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FROM PARTICIPATION TO INTERNALIZATION THROUGH MOSQUE-BASED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND RELIGIOUS CHARACTER FORMATION

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menyintesis bentuk keterlibatan pemuda dalam kegiatan berbasis masjid, mekanisme internalisasi nilai keagamaan, serta bukti pembentukan karakter religius. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan *integrative literature review* dengan identifikasi literatur secara bertahap dan berbasis topik, evaluasi kritis, serta sintesis tematik deduktif dan induktif terhadap 23 studi empiris terpilih. Satu artikel kajian terdahulu digunakan sebagai pembanding kontribusi penelitian, bukan sebagai sumber bukti empiris tambahan. Hasil sintesis mengidentifikasi empat tema: partisipasi dari kehadiran menuju agensi pemuda; mekanisme pembelajaran melalui pengaruh teman sebaya, mentoring, keteladanan, pembiasaan, dan refleksi; kondisi kelembagaan yang mendukung atau membatasi keterlibatan; serta hasil perkembangan karakter dan keterbatasan bukti. Partisipasi bermakna menyediakan peluang bagi pemuda untuk mempraktikkan tanggung jawab, kepemimpinan, dan kepedulian sosial. Namun, sebagian besar penelitian berbasis masjid bersifat deskriptif dan mengandalkan pengalaman peserta atau capaian program, sementara bukti longitudinal dan komparatif yang lebih kuat umumnya berasal dari lingkungan pendidikan lain. Kajian ini menghasilkan kerangka konseptual yang menghubungkan kondisi kelembagaan, partisipasi bermakna, mekanisme pedagogis, dan hasil karakter religius tanpa mengasumsikan hubungan sebab-akibat otomatis. Penelitian lanjutan perlu menguji perubahan perilaku yang terukur dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Berbasis Masjid; Partisipasi Pemuda; Internalisasi Nilai Keagamaan; Pembentukan Karakter Religius

Abstract

This study synthesizes forms of mosque-based youth engagement, mechanisms of religious value internalization, and evidence concerning religious character formation. An integrative literature review was conducted using iterative, topic-guided literature identification, critical evidence appraisal, and deductive–inductive thematic synthesis of 23 selected empirical studies. A previous literature review was used for comparison, not as additional empirical evidence. Four themes emerged: participation extending from attendance to youth agency; educational mechanisms involving peer influence, mentoring, role modeling, habituation, and reflection; institutional conditions enabling or restricting engagement; and character-related outcomes alongside limitations of existing evidence. Meaningful participation provides opportunities for young people to practice responsibility, leadership, and social concern. However, most mosque-based studies primarily document program implementation, participant experiences, or perceived benefits. Stronger longitudinal and comparative evidence concerning religious development generally comes from educational settings outside mosque youth organizations. The synthesis therefore does not establish that participation automatically produces sustained character change. Instead, it proposes an evidence-informed conceptual framework connecting institutional conditions, meaningful engagement, pedagogical mechanisms, and religious character-related outcomes while recognizing contextual variation and limitations of causal inference. Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative designs with clearly defined, observable measures of enduring behavioral development.

Keywords: Mosque-Based Education, Youth Engagement, Religious Value Internalization, Religious Character Formation

INTRODUCTION

Mosques have traditionally functioned not only as places of worship but also as centers of Islamic education, social interaction, and community development. In contemporary Muslim societies, their educational significance extends to providing opportunities for young people to develop religious knowledge, leadership competencies, social responsibility, and a sense of belonging. Mosque-based youth programs, including Qur'anic learning circles, religious mentoring, leadership training, and community service, offer forms of non-formal education that connect Islamic teachings with everyday experiences. Recent studies have highlighted the transformation of mosques into participatory community institutions that respond to young people's spiritual and social needs (Widiawati et al., 2024; Mancinelli, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the educational potential of these institutions cannot be understood solely through the availability of religious activities. Greater attention must be given to how young people participate in these activities and how their experiences relate to religious character formation.

Youth engagement in mosque-based activities encompasses different levels of participation, ranging from occasional attendance to active involvement in organizing programs, exercising leadership, and making institutional decisions. Research on mosque youth organizations indicates that participation is influenced by individual motivation, peer relationships, institutional support, and opportunities for meaningful responsibility (Ginting & Abdullah, 2025; Ramadhanu et al., 2025). Lubis et al. (2025) further demonstrate how participatory approaches can create opportunities for young people to exercise agency within religious institutions. Similarly, studies of Muslim youth activism emphasize the importance of recognizing young people as active contributors rather than merely recipients of religious guidance (Eseverri-Mayer & Khir-Allah, 2022; Mancinelli, 2025). These findings suggest that the educational significance of youth engagement may depend not only on participation frequency but also on the quality, autonomy, and responsibility associated with participation.

Beyond participation itself, mosque-based education involves pedagogical processes through which religious values are communicated, interpreted, practiced, and potentially internalized. Activities such as halaqah, peer mentoring, religious habituation, and community-based learning provide opportunities for repeated practice, interpersonal interaction, and the development of religious understanding. Research on mosque youth programs illustrates the use of structured guidance, practical activities, and participatory learning to develop religious and social competencies (Arisanti et al., 2023; Junanah & Susilo, 2024; Rahmanisa et al., 2026). Studies conducted in related Islamic educational settings further highlight the potential contributions of mentoring, role modeling, and supportive peer relationships to religious development (Samsuddin et al., 2025; Ismail & Makhsin, 2023). Importantly, longitudinal research among Muslim adolescents has identified significant associations between peer influence and changes in religiosity and religious coping (Shen et al., 2023). Although these findings provide valuable insights into religious socialization, their applicability to mosque-based youth programs requires careful consideration of differences in educational settings and participant experiences.

