

# Implementing Islamic School Culture Policy to Strengthen Teacher Professionalism: A Multi-Case Study in North Aceh, Indonesia

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## Abstract

Islamic school culture policy has become a strategic issue in Aceh's education system because schools are expected to integrate Islamic values, local cultural identity, teacher professionalism, and educational quality improvement into daily institutional practices. This study aims to analyze the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of Islamic school culture policy in strengthening teacher professionalism in North Aceh, Indonesia. A qualitative approach with a multi-case study design was employed at SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed using within-case and cross-case analysis to identify institutional patterns, similarities, and differences between the two schools. The findings show that both schools formulate Islamic school culture policy through value-based and contextual processes grounded in Islamic values, Aceh educational regulations, school vision, institutional rules, and stakeholder participation. Policy implementation is reflected in religious habituation, Qur'anic programs, Islamic discipline, teacher role modelling, community involvement, and the development of an Islamic professional work culture. However, the two schools differ in governance patterns: SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon is characterized by principal-driven leadership and program-based innovation, whereas MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon is more strongly guided by foundation statutes, institutional rules, and boarding-based Islamic culture. Policy evaluation is conducted through internal monitoring and external accountability, although both schools still require more measurable indicators to assess the direct contribution of Islamic school culture to teacher professional performance. This study implies that Islamic school culture policy should not be limited to symbolic religious activities, but should be designed as an integrated organizational mechanism that strengthens teacher professionalism, school leadership, institutional identity, and sustainable quality improvement in Islamic-oriented educational institutions.

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## Introduction

School culture has increasingly been recognized as a strategic organizational mechanism for improving educational quality because it shapes the values, norms, relationships, leadership practices, professional collaboration, and daily routines through which teachers and students experience schooling. In contemporary educational management, school culture is not merely understood as a set of ceremonial practices or symbolic identities, but as an institutional system that influences teacher motivation, instructional commitment, professional learning, and the sustainability of school improvement. A positive school culture can strengthen teachers' sense of belonging, professional responsibility, collaboration, and instructional performance, while a weak or fragmented culture may reduce policy coherence, weaken teacher commitment, and limit the impact

of educational reform (Harris et al., 2022; He et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, the study of school culture is highly relevant to educational policy implementation because formal regulations can only produce meaningful change when they are translated into shared values, collective practices, and sustainable organizational habits within schools (Admiraal et al., 2021; Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2023).

In Islamic educational contexts, school culture has a distinctive position because it is expected to integrate academic excellence, moral formation, spiritual values, social responsibility, and professional work ethics. Islamic school culture is not limited to religious symbols, dress codes, or ritual activities, but includes the internalization of Islamic values into leadership, curriculum management, teacher professionalism, student character development, school governance, and community relations. The development of an Islamic school culture requires school leaders and teachers to transform religious values into institutional norms, pedagogical practices, ethical behavior, and a professional climate that supports continuous improvement. Previous studies have shown that Islamic values-based education requires coherent policy direction, leadership commitment, teacher capacity building, and contextual adaptation so that religious values do not remain at the symbolic level but become embedded in school routines and professional practices (Abdullah, 2019; Ahn et al., 2024; Antinluoma et al., 2021).

Teacher professionalism is one of the most important dimensions affected by school culture because teachers are the key actors who translate school policy into classroom practice. Professional teachers are not only expected to master subject knowledge and pedagogy, but also to demonstrate ethical commitment, reflective practice, collegial collaboration, discipline, responsibility, and continuous professional growth. Recent studies indicate that instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and professional learning communities contribute significantly to teacher professional development and teaching performance when they are supported by a healthy school culture. School principals play a crucial role in creating professional learning opportunities, supervising instruction, building collaborative norms, and aligning school vision with teachers' daily practices (Hafni, 2021; Siraj et al., 2022; Subasman, 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2023). In this sense, teacher professionalism should not be viewed only as an individual attribute, but also as an organizational outcome shaped by leadership, policy implementation, institutional culture, and stakeholder participation (Çoğaltay & Boz, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2020; Prenger et al., 2021).

