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Cultivating *Tazkiyatun Nafs* through Religious Habituation at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of structured religious rituals in fostering *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) among students at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia. The study is motivated by the declining level of students' spiritual awareness, as reflected in religious practices that tend to be formalistic rather than deeply internalized. This condition indicates a gap between the practice of religious rituals and the primary goal of spiritual character development in contemporary Islamic education. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, explicitly involving Islamic Religious Education teachers, a school official for student affairs, and active students as participants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using an interactive model encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that continuous habituation of religious rituals facilitates the development of students' *tazkiyatun nafs* through three main stages: *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*. These stages are manifested in observable behavioral changes, moral

habituation, and the gradual emergence of subjective spiritual awareness. The data suggest that religious practices, initially driven by external school regulations, can evolve into intrinsic spiritual needs. Theoretically and practically, this study demonstrates that religious rituals function beyond formal acts of worship; they serve as an effective pedagogical mechanism for internalizing Islamic values when supported by consistent habituation and a conducive school environment.

Keywords: Habituation, Islamic Education, Religious Rituals, Spiritual Awareness, *Tazkiyatun Nafs*.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is fundamentally oriented not only toward cognitive development but also toward the cultivation of students' spiritual and moral character (Nurjismi & Rajab, 2025). In contemporary educational settings, however, the challenges faced extend beyond academic achievement to include the weakening of students' spiritual awareness and the limited internalization of religious values in everyday life (Patimah et al., 2025). This condition is reflected in students' religious practices, which are often performed in a formalistic manner without deep personal reflection, thereby indicating a gap between ritual observance and the broader objective of spiritual character formation in Islamic Religious Education (Sariman & Rohman, 2026).

Within the discourse of Islamic education, *tazkiyatun nafs* constitutes a central concept concerned with the purification of the soul and the cultivation of human spiritual potential. The concept extends beyond the performance of religious rituals by emphasizing inner transformation through the stages of *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*, as articulated in Al-Ghazali's spiritual framework (Al-Ishaq et al., 2026). In this regard, participation in religious rituals does not necessarily lead to the development of spiritual awareness. Without the process of *tazkiyatun nafs*, ritual practices may become mechanistic routines that prioritize external compliance while neglecting students' inner spiritual dimensions. Consequently, the success of spiritual education should not merely be assessed through the intensity of worship practices, but also through the extent to which such practices facilitate value internalization and the formation of authentic self-awareness (Utomo & Khoiriyah, 2026).

In educational practice, various religious activities in schools—such as congregational prayer, dhikr, and other routine worship programs—are frequently implemented as procedural

obligations and are not always accompanied by meaningful spiritual reflection (Santani & Muhyidin, 2026; Toyyiba & Hidayatullah, 2026). This condition suggests that students' participation in religious rituals does not necessarily correspond to the development of deeper spiritual awareness. As a result, some students engage in these practices primarily due to institutional supervision rather than personal spiritual consciousness. Nevertheless, religious rituals possess the potential to function as instruments of spiritual transformation when carried out in a structured, repetitive, and reflective manner within a supportive school environment. This indicates that the transformative dimension of rituals lies not solely in their performance, but also in the processes of value internalization embedded in students' everyday experiences.

Despite the growing concern regarding students' spiritual development, previous studies have paid limited empirical attention to the internalization of *tazkiyatun nafs* through religious rituals within formal school settings (Khusnadin & Shihab, 2025; Nurbarkah & Bahri, 2025). Existing research has predominantly focused on curriculum implementation and the reinforcement of spiritual values, while studies examining ritual practices more directly have largely been conducted in Islamic boarding schools or non-formal educational contexts (Kholiq et al., 2024). As a result, limited scholarly attention has been given to understanding how processes of spiritual value internalization operate within formal schools, which possess distinct institutional dynamics and educational challenges.

Preliminary observations conducted at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia revealed that various religious ritual programs such as congregational prayer, Dhuha prayer, Friday Faith activities, Qur'anic recitation, and memorization practices have been implemented regularly and systematically within the school environment. Nevertheless, the implementation of these activities has not entirely fostered a consistent sense of spiritual awareness among students. While some students demonstrate discipline and active engagement, others continue to participate primarily as a formal obligation shaped by teacher supervision. This condition suggests that religious ritual practices have not fully operated as processes of spiritual value internalization; instead, they remain largely procedural and have not substantially engaged the dimension of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul).