Religious character formation represents a broader educational objective than participation in religious activities or the acquisition of religious knowledge. It may encompass personal dimensions, including religious commitment, self-discipline, and responsibility,

alongside social dimensions such as empathy, cooperation, and concern for others. Mosque-based studies have reported positive developments in religious practices, social participation, and leadership-related competencies among participating youth (Ali et al., 2026; Merlin et al., 2025; Rahmanisa et al., 2026). However, reported improvements in attitudes, participation, or organizational skills should not automatically be interpreted as sustained character transformation. Evidence from group-guidance and mentoring interventions demonstrates that religious development can be examined through measurable changes in knowledge, attitudes, and religious personality, although such findings remain dependent on the research design and measurement procedures employed (Sutarto & Sari, 2020; Ismail & Makhsin, 2023). Consequently, distinguishing religious participation, value internalization, and observable character outcomes is essential for evaluating the educational contributions of mosque-based programs.

The relationship between mosque participation and religious development is also shaped by institutional and sociocultural conditions. Educational opportunities may be strengthened by supportive leadership, inclusive organizational practices, appropriate mentoring, and programs that respond to young people's experiences. Conversely, generational differences, limited decision-making opportunities, and restrictive pedagogical approaches may constrain meaningful participation. Research involving Muslim youth in European contexts has highlighted tensions surrounding institutional representation, religious identity, and young people's participation in community life (Eseverri-Mayer & Khir-Allah, 2022; Mancinelli, 2025). Altinyelken (2021) identifies limitations in opportunities for critical questioning and reflection within some non-formal Islamic educational experiences, while Sözeri et al. (2022) document differing stakeholder perspectives on the role of mosque education in social integration. These findings indicate that mosque-based education should not be assumed to produce uniformly positive outcomes. Rather, its educational contributions need to be examined in relation to the conditions under which participation and learning occur.

Despite the growing literature, existing evidence remains fragmented across studies of mosque management, youth empowerment, religious socialization, pedagogical practices, and character development. Many mosque-based investigations primarily describe program implementation, participant experiences, or perceived benefits, whereas studies employing longitudinal or comparative designs often examine religious development in schools and other educational settings rather than mosque youth organizations. This distinction limits the extent to which findings about religious behavior and peer influence can be directly attributed to mosque-based participation. Previous literature-based research has synthesized religious mentoring, halaqah, and leadership development within university mosque education, identifying challenges related to institutional integration and program organization (Hadi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, a more focused synthesis is needed to examine how different forms of youth participation relate to specific mechanisms of religious value internalization, how institutional conditions shape these processes, and what kinds of evidence support claims about religious character formation.

To address these issues, the present study employs an integrative literature review to critically synthesize empirical research on mosque-based youth engagement, religious socialization, and character development. Drawing on 23 selected empirical studies, with a previous literature review used to contextualize the contribution, the analysis addresses three questions: (1) What forms and levels of mosque-based youth engagement are identified in

existing research? (2) What educational and social mechanisms are associated with the internalization of Islamic values through youth participation? and (3) What evidence supports religious character formation, and what methodological and contextual limitations influence the interpretation of these findings? By integrating research on participation, pedagogical mechanisms, institutional conditions, and educational outcomes, this review seeks to develop an evidence-informed conceptual framework linking meaningful youth engagement with religious value internalization and character development. Rather than assuming a direct causal relationship, the proposed synthesis distinguishes documented educational practices, reported experiences, measured outcomes, and unresolved questions concerning the longer-term formation of religious character.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an integrative literature review to examine the relationships among mosque-based youth engagement, religious value internalization, and religious character formation. The integrative review approach was selected because it allows the synthesis of empirical studies employing different methodological designs, including qualitative case studies, ethnographic investigations, quantitative surveys, quasi-experimental studies, and longitudinal research. The review was informed by the methodological framework proposed by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), which encompasses problem identification, literature identification, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation of findings. This approach was considered appropriate for integrating evidence concerning youth participation, educational mechanisms, institutional conditions, and religious character development across diverse sociocultural and educational settings.

The literature identification process followed an iterative, topic-guided approach rather than a prospectively registered systematic search. Relevant publications were identified through targeted scholarly searches, journal and publisher websites, DOI-linked publication records, and full-text articles collected for review. Search terms included combinations of *mosque-based youth engagement*, *mosque youth participation*, *youth empowerment*, *Islamic character education*, *religious value internalization*, *religious socialization*, *peer mentoring*, *halaqah*, *religious habituation*, and *mosque-based education*. The selection emphasized publications from 2016 to 2026, with particular attention to empirical studies examining Muslim adolescents and young adults. The review did not claim exhaustive coverage of all indexed publications; instead, it sought to assemble a conceptually relevant and methodologically diverse body of evidence consistent with the objectives of an integrative review (Snyder, 2019).

The eligibility criteria were established to maintain conceptual relevance while accommodating the diversity of available research. Studies were considered eligible when they (1) investigated youth participation, leadership, empowerment, or educational activities in mosque-based or closely related Islamic community settings; (2) examined educational or social mechanisms potentially associated with religious value internalization, including mentoring, peer influence, habituation, and reflective learning; (3) investigated religious character, religiosity, or relevant personal and prosocial outcomes among Muslim adolescents or young adults; and (4) provided sufficient methodological and empirical information to support critical interpretation. Studies conducted in schools or universities were included when they offered direct evidence concerning educational mechanisms or character-related

outcomes relevant to the review questions. Publications with limited topical relevance, unresolved methodological or numerical inconsistencies affecting their principal conclusions, or substantial conceptual redundancy were excluded from the final synthesis.

