monica, Chair of the Mosque Youth Association at Senior High School 18, said: "The Mosque Youth Association holds Mabit (*Malam Bina Iman dan Taqwa* or Night of Faith and Piety), which is designed to provide understanding and experience of Islamic leadership" [29]. This experiential learning approach aligns with Kolb's idea that effective learning occurs when students experience, reflect on, and practice values [30]. At Vocational High School 12, leadership activities are held twice a year. Egi explained that this is intended to teach students how to manage organizations, create programs, and lead activities [30]. Meanwhile, at Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman, leadership is built through deliberation and consensus in planning programs, which reflects the implementation of the fourth principle of Pancasila democracy [31]. This approach shows that the Mosque Youth Association focuses on religiosity and shapes civic and leadership skills. In other words, the Mosque Youth Association is a forum for integrative character learning, in line with the vision of the Pancasila Student Profile, which requires students to be faithful, pious, noble, globally diverse, and cooperative.

The findings reveal that the Mosque Youth Association in Senior High School 18, Vocational High School 12, and Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman Bandung strategically shapes students' nationalist-religious character. Activities such as Qur'anic studies, congregational prayers, leadership training, social projects, and national ceremonies are repeated stimuli that condition students' behaviors toward religiosity and nationalism.

Results of the Implementation of Nationalist-Religious Character Education

The study's results show that the existence of the Mosque Youth Association in the three schools significantly impacts students' religious and nationalist character. This character manifests itself in obedience in worship, improved morals, tolerance, discipline, and active involvement in social and national activities. At Senior High School 18 Bandung, the change in the religious behavior of the Mosque Youth Association members was quite noticeable. The principal, Dani Wardani, emphasized that "students who are active in the Mosque Youth Association tend to exhibit better behavior, are trusted by their friends, and have a more disciplined attitude. Members of the Mosque Youth Association are usually appointed to religious activities such as short Islamic boarding schools or Ramadan, because they are considered capable exemplary" [32]. This is a form of Thorndike's, habit formation: repeated behavior that produces positive consequences (trust from teachers and friends) will tend to be maintained [33]. Fahmi, advisor to the Senior High School 18 Mosque Youth Association, also added that members of the Mosque Youth Association "are more obedient in worship, especially in congregational prayers at the mosque when noon arrives. In terms of character, they are more polite in their speech and maintain better ethics than students who are not active" [21]. From a behaviorist perspective, the stimulus of habitual congregational prayer and the example set by teachers shape the response of discipline and politeness. This is also in line with Lickona's, character education theory, which emphasizes that moral action, in this case the habit of praying in congregation, will foster moral feeling in the form of religious

awareness, which is then internalized into moral knowing in the form of an understanding of religious values [34]. Thus, the Mosque Youth Association plays a role as a place to learn about religion and as an arena for habituating moral values in everyday life.

Members of the Mosque Youth Association themselves confirm this impact. Rafi, a Senior High School 18 Mosque Youth Association member, stated that he felt a significant change after being active in the Mosque Youth Association: "The guidance of the Mosque Youth Association teaches how to be civilized, behave well, and maintain good character in daily life. This impact is felt not only by members and other students who are involved in or witness the activities of the Mosque Youth Association" [35]. This change occurs due to repeated conditioning, in which moral values are consistently practiced in the activities of the Mosque Youth Association.

At Vocational High School 12 Bandung, the role of the Mosque Youth Association is also evident in shaping students' religiosity. Egi, the advisor of the Mosque Youth Association, stated that "the impact is very significant for members of the Mosque Youth Association. They clearly differ from students who do not participate, especially regarding religiosity such as praying and reciting the Quran" [24]. Riski, a Vocational High School 12 Mosque Youth Association member, shared a similar experience: "There has been a significant change. For example, *Ikatan Remaja Mesjid* (IRMA) members are more active in calling the azan, participating in congregational prayers, and showing tolerance towards friends of different religions" [36]. From Pavlov's, behavioristic framework, regular involvement in religious activities functions as conditioning, so that responses in the form of religious behavior become automatic [37].