Based on this context, the present study aims to examine how religious ritual practices function as mechanisms for cultivating *tazkiyatun nafs* among students at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the processes of spiritual value internalization that emerge through structured religious practices, social interactions, and students' reflective experiences in their everyday school life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach to conduct an in-depth analysis of the role of religious rituals in fostering *tazkiyatun nafs* among students. This approach was chosen because it is capable of revealing phenomena in their contextual setting and emphasizes the interpretation and internalization of values experienced by the research subjects (Sugiyono, 2018). The study was conducted at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia. This setting was selected due to its structured religious programs and its emphasis on integrating spiritual development into students' daily educational experiences.

The selection of research subjects was conducted using purposive sampling, with criteria including the level of involvement, understanding of the program, and active participation in the school's religious program. Operationally, this study involved 6 informants: 2 Islamic Religious Education teachers, 1 vice principal for student affairs and religious education, and 3 eighth-grade students who actively participated in the regular religious program. Given that this study involved minors, the researcher strictly adhered to research ethics principles, including obtaining informed consent from the school, ensuring that student participation was voluntary, maintaining the anonymity of informants in the report, and ensuring that all data were used solely for academic purposes.

Data collection methods included observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observation was conducted over two months, from February 2026 to March 2026, to identify the duration and consistency of students' engagement in daily religious rituals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in six face-to-face sessions, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, to explore in depth the process of students' internalization of spiritual values. Meanwhile, documentation was used as supporting evidence, including photographs of activities.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which comprises three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, the researcher selected and simplified data from interview transcripts and field notes, then coded them based on three main themes in the cultivation of *tazkiyatun nafs*: *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*. The coded data were then presented as descriptive narratives according to the research themes. Conclusions were drawn through a verification process by comparing patterns of findings with the raw data and applying source triangulation (among students, teachers, and school officials) and methodological triangulation (among interviews, observations, and documentation) to ensure the validity and credibility of the data (Sugiyono, 2018).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Structured Religious Rituals through the Hidden Curriculum

Field research findings indicate that Al-Zahra Indonesia Junior High School implements religious rituals in a structured manner through the hidden curriculum mechanism. The Student Affairs and Religious Affairs Division carries out program design in a structured manner, which is then detailed in annual and semester plans. Implementation is conducted collectively for all students in grades 7, 8, and 9 to establish consistent standards of religious practice within the school environment. A summary of this habit-forming program is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of habit-forming program

Program Type	Implementation Schedule	Description and Habituation Targets
Congregational Prayer	Every Day (Dhuhr Time)	Time discipline, independent organization of prayer rows (<i>shaf</i>), and adherence to mosque etiquette.
Dhuha Prayer & <i>Muraja'ah</i>	Tuesday & Wednesday	Habituation of <i>sunnah</i> worship, recitation standardization (<i>Tahsin</i>), and memorization of selected surahs.
<i>Muhadharah</i>	Every Wednesday Morning	Developing self-confidence, public speaking skills, and responsibility.
Faithful Friday Program	Second Week of Every Month	Social piety through food distribution to the surrounding community.
<i>Tahfidz</i> & <i>Tahsin</i>	Scheduled in Class	Strengthening memorization and improving the quality of individual Qur'anic recitation.

During the student planning phase, the school sets memorization goals for selected surahs, such as Ar-Rahman, Al-Waqiah, Al-Mulk, and Yasin, with a target completion time of three months. In addition, the school implements fairly detailed rules regarding daily etiquette, covering the procedure for performing wudu, the proper arrangement of sandals, the readiness to bring and spread-out prayer mats independently, and the etiquette of sitting while praying. These provisions are enforced for all students to standardize worship practices, given the diverse educational backgrounds of the students, not all of whom come from Islamic-based schools.

The observations indicate strong alignment between program planning and on-site implementation. When the call to prayer sounds, students spontaneously stop their learning activities and head straight to the mosque without needing repeated instructions from their teachers. The patterns of physical discipline and spatial order evident in these daily activities were documented through an approved observation process conducted by school authorities.