Following the preliminary identification and screening stages, 28 provisionally retained articles underwent a final relevance and evidence-quality audit. Four articles were excluded at this stage, leaving 24 references. Of these, 23 were empirical studies included in the thematic synthesis, while one previous literature review was retained exclusively to contextualize the contribution and originality of the present study. The empirical corpus comprised 13 studies primarily addressing mosque-based youth participation and community engagement, eight studies examining educational mechanisms and character-related development, and two studies providing contextual evidence on mosque education and institutional conditions. The previous review was not treated as an independent empirical study to avoid double-counting findings from primary research.

Data were organized in a structured extraction matrix containing author information, publication year, research context, objectives, methodological design, participants or data sources, principal findings, reported limitations, and relevance to the review questions. Particular attention was given to distinguishing studies that directly examined mosque-based youth activities from those investigating related educational and psychological mechanisms in other settings. Methodological strength was assessed narratively by considering research design, sample characteristics, measurement approaches, data triangulation, analytical transparency, and consistency between empirical findings and authors' conclusions. Evidence was interpreted according to the types of claims supported by each design rather than through a pooled quality score. Longitudinal and comparative findings were distinguished from descriptive accounts, participant perceptions, and program implementation reports. No standardized numerical appraisal instrument was applied.

The extracted findings were examined through thematic synthesis informed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Analysis involved repeated reading of the studies, identification of meaningful concepts, assignment of descriptive codes, comparison of recurring patterns, and refinement of broader analytical themes. Coding combined deductive categories derived from the three research questions with inductive insights emerging from the reviewed evidence. Four interconnected themes were developed: (1) forms of youth participation, from attendance to agency; (2) pedagogical and social mechanisms of religious value internalization; (3) institutional conditions, participation barriers, and program sustainability; and (4) religious character outcomes and limitations of existing evidence. Convergent and contrasting findings were examined within and across these themes to identify conceptual relationships, contextual variations, and unresolved research questions.

To strengthen interpretive credibility, the synthesis differentiated program implementation, actual participation, self-reported changes, and measured educational or behavioral outcomes. Findings concerning religious practices, personal character, and prosocial behavior were not treated as interchangeable indicators. Likewise, evidence derived from school-based or university-based studies was used to illuminate potentially relevant educational mechanisms without assuming that the same outcomes necessarily occur in mosque youth organizations. Given the methodological heterogeneity of the included studies and the absence of comparable effect measures, statistical meta-analysis was not undertaken. Instead, the review developed an evidence-informed conceptual interpretation of how

meaningful youth engagement may relate to religious value internalization and character formation, while explicitly acknowledging the limitations of causal inference and the restricted generalizability of context-specific findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Characteristics of the Included Studies

The integrative review included 23 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2026. The studies represented diverse geographical, institutional, and methodological contexts, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of research on mosque-based youth engagement, Islamic education, and religious character development. Fifteen studies were conducted in Indonesia, three in the Netherlands, two in Malaysia, and one each in Spain, Italy, and Germany. Most studies were situated in Muslim community organizations, mosque-based educational programs, or youth development initiatives, while a smaller group investigated related educational and socialization processes in schools and universities.

The included studies were organized into three analytical groups according to their primary contribution to the review. Thirteen studies directly addressed mosque-based or mosque-linked youth participation, leadership, empowerment, and community engagement. Eight studies examined pedagogical or social mechanisms associated with religious value internalization and character-related development. Two additional studies provided contextual evidence concerning mosque education and institutional conditions. These categories were used to organize the evidence rather than to imply that individual studies contributed to only one theme.

Table 1. Distribution of Included Empirical Studies

Analytical Group	Number of Studies	Primary Focus	Representative Studies
Mosque-based youth engagement	13	Participation, youth agency, leadership, empowerment, and community activities	Eseverri-Mayer and Khir-Allah (2022); Widiawati et al. (2024); Mancinelli (2025); Lubis et al. (2025); Nugroho et al. (2025)
Educational and social mechanisms	8	Peer influence, mentoring, habituation, reflective learning, and religious development	Leszczensky and Pink (2020); Altinyelken (2021); Wahid and Wardatun (2023); Shen et al. (2023); Ismail and Makhsin (2023)
Institutional and educational contexts	2	Mosque education, institutional support, and sociocultural conditions	Sözeri et al. (2022); Yusuf and Ulfah (2026)

Note. The grouping reflects the principal analytical contribution of each study. Several studies informed multiple themes. The previous literature review by Hadi et al. (2025) was

retained for comparison with earlier scholarship but was not counted among the empirical studies.

The methodological characteristics varied considerably. Qualitative case studies, ethnographic investigations, and community-based educational reports provided detailed accounts of mosque programs, institutional practices, and participant experiences. Participatory action research contributed evidence concerning youth agency and organizational decision-making. Quantitative surveys examined relationships among religiosity, social influence, and participation intentions. Longitudinal social network studies investigated changes in religious practices and peer relationships, while comparative intervention studies assessed changes in religious character-related measures following structured educational activities.

Four interconnected themes emerged from the synthesis: (1) forms of mosque-based youth participation, from attendance to agency; (2) pedagogical and social mechanisms of religious value internalization; (3) institutional conditions, participation barriers, and program sustainability; and (4) religious character outcomes and limitations of the existing evidence.

From Attendance to Agency: Forms of Mosque-Based Youth Participation

The reviewed studies identified several forms of youth engagement in mosque-based activities, ranging from attendance at religious gatherings to active participation in organizational leadership and community initiatives. Mosque youth programs commonly included Qur'anic recitation, religious discussions, leadership training, social services, organizational development, and digital religious communication. However, the extent of participants' involvement differed according to their responsibilities, motivations, and opportunities to contribute to program development.