The case of Aceh, Indonesia, provides a significant context for examining the relationship between Islamic school culture policy and teacher professionalism. Aceh has a special legal and cultural status in Indonesia, where education is closely connected to Islamic values, local identity, and regional autonomy. Through various regulations and qanun, Aceh's education system is expected to integrate Islamic values, Acehnese culture, national education goals, and the development of morally grounded human resources. Studies on Aceh's Islamic education policy show that the implementation of Islamic values-based education is shaped by juridical, philosophical, sociological, and historical foundations, but it also faces challenges related to policy socialization, institutional readiness, curriculum integration, leadership capacity, and stakeholder coordination (Prenger et al., 2021; Qoyyimah, 2018; Qoyyimah et al., 2020). These findings suggest that Islamic education policy in Aceh cannot be evaluated only from the existence of regulations, but must be examined from how schools formulate, implement, and evaluate Islamic culture as a living organizational practice.

Although Aceh has a strong normative foundation for Islamic education, several studies indicate that the implementation of Islamic school culture is still not fully optimal. In some schools, Islamic school culture is still understood narrowly as the use of Islamic symbols, routine religious activities, or compliance with formal rules, while deeper aspects such as teacher professionalism, leadership practices, collaborative culture, instructional integration, and policy evaluation remain underdeveloped. Previous research also shows that the limited understanding of school actors regarding the meaning of Islamic school culture, insufficient technical guidance, weak policy dissemination, and limited involvement of educational practitioners may hinder the effectiveness of Islamic education policy implementation (Mujahid, 2021; Qoyyimah et al., 2023; Tambak et al., 2021). Therefore, examining how Islamic school culture policy is interpreted and practiced at the school level is essential for understanding whether the policy contributes to meaningful institutional transformation or remains merely normative and symbolic (Abdullah, 2019; Levitt et al., 2018; Subasman, 2023).

Previous studies have contributed important insights into Islamic education policy, school leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism. However, several limitations can still be identified. First, many studies on Islamic education policy in Aceh focus mainly on legal frameworks, curriculum policy, or normative aspects of Islamic education, while fewer studies examine how Islamic school culture policy is operationalized through school-level leadership, teacher professional development, and organizational routines. Second, studies on school culture and teacher performance often emphasize quantitative relationships between leadership, culture, and performance, but provide limited qualitative explanation of how school culture is formulated, implemented, and evaluated in different institutional settings. Third, existing research rarely compares public schools and private Islamic-based madrasahs within the same sociocultural context to understand how different governance structures affect the implementation of Islamic school culture policy (Hady, 2020; Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Saada, 2023; Wu & Shen, 2022). These gaps indicate the need for a more contextual, comparative, and process-oriented investigation of Islamic school culture policy implementation.

Based on these research gaps, this study focuses on the implementation of Islamic school culture policy in North Aceh by comparing two educational institutions, namely SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to analyze Islamic school culture policy not merely as a normative regulation or religious program, but as an organizational mechanism for strengthening teacher professionalism through policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. By using a multi-case study design, this research seeks to explain how different institutional contexts, leadership patterns, stakeholder participation, and evaluation mechanisms shape the development of Islamic school culture in public and private Islamic-oriented educational institutions. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of Islamic school culture policy in strengthening teacher professionalism in North Aceh. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse on Islamic educational management, school culture, and policy implementation, while also offering practical implications for school leaders, teachers, policymakers, and Islamic educational institutions seeking to develop a more coherent, value-based, and professionally oriented school culture.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multi-case study design to examine the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of Islamic school culture policy in strengthening teacher professionalism in North Aceh, Indonesia. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand policy implementation as a contextual, interpretive, and socially constructed process rather than to measure causal relationships statistically. The multi-case study design was selected to allow an in-depth comparison between two educational institutions with different governance characteristics, namely SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon as a public senior high school and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon as a private Islamic senior secondary institution under foundation-based management. The selection of these two schools was based on their active implementation of Islamic school culture, their institutional relevance to Islamic education policy in Aceh, and their potential to provide rich information regarding how Islamic values are translated into school policies, organizational routines, teacher professional practices, and evaluation mechanisms (Busetto et al., 2020; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