The entire series of worship activities was carried out comprehensively, including congregational prayer, *dhikr*, collective supplication, and the *ba'diyah* Zuhur prayer. Throughout the activity, the students remained in their respective positions until the concluding prayer ended and left the mosque area in an orderly manner without causing any disturbance. The students' sense of responsibility was evident when the student assigned to lead the prayer was unable to attend; other students volunteered to take on that role without the teacher's instruction. Although the students' level of independence has developed well, the Islamic Education teacher continues to participate directly in guiding them to ensure the quality of recitation and the orderly conduct of the prayer are maintained.

To complement the daily worship routine, the school also implements a *Muhadharah* program held regularly every Wednesday morning. Based on school program documentation and interview results, this activity is designed to build students' self-confidence and public speaking skills. Through a rotating assignment system, students are responsible for preparing and delivering a brief religious presentation to their teachers and peers. The students' actual practice of completing an assignment given by the school to develop public speaking skills too. The audience's engagement—specifically, the other students who sat and listened attentively—also demonstrates that the event proceeded in an orderly manner.

Outside the mosque, character development is fostered through the 5S culture (smile, greet, say hello, be polite, be courteous). The reinforcement of daily etiquette, such as the proper way to walk in front of a teacher, limiting physical contact with non-mahram

individuals when shaking hands, and the prohibition against eating and drinking while standing. Interactions among students during the observation period also reflected a harmonious atmosphere; the researcher found no visible indications of bullying or seniority-based discrimination. Additionally, during the "Friday of Faith" activity, students actively participated in sharing food with the community outside the school environment. Empirically, this pattern of behavior was also observed to be consistently practiced by students independently at home, as reflected in the routine monitoring reports conducted between the school and parents.

Overall, the inculcation of religious rituals through the hidden curriculum at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia contributes gradually to the formation of students' religious character. This process is evident through compliance with school regulations, the cultivation of religious etiquette and rituals, and the emergence of a sense of independent worship without reliance on teacher instructions. The internalization of these practices is also observed to continue in the home environment through collaborative monitoring between the school and parents.

The Process of Cultivating *Tazkiyatun Nafs* through the Practice of Rituals

The systematic practice of religious rituals does not merely emphasize the discipline of outward behavior but is also directed toward the formation and purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*). According to the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali, this process is explained in three stages of ethical Sufism: *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*. Because this spiritual concept is profound, its attainment cannot be understood as a rapid process or judged solely by outward appearances. Therefore, the research analysis was conducted in stages, distinguishing between empirically observed behavior, expressed inner awareness, and the researcher's academic interpretation of field data.

Elimination of Undesirable Behaviors (Takhalli)

The initial stage is demonstrated through a planned effort to reduce students' negative behaviors by reinforcing discipline in daily etiquette. The forms of intervention carried out by educators—such as reprimanding students who use coarse language, behave in an impolite manner, or violate simple etiquette rules, such as eating and drinking while standing—demonstrate that the process of habit formation is being applied in practice within the school environment. This finding aligns with the view of Anbiya (2023) that the *takhalli* stage requires the consistent application of rules as the first step in the process of self-purification.

Tangible changes at this stage are evident in a shift from the process of *takhalli* has begun to be internalized in students' language habits, thereby reducing the negative behavioral patterns that previously emerged. Additionally, the *Muhadharah* activity serves to train in managing nervousness, controlling one's ego, and fostering a sense of responsibility when speaking in public. This finding reinforces previous research, which found that participatory religious activities not only influence outward behavior but also foster internal self-control (Allsyafira & Fauzi, 2025).

In terms of social interaction, the school environment exhibited a harmonious atmosphere. During the observation, the researcher found no apparent indications of bullying or seniority-based practices in the student interactions. The students' ability to maintain appropriate behavioral boundaries indicates that strengthening religious character helps prevent the emergence of deviant behavior (Abidin et al., 2025). Therefore, the *takhalli* stage in this study is not merely interpreted as a theoretical concept but is also reflected through directly observable indicators, such as a reduction in negative behavior and the establishment of social discipline as a crucial foundation before entering the *takhalli* stage.

The Cultivation of Virtues (Tahalli)

From the perspective of *tazkiyatun nafs*, after negative traits have been reduced through the *takhalli* stage, the next process is *tahalli*, namely the effort to adorn the soul with virtuous qualities through continuous cultivation (Musyarofah et al., 2026). Unlike general character education, which is often directed primarily toward social morality, *tahalli* places every moral action within the framework of spiritual devotion to Allah. Therefore, the values cultivated in this stage do not merely shape students' outward behavior, but also develop their inner spiritual dimension (*nafs*).