Ginting and Abdullah (2025) identified four participation patterns among mosque youth: consistent, situational, initiative-based, and responsive participation. Consistent participation involved sustained engagement in organizational activities, whereas situational participation was associated with particular events or religious occasions. Initiative-based participation involved independently proposing or organizing activities, while responsive participation occurred following invitations or assignments from mosque administrators. Although derived from a limited qualitative sample, this classification illustrates the different ways young people may engage with mosque institutions.

Other studies described youth participation through organizational responsibility and leadership development. Ramadhanu et al. (2025) reported that involving mosque youth in committee responsibilities, religious activities, and community programs provided opportunities to develop organizational and communication competencies. Similarly, Nugroho et al. (2025) identified leadership training, social initiatives, and religious knowledge development as central strategies used by the Indonesian Mosque Youth Communication Agency in Medan. These programs positioned young participants as contributors to religious and community activities rather than exclusively as recipients of instruction.

Studies examining youth empowerment further emphasized opportunities for decision-making and institutional representation. In a participatory action research project in Malaysia, Lubis et al. (2025) involved young people in identifying institutional barriers, developing activities, and participating in program implementation. The study reported the establishment of a youth committee with formally recognized organizational responsibilities. Its findings

documented changes in opportunities for participation during the intervention, although the short implementation period limited assessment of their longer-term sustainability.

The organizational dimension of participation was also evident in research conducted outside Indonesia. Eseverri-Mayer and Khir-Allah (2022) documented how Muslim youth in Spain negotiated generational differences, organizational representation, and opportunities for civic engagement. Mancinelli (2025) identified mosques as spaces through which second-generation Muslim youth in Italy developed community relationships and participated in broader civic activities. Across these studies, participation included social representation, community initiatives, and efforts to influence organizational priorities.

Several investigations highlighted participation through practical religious and social activities. Arisanti et al. (2023) developed a mosque youth life-skills guidance program addressing personal, social, rational, and vocational competencies. Junanah and Susilo (2024) described youth involvement in religious communication training, organizational development, and digital content production. Ali et al. (2026) reported improvements in program-related organizational, communication, and digital competencies following participatory mentoring activities. These findings primarily documented program implementation, participant experiences, and competency development rather than independently verified changes in religious character.

Religious engagement was also examined through specific devotional activities. Rahmanisa et al. (2026) described efforts to increase participation in Qur'anic recitation through peer-group approaches, small learning circles, and supportive religious environments. Merlin et al. (2025) identified Qur'anic learning, religious discussions, preaching activities, and community service as elements of mosque-based youth education.

Participation was not exclusively examined as observed behavior. Thoha et al. (2024), using survey data from Generation Z respondents associated with Al-Akbar Mosque in Surabaya, found positive associations between social influence, religiosity, and intentions to volunteer. The study reported statistically significant direct relationships between social influence and volunteering intention, as well as between religiosity and volunteering intention. These findings addressed factors associated with willingness to participate rather than independently observed volunteer behavior.

Taken together, the studies documented participation through attendance, religious involvement, organizational contributions, community service, leadership, and decision-making. Their findings also revealed differences between participation initiated by young people and participation primarily organized or directed by institutional authorities.

Pedagogical and Social Mechanisms of Religious Value Internalization

The second theme concerned educational and social processes associated with the development of religious understanding, practices, and values. Across the included studies, recurring mechanisms included peer influence, mentoring, habituation, role modeling, reflective learning, and participation in practical religious activities. These processes were examined in both mosque-based programs and related Islamic educational settings.

Peer relationships constituted a prominent mechanism in the reviewed literature. Wahid and Wardatun (2023), in their study of Muslim youth activists in Bima, identified peer-group discussions, organizational interactions, and guidance from experienced members as important elements of religious learning. Religious knowledge was developed through interpersonal

engagement and discussion rather than through digital information alone. Their findings also highlighted the importance participants attached to interpersonal guidance when evaluating religious knowledge obtained from online sources.

Longitudinal investigations provided additional evidence concerning peer influence. Leszczensky and Pink (2020) found that friendship networks were associated with changes in religious practices among Muslim youth in Germany, including prayer and religious attendance. In Indonesia, Shen et al. (2023) examined 825 Muslim adolescents using longitudinal social network analysis. Their findings indicated significant peer influence on religiosity and positive religious coping, while selection effects based on similarity in these variables were not statistically significant. These studies provided evidence of relationships between peer networks and changes in religious practices, although neither directly evaluated a mosque-based youth intervention.

Structured mentoring emerged as another educational mechanism. Ismail and Makhsin (2023) investigated an Islamic peer mentoring module among university students in Malaysia. The module incorporated religious guidance, interpersonal relationships, structured activities, and reflection. The study reported a greater increase in religious personality scores among the intervention group than among the comparison group, including measures addressing relationships with God, oneself, other people, and nature.

Related findings were reported by Samsuddin et al. (2025), who examined students' experiences of halaqah tarbiyah. Participants described the importance of murabbi role modeling, supportive peer relationships, repeated religious practices, and motivational guidance. The study identified themes involving spiritual awareness, moral values, religious habituation, and a supportive religious environment. However, these findings primarily reflected participant perceptions and experiences within an Islamic school setting.

Studies focusing directly on mosque programs also described habituation and guided religious participation. Rahmanisa et al. (2026) identified group-based Qur'anic recitation, supportive interpersonal relationships, and repeated practice as elements associated with participation and motivation. Yusuf and Ulfah (2026) described mosque-based tarbiyah through religious instruction, Qur'anic learning, devotional activities, and social engagement. These studies illustrated how repeated activities and instructional guidance were incorporated into non-formal Islamic education, although direct evidence concerning sustained internalization remained limited.