The research was conducted in natural school settings to capture the actual practices, interactions, and institutional dynamics related to Islamic school culture policy. Participants were selected through purposive sampling by considering their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the formulation, implementation, or evaluation of school culture policies. The participants consisted of school principals, teachers, school management members, and other relevant stakeholders who were considered capable of providing substantial information about Islamic school culture, teacher professionalism, leadership practices, and policy implementation processes. The use of purposive sampling enabled the researchers to obtain data from information-rich participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Fearon et al., 2021; Mtisi, 2022; Priya, 2021; Rashid et al., 2019).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of Islamic school culture policy, including how policies were formulated, how Islamic values were internalized into school practices, how teachers responded to policy implementation, and how evaluation was conducted. Observations were carried out to examine daily school routines, religious programs, teacher behavior, student activities, leadership practices, and the physical and symbolic environment that reflected Islamic school culture. Document analysis was used to strengthen and verify interview and observation data by reviewing school vision and mission statements, policy documents, school statutes, standard operating procedures, program reports, evaluation records, activity schedules, curriculum-related documents, and other institutional archives relevant to the research focus. The combination of these three techniques allowed the researchers to obtain comprehensive and triangulated data (Campbell et al., 2020; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents to identify meaningful units of information related to policy formulation, policy implementation, teacher professionalism, leadership, stakeholder participation, and policy evaluation. The data were then coded, categorized, and organized into thematic patterns.

Within-case analysis was first conducted to understand the unique characteristics of each school, including its policy orientation, leadership pattern, Islamic cultural practices, and evaluation mechanism. After each case had been analyzed independently, cross-case analysis was conducted to compare similarities and differences between the two schools. This process enabled the researchers to identify common patterns, contextual variations, and conceptual propositions regarding the implementation of Islamic school culture policy in different institutional settings (Dalglish et al., 2020; Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, and repeated verification of data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context, school characteristics, and implementation processes so that readers can assess the relevance of the findings to similar educational settings. Dependability was maintained by documenting the research procedures, data collection process, coding decisions, and analytical steps in a systematic manner. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining reflexivity during data interpretation and by grounding the findings in empirical data rather than personal assumptions. Ethical considerations were also observed by explaining the purpose of the study to participants, maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities, and using the data only for academic purposes. Through these procedures, the study aimed to produce a credible, transparent, and contextually grounded analysis of Islamic school culture policy implementation in relation to teacher professionalism (Fearon et al., 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Naeem et al., 2023).

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Characteristics of the Research Sites***

The findings of this study were obtained from two educational institutions in North Aceh, namely SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon. These two institutions were selected because both have implemented Islamic school culture policies, but they operate under different governance systems. SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon represents a public senior high school under the authority of the education office, while MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon represents a private Islamic senior secondary institution managed under a foundation-based system and supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This difference provides an important basis for understanding how institutional structure, leadership authority, stakeholder participation, and evaluation mechanisms influence the implementation of Islamic school culture policy.

SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon is a public senior high school established on 12 July 1979. The school has been accredited "A" and serves 699 students with the support of 56 teachers. Its institutional vision emphasizes faith, piety, noble character, academic achievement, creativity, and environmental awareness. These values are operationalized through religious habituation, Qur'anic literacy, Islamic moral formation, school-based religious programs, and the integration of Islamic values into daily school activities. In contrast, MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon is a private Islamic senior secondary institution located in Meunye Matang Ubi Village, Lhoksukon District. The madrasah has also been accredited "A" and serves 462 students. Its institutional identity is shaped by the vision of becoming a modern Qur'anic dayah that integrates the national madrasah curriculum with a modern Islamic

boarding school tradition. Table 1 summarizes the institutional characteristics of the two research sites.