From a moral perspective, the Mosque Youth Association encourages students to be more polite, disciplined, and respectful of teachers and peers. This is evident in the statement by the Acting Principal of Vocational High School 12, Dedeh Lesmanawati: "Students who are active in the Mosque Youth Association generally demonstrate better religious attitudes, such as discipline in worship, concern for environmental cleanliness, and polite behavior towards teachers and friends" [38]. This is consistent with Skinner's concept of operant conditioning: disciplined and polite behavior is maintained because it receives social reinforcement through recognition and appreciation from the environment.

At Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman, the formed religious character is even stronger because of the supportive boarding school environment. Maula Siti Hamidah, Chair of the Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman Mosque Youth Association, explains that "active students will become more disciplined, especially in religious matters such as worship and behavior" [39]. Rastri, a member of the Mosque Youth Association, added that "students who are active in IRMA tend to have more religious, disciplined, and responsible behavior. They are also more sensitive to their social environment" [40].

The Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman Mosque Youth Association advisor, Yasril Ahmad Syairazi, emphasized the same impact: "Students are disciplined in worship and have social sensitivity towards their environment. Because I teach the Mosque Youth Association in the classroom and apply religious and nationalistic values in everyday life" [31]. Stimuli from advisors in the form of encouragement, role models, and worship routines shape responses in the form of tangible social concern. These findings confirm that the Mosque Youth Association functions as an arena for internalizing values and strengthening students' moral feelings, as theorized by Lickona [34].

In addition to religiosity, the Mosque Youth Association also contributes to the formation of a nationalist character. One of the most tangible forms of this is discipline and cooperation. Monica, Chair of the Senior High School 18 Mosque Youth Association, stated that "the contribution of the Mosque Youth Association is evident through cooperation activities, such as cleaning the mosque and school environment. Regarding discipline, members are accustomed to maintaining neatness and order" [29]. Dani, Principal of Senior High School 18, stated this, who assessed that the school cleanliness program is a form of real nationalism relevant to the times [32]. Cooperation is a social stimulus that fosters a response in the form of cooperation and solidarity, in line with the values of nationalism.

At Vocational High School 12, the involvement of the Mosque Youth Association in national activities is also significant. Egi emphasized that "the Mosque Youth Association contributes greatly to instilling nationalism, both through discipline in flag ceremonies, involvement in August 17 celebrations, and their readiness to be involved in various school activities" [24]. Riski confirmed this by mentioning that he often serves as the prayer leader in flag ceremonies [36]. This nationalistic behavior is reinforced through symbolic reinforcement in the form of trust to serve as ceremony leaders or school activity committee members.

At Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman, the contribution of the Mosque Youth Association to nationalism is manifested through an understanding of religious moderation. Fuad, Principal of Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman, emphasized that "religious moderation promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is a gateway to instilling nationalism. Students who understand differences as a blessing are better prepared to maintain unity" [25]. This approach aligns with social identity theory [41], which states that religious group identity can contribute to national identity if framed in an inclusive narrative. Stimuli in the form of moderation material were given repeatedly, so that responses in the form of tolerant and nationalistic attitudes were formed consistently.

In general, these results show that the Mosque Youth Association has succeeded in integrating religiosity and nationalism in student character building. This confirms that the two are not conflicting values, but can go hand in hand. As emphasized by Prof. Mupid from UPI, “religion and nationalism are basically never in conflict, but rather complement each other. Religious values actually encourage the creation of love for the homeland” [42]. The findings of this study reinforce the argument that the Mosque Youth Association acts as a moral laboratory in secondary schools. By combining worship habits, social action, leadership, and national activities, the Mosque Youth Association fulfills the three dimensions of character moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action [43]-[45]. From Bloom's taxonomy perspective, the Mosque Youth Association simultaneously activates the three cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning domains. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, the Mosque Youth Association forms a harmonious dual identity: religious and nationalist.

The study identifies three mechanisms of internalization: (1) habituation through routine religious practices, (2) experiential learning through leadership and social projects, and (3) reinforcement through recognition and sanctions. These mechanisms correspond with Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), where students learn by experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and applying values. This confirms that character formation is not limited to cognitive understanding but extends to affective and behavioral domains, resonating with Bloom's taxonomy and Lickona's three dimensions of moral knowing, feeling, and action.