Not all studies described religious learning as an uncomplicated process. Altinyelken (2021) found that some young Muslims in the Netherlands recalled limited opportunities for questioning, dialogue, and critical reflection during their earlier experiences of non-formal Islamic education. Altinyelken et al. (2022) further documented how young Muslims negotiated differing expectations and normative messages encountered in mosque education and mainstream schooling. These findings illustrated that religious learning may involve active interpretation and negotiation rather than straightforward acceptance of transmitted values.

Overall, the studies identified peer socialization, mentoring, role modeling, repeated practice, and reflective engagement as processes associated with religious development. The empirical evidence differed in whether these processes were directly observed, described through participant experiences, or examined through measurable relationships and changes over time.

Institutional Conditions, Participation Barriers, and Program Sustainability

The third theme identified institutional and contextual conditions associated with opportunities for youth engagement and the continuity of mosque-based education. Recurring factors included organizational leadership, the availability of meaningful responsibilities, relationships between young participants and mosque administrators, program relevance, educational support, and access to organizational resources.

Studies of mosque management described the importance of program organization and institutional responsiveness. Widiawati et al. (2024), examining Masjid Sejuta Pemuda in Sukabumi, identified an organizational approach integrating religious activities, social services, community relationships, and youth participation. Ramadhanu et al. (2025) similarly described support from mosque administrators as an enabling condition for youth leadership activities. Nugroho et al. (2025) identified organizational training and collaboration as components of youth empowerment strategies, while also reporting constraints related to participation interest and resources.

Organizational authority and intergenerational relations were particularly visible in studies emphasizing youth agency. Eseverri-Mayer and Khir-Allah (2022) documented tensions between established Muslim community leadership and younger participants seeking opportunities for representation and engagement. Lubis et al. (2025) identified limited access to decision-making as an institutional barrier and reported the development of a more participatory organizational arrangement during their intervention. These findings indicated variation in the extent to which youth participation included influence over program priorities and organizational decisions.

Studies also identified practical barriers to consistent involvement. Ginting and Abdullah (2025) described time constraints, organizational communication, limited facilities, and varying levels of motivation as factors associated with differences in participation. Similarly, mosque youth development studies reported difficulties in maintaining regular engagement when participants faced competing educational, employment, or personal commitments (Ramadhanu et al., 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025).

Institutional conditions extended beyond program administration to include educational approaches and relationships between religious institutions and their surrounding communities. Yusuf and Ulfah (2026) identified religious instruction, teacher involvement, and adaptation to contemporary learning needs as components of mosque-based education. Sözeri et al. (2022), examining stakeholder perspectives on Turkish-Dutch mosque education, found contrasting views about its contribution to social integration. Some participants perceived educational and identity-related benefits, while others expressed concerns about institutional separation and conflicting social expectations.

Pedagogical conditions also shaped participants' experiences. Altinyelken (2021) documented perceived limitations in questioning and critical discussion within some non-formal Islamic educational environments. Such findings indicated that opportunities for active engagement varied not only according to organizational responsibilities but also according to the interactional practices adopted by educators and mentors.

Across the reviewed studies, program continuity was generally discussed through sustained participation, organizational support, leadership development, and recurring educational activities. However, relatively few studies systematically documented whether institutional improvements or changes in participation continued beyond the immediate period of observation.

Religious Character Outcomes and the Limits of Existing Evidence

The fourth theme concerned the dimensions of religious character reported in the literature and the forms of empirical evidence used to assess them. The reviewed studies described religious character through personal religious practices, moral attitudes, organizational responsibility, interpersonal conduct, and social participation. These outcomes were not measured consistently across investigations.

Personal religious development was commonly represented through indicators such as Qur'anic engagement, prayer, religious commitment, self-discipline, and spiritual awareness. Rahmanisa et al. (2026) reported favorable participant perceptions concerning motivation, religious awareness, and consistency in Qur'anic recitation activities. Merlin et al. (2025) described developments in religious practices, discipline, politeness, and responsibility within mosque-based educational activities. Yusuf and Ulfah (2026) also identified moral guidance and religious learning as intended educational components of mosque tarbiyah.

Social dimensions of character were represented through responsibility, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and engagement in community activities. Ali et al. (2026) reported improvements in organizational and communication-related indicators following a mosque youth mentoring program. Ramadhanu et al. (2025) and Nugroho et al. (2025) described opportunities for developing responsibility and social concern through leadership training and community service. Mancinelli (2025) documented youth engagement in civic and community activities, illustrating outcomes related to social participation and collective identity.

Studies conducted outside mosque youth organizations offered more structured measures of religious development. Sutarto and Sari (2020) examined changes in religious character-related scores following group guidance activities among 30 students divided into experimental and comparison groups. The intervention group demonstrated larger improvements in measured understanding, attitudes, and religious practices than the comparison group.

Similarly, Ismail and Makhsin (2023) reported an increase in mean religious personality scores from 4.03 to 4.96 among 60 participants receiving structured Islamic peer mentoring, compared with an increase from 4.01 to 4.21 among 60 comparison participants. These findings documented differences in measured outcomes following educational interventions, although the studies did not establish whether the changes were sustained over longer periods.

Longitudinal social network studies contributed a different type of evidence. Leszczensky and Pink (2020) and Shen et al. (2023) examined changes in religious practices and religiosity associated with peer relationships. Their designs provided information about temporal patterns and social influence, but their measured outcomes were not equivalent to comprehensive assessments of religious character or evaluations of mosque-based education.

The qualitative studies offered richer descriptions of participants' experiences and institutional practices, yet frequently relied on interviews, observations within individual cases, or reports of perceived improvement. Community engagement studies primarily documented program implementation, participation, and skill-related achievements. Several investigations did not employ comparison groups, independent behavioral observations, or follow-up measurements capable of assessing the persistence of reported character changes.