**Table 1.** Profile of the Research Sites

Aspect	SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon	MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon
Institutional type	Public senior high school	Private Islamic senior secondary school/madrasah
Governance structure	Under the authority of the education office	Under foundation-based management and the Ministry of Religious Affairs
Accreditation	A	A
Number of students	699 students	462 students
Main institutional orientation	Faith, piety, noble character, achievement, creativity, and environmental awareness	Modern Qur'anic dayah with Islamic character and academic excellence
Main Islamic culture programs	Qur'anic literacy, Tahfizh Al-Qur'an, religious habituation, Islamic celebrations, Islamic dress culture, and teacher role modelling	Congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, tahfiz, tahsin, Islamic speech, hadrah, nasyid, dormitory-based Islamic character formation, and Islamic school discipline
Leadership pattern	Principal-centered and vision-driven leadership	Foundation-based and statute-guided leadership
Main policy emphasis	Internalization of Islamic values through school programs and teacher professionalism	Integration of Islamic values, foundation statutes, boarding culture, and Islamic work ethics

Table 1 shows that both schools share a similar commitment to Islamic values, religious habituation, character formation, and teacher professionalism. However, the two institutions differ in terms of governance structure and leadership authority. SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon provides wider managerial space for the principal to initiate and develop school-based Islamic culture programs, while MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon implements Islamic school culture within a more structured framework determined by the foundation's statutes, standard operating procedures, and institutional vision as a modern dayah.

### ***Formulation of Islamic School Culture Policy***

The formulation of Islamic school culture policy in both institutions was carried out through a value-based and contextual process. At SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon, policy formulation was grounded in Islamic teachings, Aceh educational regulations, community expectations, and the school's institutional vision. The school principal played a central role in translating Islamic educational values into school programs, regulations, and daily routines. The formulation process involved internal school actors such as teachers and school management, as well as external stakeholders such as parents, community figures, and education authorities. This indicates that the policy was not developed as a purely administrative document, but as a shared commitment to build a religious, disciplined, and professional school environment.

At MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon, policy formulation was more strongly connected to the foundation's blueprint, statutes, and institutional guidelines. The school's Islamic culture policy was developed through formal regulations such as statutes, standard operating procedures, school rules, and program guidelines. These documents regulate school governance, quality assurance, student recruitment, teacher expectations, Islamic activities, and daily institutional routines. The foundation

played a dominant role in setting the general direction of the policy, while the principal and school management were responsible for operationalizing the policy through school programs and daily supervision. Table 2 presents the main patterns of policy formulation in the two schools.

**Table 2.** Cross-Case Comparison of Islamic School Culture Policy Formulation

Dimension	SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksuko	MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksuk	Cross-Case Finding
Policy foundation	Islamic values, school vision, Aceh education policy, and community expectations	Foundation blueprint, school statutes, Islamic values, and Aceh education policy	Both schools formulate policy based on Islamic values and the sociocultural context of Aceh.
Main policy actor	School principal and internal school management	Foundation, director, and school principal	Leadership authority differs according to institutional governance.
Stakeholder involvement	Teachers, students, parents, community leaders, and education authorities	Foundation, school management, teachers, parents, and community members	Both schools involve stakeholders, but the pattern of involvement is more flexible in the public school and more statute-based in the madrasah.
Policy orientation	Religious habituation, Islamic character, Qur'anic literacy, and teacher professionalism	Islamic character formation, boarding culture, discipline, teacher capacity, and institutional quality assurance	Both schools connect Islamic school culture with teacher professionalism and student character development.
Decision-making model	Participatory and principal-driven	Foundation-based and consultative	Policy formulation reflects different models of institutional decision-making.

The findings indicate that Islamic school culture policy is shaped by both normative and organizational factors. Normatively, the policy reflects Islamic values and Acehnese educational identity. Organizationally, the policy is influenced by leadership structure, school governance, available resources, and the relationship between school actors and external stakeholders. Thus, the formulation of Islamic school culture policy cannot be separated from the interaction between religious values, local policy, institutional leadership, and community participation.

### ***Implementation of Islamic School Culture Policy***

The implementation of Islamic school culture policy in the two schools was carried out through the internalization of Islamic values in school routines, religious programs, teacher behavior, student discipline, and institutional work culture. At SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon, implementation was strongly reflected in daily religious habituation, Qur'anic literacy, Tahfizh Al-Qur'an, Islamic dress culture, religious lectures, Islamic celebrations, teacher role modelling, and integration of Islamic values into classroom learning. The principal's leadership was important in ensuring that Islamic values were not limited to ceremonial activities but were embedded into school management, teacher discipline, and the moral atmosphere of the school.