Challenges and Efforts of the Mosque Youth Association in Nationalist-Religious Character Education

Although the Mosque Youth Association is effective, it faces several challenges. From a behavioral perspective, the main challenges are inconsistent stimuli and weak reinforcement. These challenges affect the consistency, quality, and scope of the Mosque Youth Association's activities in the three schools. However, coaches, administrators, and school support also make various efforts to find solutions to these obstacles.

Internal Obstacles

One of the most dominant obstacles is the fluctuation in member participation. Many students join the Mosque Youth Association at the beginning of the school year with high enthusiasm, but are not consistent in attending routine activities. Riski, a Vocational High School 12 Mosque Youth Association member, says, “student participation is considered low... some students often use excuses for not being active, even though the administrators have often provided motivation” [36]. This condition causes the stimulus not to be repeated consistently, so the behavioral response is not formed optimally. This participation problem is also acknowledged by Rastri, a member of the Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman Mosque Youth Association, who said that “there are still many who are less active because they consider religious activities to be accommodated in class and at the Islamic boarding school” [40].

Another obstacle is boredom due to the repetition of material. Yasril, advisor to the Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman Mosque Youth Association, said, “Some of the material presented, especially related to religion, is already accommodated in classroom and Islamic boarding school learning, so they feel bored” [31]. This condition shows an overlap between the formal curriculum and extracurricular activities, so the Mosque Youth Association must innovate so that it is not considered merely repeating religious lessons. In behaviorism, this shows that the stimuli are not varied enough, causing boredom.

From the perspective of learning motivation theory, this obstacle reflects the low intrinsic motivation of students towards religious activities that are considered routine. Learning will be effective if it can trigger internal conditions such as attention, active involvement, and relevance to students' needs [46]-[48]. The Mosque Youth Association, which only repeats material without innovation, risks failing to maintain students' intrinsic motivation. Therefore, Mosque Youth Association advisors must provide various methods, for example, through problem-based learning or digital preaching.

External Obstacles

In addition to internal factors, the Mosque Youth Association also faces external obstacles, particularly related to limited funds and facilities. Akasyah, Chair of the Vocational High School 12 Mosque Youth Association, said, “The main challenge is limited funds, which makes it difficult to implement large programs or bring in external speakers”. Mrs. Ida also reinforces this obstacle from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bandung City, who admits that “financial support for the Mosque Youth Association in schools is still minimal because there is no specific budget allocation” [49].

Another obstacle is obtaining permission for external activities. Monica, Chair of the Senior High School 18 Mosque Youth Association, said that “the Mosque Youth Association sometimes has difficulty obtaining permission from the school when it wants to hold activities outside, so external programs do not always go according to plan” [29]. This situation shows that there are limitations on the activities of student organizations, even though the planned activities are positive.

In addition, technological developments and youth lifestyles also pose challenges. Prof. Mupid from UPI emphasized that “digital learning is seen as inevitable, given that today’s young generation is very connected to the digital world. The challenge is how to prevent digital algorithms from shaping the wrong character” [42]. This shows that the Mosque Youth Association faces a significant challenge in competing with the flow of digital information, often not in line with religious and nationalist values.

Efforts to Overcome Obstacles

To overcome participation obstacles, the advisors of the Mosque Youth Association tried to adjust the activity schedule so that it did not conflict with academic activities. Egi, advisor at Vocational High School 12, explained: “I proposed a change in the schedule so that compulsory and optional extracurricular activities did not clash. For example, the activities of the Mosque Youth Association are held on Fridays after Friday prayers so that they do not conflict with other schedules” [24]. This schedule adjustment is a form of structural innovation to maintain member participation.

Various Mosque Youth Associations have begun trying innovative programs to overcome boredom. Rafi from Senior High School 18 mentioned that the Mosque Youth Association created “da’wah poster content that was shared through the official Instagram account of the Mosque Youth Association ... as a form of creative da’wah that reaches a wider audience”. At Islamic Senior High School Nurul Iman, Yasril added that there was “online da’wah training and Arabic language learning”. These innovations align with the needs of Generation Z, who are more familiar with digital media.