The transformation mechanism in the *tahalli* stage occurs gradually and is mutually connected. The repeated implementation of religious rituals fosters students' discipline, orderliness, and obedience in carrying out worship practices (Lestari et al., 2026). This discipline then develops into moral habituation, particularly in the form of *adab* in daily life. At a deeper level, the habituation of religious practices strengthens students' spiritual awareness, so that worship is no longer performed merely as a formal obligation, but begins to involve understanding, reflection, and inner commitment.

The implementation of this process can be seen in the school's attention to the detailed aspects of adab in worship practices. The school does not only emphasize prayer as a religious obligation, but also habituates students to maintain order in wudu procedures, devotion in supplication, calmness during worship, and discipline in following mosque etiquette. These practices indicate that religious rituals are used as a pedagogical medium to cultivate discipline, humility, and spiritual consciousness. In this context, worship functions not only as a ritual activity, but also as a formative process that shapes students' moral and spiritual character.

The recitation of the pledge "*Radhitsu billahi rabba*" every morning also becomes an important part of this habituation process. This practice serves as a symbolic affirmation of faith before students begin their academic activities. Through continuous repetition, the pledge is not only understood as a verbal expression, but also as a means of strengthening the values of tawhid in students' inner orientation. This finding is in line with Hakim (2022), who explains that the habituation of religious activities can foster outward discipline while also strengthening faith values and improving the quality of students' worship.

The *tahalli* process is also reflected in students' social interactions as a form of social piety. The implementation of the 5S culture—smile, greeting, salutation, politeness, and courtesy—shows the school's effort to cultivate Islamic manners in daily interactions. In addition, the habituation of Islamic etiquette, such as maintaining appropriate boundaries in interactions with non-mahram individuals and controlling behavior when interacting with peers and teachers, reflects the formation of self-control and moral responsibility. These practices show that the values of *tahalli* are not limited to ritual worship, but are also expressed in students' social behavior.

This form of social transformation is consistent with the findings of Muslimah (2022), which show that persuasive guidance and the cultivation of polite behavior in the school environment can become internalized in students' daily conduct. Through consistent reinforcement, students gradually develop courteous, controlled, and respectful behavior. Thus, *tahalli* does not only strengthen individual piety, but also forms social ethics that guide students in building respectful relationships with others.

Furthermore, empathy and social concern as important dimensions of *tahalli* are developed through the Faithful Friday program. Students' involvement in collecting and distributing food to the surrounding community shows that the virtues cultivated in school

extend beyond the institutional environment. This activity indicates that religious character formation does not stop at personal worship, but also develops into social piety through concrete acts of care, generosity, and responsibility. This finding supports Cahyani and Attalina (2024), who state that the cultivation of religious character contributes to the development of positive social behavior in everyday life.

Therefore, *tahalli* within the framework of *tazkiyatun nafs* at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia represents a process of value internalization that integrates ritual discipline, moral habituation, and social concern. Consistent religious habituation becomes a bridge between worship practices and social ethics. Through this process, students' character is formed not only in visible moral behavior, but also in inner spiritual awareness. This stage becomes an important foundation for the next stage, *tajalli*, which represents a deeper level of spiritual consciousness.

The Growth of Spiritual Awareness (Tajalli)

The highest stage in the process of *tazkiyatun nafs* is *tajalli*, namely a condition in which spiritual values are deeply internalized and reflected in the individual's awareness of Allah's presence (*muraqabah*) in every action (Yandri & Juliawati, 2025). However, considering the depth of this Sufi concept, *tajalli* cannot be understood as a spiritual state that can be easily measured or definitively verified through surface-level observation. Therefore, in this study, *tajalli* is positioned not as an absolute claim regarding students' attainment of a final spiritual state, but as an interpretive indicator of the development of students' spiritual awareness.

The indication of *tajalli* can be observed through the emergence of students' independence and responsibility in religious practices. Students' ability to organize prayer rows independently during Dhuha prayer, as well as their willingness to voluntarily lead *zikr* when the assigned student is absent, reflects the success of religious habituation in forming disciplined and responsible behavior. Nevertheless, these empirical behaviors should not be interpreted as direct evidence of *tajalli*. Rather, they are better understood as conducive conditions that open the possibility for the growth of inner awareness, particularly when worship practices are carried out without dependence on direct instruction from teachers (Mud'is, 2023).