Table 2. Synthesis of Empirical Findings and Evidence Limitations

Analytical Dimension	Findings Identified Across Studies	Principal Evidence Limitation
Youth participation	Attendance, volunteering, organizational contribution, leadership, and decision-making	Participation frequency, intention, and agency were not consistently distinguished
Educational mechanisms	Peer influence, mentoring, habituation, role modeling, and reflective engagement	Stronger evidence for some mechanisms came from non-mosque educational settings
Institutional conditions	Administrative support, organizational inclusion, program relevance, and learning environment	Limited longitudinal assessment of organizational and program sustainability
Personal religious development	Religious commitment, Qur'anic engagement, discipline, and religious personality	Frequent reliance on self-reported or context-specific indicators
Social character development	Responsibility, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and community involvement	Organizational participation and skills were sometimes used as proxies for character development

Note. The table summarizes patterns identified across the 23 empirical studies. The findings do not represent pooled statistical effects or independently established causal relationships.

In summary, the empirical studies documented diverse forms of mosque-based youth engagement and identified several educational and social mechanisms associated with religious development. The literature provided substantial descriptive evidence concerning programs, participation experiences, and organizational conditions, alongside more limited comparative and longitudinal evidence concerning specific religious outcomes. However, direct evidence linking meaningful participation in mosque-based youth programs to sustained religious character formation remained limited within the reviewed corpus.

DISCUSSION

From Attendance to Agency: Reconsidering Meaningful Youth Participation

The findings of this integrative review suggest that the educational significance of mosque-based youth engagement cannot be adequately explained by participation frequency alone. Although attendance at religious activities remains an important indicator of institutional engagement, meaningful participation involves broader dimensions of responsibility, initiative, leadership, and opportunities to influence organizational decisions. This distinction is particularly important because the reviewed studies frequently describe participation as a desirable outcome without consistently differentiating between attendance, active contribution, and youth agency.

Research conducted in Indonesia illustrates how mosque youth organizations provide opportunities for leadership development through religious activities, committee responsibilities, and community service (Ramadhanu et al., 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025). However, these activities do not necessarily provide young participants with comparable levels of organizational influence. Ginting and Abdullah (2025) distinguish initiative-based participation from participation that occurs primarily in response to institutional requests. This distinction suggests that the educational experiences associated with independently initiated activities may differ from those associated with assigned responsibilities, although the available evidence does not establish that one form consistently produces stronger character outcomes.

The importance of institutional opportunities becomes particularly apparent when youth agency is considered alongside organizational power relations. Lubis et al. (2025) demonstrate how participatory action research can create opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making within religious institutions. Similarly, Eseverri-Mayer and Khir-Allah (2022) identify tensions between established community leadership and younger Muslim participants seeking greater representation. These findings suggest that meaningful engagement depends partly on whether young people are recognized as contributors to institutional development rather than exclusively as recipients of religious instruction.

Studies from different sociocultural settings provide further insight into the relationship between religious participation and social agency. Mancinelli (2025) illustrates how mosque involvement among second-generation Muslim youth in Italy may extend into civic participation and community relationships. In contrast, studies of Indonesian mosque youth programs primarily emphasize religious activities, organizational development, and community service (Widiawati et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2026). These differences indicate that youth engagement should be interpreted within its particular institutional and sociocultural context rather than treated as a uniform experience across Muslim communities.

Accordingly, the present review proposes that mosque-based youth participation should be understood as a multidimensional educational experience. Attendance provides access to institutional activities, active contribution creates opportunities for practical learning, and organizational agency enables young people to exercise responsibility and participate in decision-making. These dimensions may coexist rather than represent a fixed developmental sequence. Their educational significance lies in the different learning experiences they make possible, not in an assumed automatic progression from participation to character formation.

Religious Value Internalization as a Social and Pedagogical Process

The synthesis indicates that religious value internalization is more complex than the transmission of religious knowledge or the repetition of devotional practices. Across the reviewed studies, religious development is associated with interpersonal relationships, mentoring, repeated practice, social expectations, and opportunities to interpret religious values through experience. These mechanisms provide a basis for understanding how mosque-based activities may contribute to religious character formation, although their individual and combined effects remain insufficiently established in mosque-specific research.

Peer relationships constitute one of the most empirically supported mechanisms within the reviewed corpus. Leszczensky and Pink (2020) identify relationships between peer networks and changes in religious practices, while Shen et al. (2023) demonstrate significant peer influence on religiosity and positive religious coping among Indonesian Muslim

adolescents. Importantly, Shen et al. distinguish peer influence from the selection of friends with similar religious characteristics. Their findings indicate that changes in religious behavior may occur in association with existing peer relationships rather than solely through the formation of religiously homogeneous friendship groups.

Nevertheless, these longitudinal findings cannot be directly interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of mosque youth programs. Both studies examined school-based social networks, where peer relationships, institutional expectations, and participation opportunities may differ from those found in mosque organizations. Their relevance lies in supporting the plausibility of peer socialization as an educational mechanism, not in demonstrating that mosque participation itself produces measurable changes in religiosity.

Qualitative research offers complementary explanations of how religious learning occurs within social relationships. Wahid and Wardatun (2023) show that Muslim youth activists develop religious understanding through peer discussions, organizational involvement, and guidance from more experienced members. Their findings also highlight the continuing importance of interpersonal guidance when young people encounter religious information through digital media. This suggests that peer learning involves more than social conformity; it may also include discussion, interpretation, and evaluation of religious knowledge.