In overcoming financial constraints, several schools encourage partnerships with external parties. Andre from Cadisdik Region VII explained that his party encourages schools to collaborate with the Koramil, Polsek, or community institutions so that the activities of the Mosque Youth Association receive facility support [50]. This shows a quadruple helix pattern in which schools collaborate with the community, government, and religious organizations to support student development. Thus, from a behaviorist perspective, the challenges of the *Ikatan Remaja Masjid* can be addressed by strengthening varied stimuli, consistent habits, and positive reinforcement that are more relevant to the needs of Generation Z.

From a theoretical point of view, these efforts demonstrate a process of problem solving and organizational adaptation as described in the POACE (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling, Evaluating) model recommended by Prof. Mupid. The *Ikatan Remaja Masjid*, as a student organization, learns to identify problems, plan solutions, implement innovations, control the course of activities, and conduct evaluations. Thus, the Mosque Youth Association is a forum for character building and a place to learn contextual organizational management [51].

The findings of this study reinforce the behavioristic principle that character education is essentially a change in observable behavior [28]. The Mosque Youth Association successfully utilizes routine stimuli (congregational prayers, cooperation, flag ceremonies) to shape positive responses in discipline, tolerance, religiosity, and nationalism. Reinforcement through positive and negative reinforcement has been proven effective [52]. Consistency in repetition forms habits according to [53]. The process of repeated conditioning demonstrates [54] mechanism in the formation of religious behavior. The integration of behaviorism with Social Identity Theory [55] explains how the behavioral changes formed by IRMA are not only individual but also build students’ social identity as a religious-nationalist group. Meanwhile, framework helps us see that there are interrelated moral dimensions of knowing, feeling, and action behind behavioral change [56]-[61]. Thus, the Mosque Youth Association is a behavioristic laboratory that implants stimuli, reinforces responses, and maintains behavioral consistency through reinforcement. The result is the formation of students who are both religious and nationalistic.

Practically, the findings imply that schools should allocate greater institutional support and resources to strengthen the role of Mosque Youth Associations as partners in character education aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Teachers and advisors can employ pedagogical strategies—including digital-based learning and problem-solving discussions—to maintain students’ intrinsic motivation. For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of integrating extracurricular religious organizations into national education policy frameworks, ensuring sustainable funding and programmatic innovation.

This study is limited by its scope, which focuses on three schools in Bandung; generalizing to other regions or contexts is less specific. Participation levels among respondents also fluctuated, which may affect the comprehensiveness of the data. Additionally, as a qualitative case study, the research does not provide measurable statistical outcomes but rather thematic insights. Future research should address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies to track behavioral changes over time, employing mixed-methods approaches to combine qualitative depth with quantitative measurement, and expanding the context to other regions or faith-based youth organizations for comparative insights.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms the strategic role of the Mosque Youth Association as a behavioristic laboratory of character education, where religiosity and nationalism are simultaneously cultivated through repeated practices, experiential activities, and reinforcement mechanisms. Across three Bandung secondary schools, the findings demonstrate that religious activities (e.g., Qur'anic studies, congregational prayers), social projects, and leadership training provide consistent stimuli that shape students' nationalist-religious behaviors. Positive reinforcement in the form of recognition and trust, alongside corrective sanctions, sustains these behaviors and embeds them as habits.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by advancing an integrated model of character education that unites behavioristic learning theory, experiential learning, and Social Identity Theory. It extends prior research that treated religiosity and nationalism separately, showing that both values can be harmonized in a single pedagogical arena. This conceptualization enriches international debates on character education in multicultural societies, where identity conflicts between religion and nation often arise. Practically, the findings underline the potential of religious extracurricular organizations as partners in achieving the Pancasila Student Profile and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Schools are encouraged to provide institutional support, financial resources, and innovative programming to strengthen the role of Mosque Youth Associations. Policymakers should recognize these organizations within formal education policy frameworks, ensuring alignment between extracurricular activities and national character-building agendas.

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