The development of spiritual awareness is also reflected in the way students begin to connect worship with self-control and moral responsibility. Religious practices are no longer limited to mechanical repetition or compliance with school regulations, but gradually become

a medium for cultivating inner reflection. In this context, prayer, zikr, and Qur'anic memorization function not only as routine activities, but also as instruments for developing awareness of proper conduct. This shows that spiritual habituation can encourage students to regulate their behavior based on religious consciousness rather than merely external supervision.

This process is closely related to the concept of *muraqabah*, namely the awareness that every action is under the observation of Allah. In the context of students' religious development, *muraqabah* appears in the form of growing self-awareness to maintain worship, preserve memorization, and control daily behavior. Although this awareness cannot be claimed as a perfect manifestation of *tajalli*, it indicates that structured religious habituation has begun to move from external compliance toward internalized spiritual consciousness.

The connection between ritual practice and moral self-control supports the findings of Romadhoni et al. (2023), which state that religious habituation does not only establish worship routines, but also fosters self-awareness to apply religious values in daily behavior. Thus, the religious rituals implemented at school contribute to the formation of students' internal control mechanisms. Worship practices gradually become linked with moral reflection, enabling students to understand that religious observance should be followed by ethical conduct in everyday life.

Furthermore, the indication of spiritual internalization can be seen from the consistency of students' religious practices outside the school environment. Collaborative monitoring between the school and parents shows that some religious habits developed at school continue to be practiced in the family environment. This continuity indicates that religious habituation is not entirely dependent on institutional rules. Instead, the practices begin to develop into personal routines that shape students' way of life beyond the school setting.

Based on these findings, *tajalli* in this study is understood as an interpretive stage that reflects the emergence of students' spiritual awareness through structured religious habituation. The combination of independence in worship, moral self-control, awareness of *muraqabah*, and continuity of religious practice outside school provides analytical evidence that religious rituals do not stop at outward compliance. Rather, they facilitate the gradual internalization of Islamic values within students' consciousness. Therefore, structured religious rituals at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia can be understood as a pedagogical mechanism

that supports the process of *tazkiyatun nafs* by transforming formal religious practice into deeper spiritual awareness.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of religious rituals, systematically designed and consistently carried out at SMP Al-Zahra Indonesia, fosters the process of *tazkiyatun nafs* through the stages of *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*. The findings indicate that the internalization of spiritual values occurs gradually, beginning with external compliance, progressing to habitual practices through repeated exposure, and ultimately giving rise to spiritual awareness that emerges from within students themselves. Theoretically, these findings enrich Islamic education studies by integrating Imam Al Ghazali's Sufi concepts into a modern pedagogical framework through the hidden curriculum approach. In practice, this research demonstrates that the formation of religious character does not rely solely on knowledge transfer in the classroom but also on the creation of a structured and sustained social environment and habituation.

However, this study has limitations because it was conducted at a single educational institution with a limited number of informants; therefore, the findings are not intended to be broadly generalized or used to draw absolute causal relationships, but rather to provide a contextual understanding of the process of value internalization within that school environment. For future research, it is recommended to involve more educational institutions with diverse characteristics or to use a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between religious ritual habituation and spiritual awareness.

Overall, this study confirms that the synergy among religious rituals, the reinforcement of good manners, and a supportive school environment is a key factor in transforming students' outward compliance into a deeper spiritual awareness within the context of contemporary Islamic education.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Publish or Perish software to support the identification and retrieval of relevant academic literature. In addition, DeepL was used for translation from Indonesian to English, and Grammarly was employed for

grammar checking, language refinement, and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript.

After using these tools, the author(s) carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all content. The author(s) take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final version of the manuscript.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

- a. Muhamad Zhulfan Ramadhan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, and Writing – Review & Editing.
- b. Saiful Bahri: Supervision and Validation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Ethical Approval Statement

The authors confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. All data collection procedures, including observation and photographic

documentation, were conducted with permission from the school authorities. No personal or sensitive identifying information of the participants was disclosed in this study, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

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