Structured mentoring provides another perspective on the relationship between guidance and internalization. Ismail and Makhsin (2023) report greater improvements in religious personality scores among students participating in an Islamic peer mentoring intervention than among comparison participants. Their findings indicate the potential educational value of structured guidance, interpersonal support, and reflective activities. Samsuddin et al. (2025) similarly identify role modeling, religious habituation, and supportive relationships with mentors as important elements of participants' halaqah experiences. However, the latter findings primarily reflect participants' perceptions, whereas the former study measures changes associated with a structured intervention. This methodological distinction is essential when assessing the strength of evidence supporting mentoring as an educational mechanism.

An additional consideration concerns the relationship between habituation and reflective understanding. Mosque-based religious activities frequently emphasize repeated practices, including Qur'anic recitation, collective worship, and regular religious learning (Rahmanisa et al., 2026; Yusuf & Ulfah, 2026). Such activities create opportunities for behavioral familiarity and religious engagement. However, repeated participation does not necessarily establish that religious values have been internalized as personally meaningful commitments.

This limitation is particularly evident in research examining opportunities for dialogue and critical reflection. Altinyelken (2021) identifies educational experiences in which young Muslims perceived limited opportunities to question or discuss religious teachings. Altinyelken et al. (2022) further demonstrate that young people may negotiate differing religious and social expectations rather than simply reproduce values encountered in educational institutions. These findings challenge any assumption that internalization is a passive or entirely linear process.

The combined evidence therefore supports a broader understanding of religious value internalization as a process involving behavioral practice, interpersonal learning, interpretation, and personal engagement with religious meanings. Habituation may provide opportunities for repeated practice, mentoring may offer guidance and feedback, and peer relationships may reinforce or modify religious behavior. Reflective engagement may further

shape how young people understand and negotiate the values they encounter. However, the reviewed studies do not provide sufficient evidence to determine which combination of these mechanisms is most effective within mosque-based youth education.

Institutional Conditions and the Boundaries of Educational Participation

The findings also indicate that mosque-based youth engagement is embedded within institutional arrangements that can facilitate or restrict educational opportunities. Organizational leadership, access to decision-making, program relevance, interpersonal relationships, and institutional resources influence the experiences available to young participants. These contextual conditions should therefore be considered integral to understanding mosque-based education rather than merely external factors affecting program implementation.

Studies of mosque management emphasize the importance of organizational responsiveness and opportunities for youth involvement. Widiawati et al. (2024) illustrate an approach to mosque management that integrates religious learning, social services, and community engagement. Ramadhanu et al. (2025) and Nugroho et al. (2025) similarly identify leadership development and institutional support as components of youth empowerment. These findings suggest that mosque organizations can provide educational environments in which religious participation is connected to practical responsibilities and collective activities.

However, organizational support should not be equated with the number of activities provided. The research of Lubis et al. (2025) and Eseverri-Mayer and Khir-Allah (2022) indicates that opportunities to influence decisions may be restricted even when youth-oriented activities exist. This distinction highlights a tension between institutionally directed participation and participation that allows young people to shape organizational priorities. The former may provide structured educational opportunities, while the latter may create additional experiences of responsibility and agency.

Institutional conditions also include the pedagogical relationships developed within educational programs. Altinyelken (2021) demonstrates that restrictive teaching approaches may limit opportunities for questioning and reflection, while Sözeri et al. (2022) identify contrasting stakeholder perspectives concerning the contribution of mosque education to social integration. These studies challenge generalized assumptions that participation in religious institutions necessarily produces inclusion, autonomy, or positive social relationships.

The international evidence also requires contextual sensitivity. Studies involving Muslim minorities in Europe examine questions of identity, representation, and integration within broader social environments, whereas studies conducted in Muslim-majority Indonesian communities frequently emphasize religious education, leadership, and community participation. Consequently, institutional conditions and educational outcomes cannot be assumed to operate identically across these settings.

Another limitation concerns program sustainability. Although several studies describe institutional support, recurring activities, and improvements in organizational participation, relatively few investigate whether these arrangements remain effective after changes in leadership, participant membership, or program resources. Thus, the available literature supports the importance of institutional conditions for understanding youth engagement but offers limited evidence regarding their longer-term relationships with religious character development.

Religious Character Formation: Distinguishing Educational Outcomes from Evidence of Change

A central finding of this review concerns the conceptual and methodological differences between religious participation, religious value internalization, and religious character formation. These concepts are closely related but should not be treated as interchangeable outcomes. Participation describes involvement in religious or organizational activities, internalization concerns the development of personally meaningful commitments to values, and character formation refers to the development and expression of moral and religious dispositions through attitudes and behavior.

The reviewed studies describe religious character using both personal and social dimensions. Personal dimensions include religious commitment, devotional practices, discipline, and spiritual awareness, whereas social dimensions encompass responsibility, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and concern for others. Mosque-based studies frequently associate these qualities with participation in Qur'anic learning, organizational activities, and community service (Ali et al., 2026; Merlin et al., 2025; Rahmanisa et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, the evidence supporting these outcomes is not uniform. Some studies describe participants' perceptions of increased motivation, religious awareness, or responsibility. Others document organizational achievements, such as completed programs, improved communication skills, or greater involvement in community activities. Although such findings are educationally relevant, they do not necessarily establish that participants have developed stable religious character traits.

This distinction is particularly important when evaluating organizational and social competencies. Leadership training may improve communication and decision-making skills, while community service may provide opportunities to practice responsibility and cooperation. However, the existence of these opportunities does not independently demonstrate enduring moral development. The findings of Ramadhanu et al. (2025), Nugroho et al. (2025), and Ali et al. (2026) are therefore more appropriately interpreted as evidence of educational opportunities, participation experiences, and reported competency development than as definitive proof of sustained character transformation.