The Tahfizh Al-Qur'an program became one of the distinctive features of SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon. This program was not only designed to strengthen students' Qur'anic competence, but also to shape discipline, commitment, and religious identity within the school. Teachers were

expected to support the program through supervision, motivation, and integration of Islamic values in learning activities. In this context, teacher professionalism was developed not only through formal training, but also through ethical responsibility, religious commitment, and active participation in Islamic school culture.

At MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon, implementation was more systematically embedded in the identity of the madrasah as a modern Qur’anic dayah. Islamic culture was implemented through six main patterns: religious habituation, teacher role modelling, enforcement of Islamic rules, creation of an Islamic environment, implementation of Islamic programs, and community participation. Daily practices included congregational prayers, Qur’anic recitation, dhuha prayer, greetings, discipline in time management, Islamic dress code, tahfiz, tahsin, Islamic speech, hadrah, nasyid, and da’wah activities. The physical environment of the madrasah was also designed to support Islamic identity through the presence of a mosque, Islamic calligraphy, moral posters, and dormitory-based religious supervision. Table 3 summarizes the implementation strategies found in both institutions.

**Table 3.** Implementation Strategies of Islamic School Culture Policy

<b>Implementation Aspect</b>	<b>SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon</b>	<b>MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon</b>	<b>Main Contribution to Teacher Professionalism</b>
Religious habituation	Qur’anic literacy, prayers, tauiyah, Islamic celebrations, and Islamic dress culture	Congregational prayer, tadarus, dhuha prayer, dhikr, kultum, tahsin, and dormitory-based religious routines	Strengthens teachers’ role as moral and religious models.
Qur’anic program	Tahfizh Al-Qur’an as a flagship program	Tahfiz and tahsin as part of madrasah/dayah identity	Builds teachers’ responsibility in guiding religious learning.
Islamic values in learning	Integration of Islamic values into classroom activities	Integration of Islamic values into curriculum and boarding culture	Encourages teachers to align pedagogy with Islamic ethics.
School discipline	Discipline, modest dress, polite communication, and religious participation	Islamic rules, student character monitoring, anti-bullying, and moral discipline	Strengthens professional discipline and ethical work culture.
Leadership practice	Principal as a visionary and cultural leader	Foundation and principal as statute-based policy actors	Shapes different patterns of teacher supervision and professional development.
Community involvement	Parenting programs, community religious activities, and collaboration with parents	Parent monitoring, foundation support, and community-based Islamic activities	Expands teacher professionalism beyond classroom instruction.

Table 3 shows that both schools implement Islamic culture through a combination of religious, managerial, pedagogical, and social practices. The implementation process demonstrates that Islamic school culture functions as an organizational mechanism that shapes teacher professionalism through discipline, role modelling, religious commitment, pedagogical responsibility, and collaborative work culture. However, the two schools differ in their dominant implementation pattern. SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon is characterized by principal-driven innovation and program-based Islamic culture, while MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon is characterized by foundation-guided institutional culture and statute-based implementation.

### ***Evaluation of Islamic School Culture Policy***

Evaluation of Islamic school culture policy in both institutions was conducted through internal and external mechanisms. At SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon, internal evaluation was carried out by the principal and school management through monitoring of religious habituation, teacher involvement, student behavior, Qur’anic literacy, and implementation of Islamic values in learning. External evaluation involved the education office, school committee, parents, religious figures, and community actors. One of the most measurable evaluation indicators was the achievement of students in the Tahfizh Al-Qur’an program, which served as a visible indicator of the school’s commitment to Islamic culture.

At MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon, evaluation was more closely connected to institutional statutes and foundation-based supervision. Internal evaluation was conducted through the monitoring of student behavior, enforcement of school rules, character development, teacher discipline, and implementation of daily Islamic activities. External evaluation involved parents through a web-based monitoring system, madrasah supervisors, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and foundation authorities. Sanctions for student violations were applied according to the level of violation and were accompanied by guidance and character development. This indicates that evaluation was not only administrative, but also moral and educational. Table 4 presents the evaluation mechanisms applied in the two schools.