Studies employing comparative research designs provide a stronger basis for assessing measurable changes. Sutarto and Sari (2020) report greater improvements in religious character-related scores following group guidance activities than those observed in a comparison group. Similarly, Ismail and Makhsin (2023) report larger increases in religious personality scores among students receiving structured Islamic mentoring. These findings indicate that religious educational interventions may be associated with measurable developmental outcomes. However, neither study establishes that comparable changes occur specifically through mosque youth participation, and the available evidence does not sufficiently address the persistence of such outcomes over time.

The distinction between immediate educational outcomes and sustained character development therefore represents a significant limitation in the existing literature. Cross-sectional studies cannot establish temporal ordering, short-term interventions provide limited evidence of durability, and self-reported measures may not correspond directly with observed

behavior. Qualitative studies can offer detailed explanations of participants' experiences and perceived transformation, but their findings require careful interpretation when broader effectiveness claims are considered.

Consequently, the present synthesis does not support a universal causal conclusion that mosque participation produces religious character formation. Rather, it indicates that mosque-based engagement provides potential educational experiences through which religious values may be practiced, interpreted, and expressed, while the strength and persistence of character-related outcomes remain dependent on factors that have not been adequately examined across existing studies.

Toward an Integrated Conceptual Framework

Integrating the four themes, this review proposes an evidence-informed conceptual framework consisting of four interconnected dimensions: institutional conditions, meaningful youth participation, pedagogical and social mechanisms, and religious character-related outcomes.

Institutional conditions encompass organizational openness, leadership support, mentoring arrangements, and opportunities for participation. These conditions shape the forms of engagement available to young people, including attendance, organizational contribution, leadership, and decision-making. Such experiences may provide opportunities for learning through peer interaction, guidance, repeated practice, reflective discussion, and community responsibility. Religious character-related outcomes may subsequently be expressed through personal religious practices and social behavior.

The proposed relationships should not be interpreted as a predetermined sequence in which each stage necessarily produces the next. Participation may influence educational experiences, but participants' existing religiosity, social relationships, and motivations may also shape their willingness to participate. Similarly, emerging competencies and commitments may influence subsequent participation and leadership opportunities. The framework therefore recognizes potentially reciprocal relationships and contextual variation rather than assuming a single linear causal pathway.

This interpretation extends earlier scholarship on mosque-based education. Hadi et al. (2025) synthesized religious development activities within university mosques, emphasizing mentoring, halaqah, leadership development, and institutional challenges. The present review takes a more specific analytical direction by distinguishing levels of youth participation, examining the mechanisms potentially linking participation with value internalization, and evaluating the types and limitations of evidence supporting religious character-related outcomes.

The contribution of this framework lies not in introducing previously unrecognized educational activities, but in organizing existing evidence around the distinction between participation, educational processes, and developmental outcomes. It also provides a basis for identifying where existing empirical research offers comparatively stronger support and where further investigation remains necessary.

Implications and Limitations of the Review

The findings have implications for mosque-based educational practice and future research. For mosque administrators and youth program organizers, the synthesis suggests the value of examining not only participation rates but also opportunities for youth initiative,

leadership, and meaningful contribution. Educational activities may be strengthened by combining structured religious guidance with peer interaction, opportunities for reflection, and practical responsibilities. However, these implications should be regarded as evidence-informed considerations rather than interventions whose effectiveness has been conclusively established across mosque settings.

Future research should distinguish participation intensity from participation quality, examine mechanisms of value internalization using clearly defined constructs, and assess religious character outcomes through multiple sources of evidence. Longitudinal studies, comparative program evaluations, and observations of behavior beyond organized religious activities would be particularly valuable. Research that includes both active and less-active participants could also clarify how institutional barriers, individual motivation, and access to educational opportunities shape engagement.

This review has several limitations. The literature was identified through an iterative, topic-guided process rather than an exhaustive systematic search, and the included studies varied substantially in their populations, methods, settings, and outcome measures. Methodological appraisal was conducted narratively rather than through a standardized scoring instrument. Furthermore, some evidence concerning peer influence, mentoring, and character development originated from schools or universities rather than mosque youth organizations. These conditions limit the generalizability of the synthesis and prevent the estimation of a combined effect of mosque participation on religious character development.

Despite these limitations, the review provides an integrated account of how youth participation, pedagogical mechanisms, and institutional conditions are represented in the existing empirical literature. Its central contribution is to clarify that mosque-based religious character formation should be examined as a context-dependent educational process rather than assumed to be an automatic consequence of participation in religious activities.

CONCLUSION

This integrative literature review demonstrates that mosque-based youth engagement represents a multidimensional educational experience extending beyond attendance at religious activities to encompass active participation, organizational responsibility, leadership, and decision-making. Drawing on 23 empirical studies, the synthesis identifies peer influence, mentoring, religious habituation, role modeling, and reflective learning as educational and social mechanisms associated with religious value internalization. However, these processes are shaped by institutional conditions, including leadership support, opportunities for meaningful participation, inclusive educational practices, and program continuity. The findings further indicate that religious character formation encompasses both personal dimensions, such as religious commitment and self-discipline, and social dimensions, including responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and community engagement. Nevertheless, the available evidence remains uneven: mosque-based studies predominantly document program implementation, participant experiences, and perceived benefits, while stronger longitudinal and comparative evidence concerning religious development largely originates from other educational settings. Accordingly, participation in mosque-based programs should not be assumed to produce sustained character transformation automatically. The principal contribution of this review is an evidence-informed conceptual framework connecting institutional conditions, meaningful youth participation, pedagogical mechanisms, and

religious character-related outcomes while recognizing contextual differences and potentially reciprocal relationships. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and comparative evaluations of mosque-based youth programs, employ clearly defined indicators of religious character, and examine how educational experiences translate into observable and sustained behavioral development.

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