**Table 4.** Evaluation Mechanisms of Islamic School Culture Policy

<b>Evaluation Dimension</b>	<b>SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon</b>	<b>MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon</b>	<b>Cross-Case Meaning</b>
Internal evaluation	Conducted by the principal and school management through program monitoring and behavioral observation	Conducted through foundation statutes, school rules, student monitoring, and teacher supervision	Internal evaluation focuses on consistency between policy and daily practice.
External evaluation	Involves education office, parents, school committee, community leaders, and religious stakeholders	Involves parents, foundation, madrasah supervisors, and Ministry of Religious Affairs	External evaluation strengthens accountability and institutional legitimacy.
Main evaluation object	Religious programs, student behavior, teacher role modelling, and school environment	Student discipline, Islamic activities, teacher performance, dormitory culture, and institutional compliance	Evaluation covers both character formation and teacher professionalism.
Evaluation indicator	Tahfizh achievement, religious participation, discipline, and school climate	Rule compliance, Islamic behavior, parental monitoring, and program sustainability	Both schools need more measurable indicators for long-term policy impact.
Evaluation limitation	Some evaluations remain descriptive and not fully indicator-based	Strong internal control but dependent on foundation authority	More systematic evaluation instruments are needed in both institutions.

The findings show that evaluation is an essential part of Islamic school culture policy implementation. However, both schools still need to strengthen evaluation instruments, measurable indicators, and systematic documentation. Although religious programs and character development activities are regularly monitored, the direct relationship between Islamic school culture and teacher professional performance has not yet been fully measured using explicit performance indicators. This finding suggests the need for a more comprehensive evaluation model that connects Islamic values, teacher professionalism, student character outcomes, and institutional quality improvement.

**Cross-Case Synthesis and Research Model**

The cross-case analysis demonstrates that both SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon implement Islamic school culture policy through four interconnected dimensions: value-based policy formulation, leadership-driven implementation, Islamic professional work culture, and continuous evaluation. The two schools share similar normative foundations, namely Islamic values, Acehnese educational identity, character formation, and teacher professionalism. However, they differ in governance structure, leadership authority, policy instruments, and evaluation mechanisms.

SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon shows a stronger pattern of principal-centered leadership. The principal has a significant role in interpreting policy, mobilizing teachers, strengthening religious programs, and building a school culture based on Islamic values. In this case, the success of Islamic school culture policy depends heavily on leadership vision, teacher commitment, and community support. MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon, on the other hand, shows a stronger pattern of foundation-based governance. The implementation of Islamic school culture is guided by institutional statutes, boarding culture, and foundation policies. In this case, the success of policy implementation depends on institutional consistency, compliance with rules, and coordination between the foundation, principal, teachers, parents, and students. The overall findings can be summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Model of Islamic School Culture Policy Implementation for Strengthening Teacher Professionalism

Figure 1 indicates that Islamic school culture policy functions as a bridge between Islamic values and teacher professionalism. The policy begins with the formulation of values and institutional direction, continues through implementation in school routines and professional practices, and is strengthened through evaluation and accountability. In this model, teacher professionalism is shaped not only by formal training or administrative supervision, but also by the daily internalization of Islamic values, leadership practices, collegial culture, discipline, and institutional commitment.

The findings of this study reveal that Islamic school culture policy becomes effective when it is supported by strong leadership, stakeholder participation, clear institutional rules, consistent religious habituation, and continuous evaluation. Nevertheless, the study also indicates that both schools need to strengthen measurable indicators of teacher professional development, improve systematic documentation, and develop more explicit links between Islamic school culture programs and teacher performance outcomes. Therefore, Islamic school culture should be understood not merely as a set of religious activities, but as a comprehensive policy framework that integrates values, leadership, professional ethics, organizational culture, and educational quality improvement.

### ***Discussion***

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic school culture policy in North Aceh is implemented through a dynamic relationship between Islamic values, Aceh's educational policy, school leadership, stakeholder participation, teacher professionalism, and continuous evaluation. In both SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon, Islamic school culture is not merely expressed through religious symbols or ceremonial activities, but is institutionalized through policy formulation, religious habituation, Qur'anic programs, Islamic discipline, teacher role modelling, and professional work culture. This finding is consistent with Siraj et al. (2022), who argue that Islamic school culture policy in Aceh must be understood within the framework of Qanun-based educational implementation, where Islamic values, local identity, and institutional policy are interrelated. However, the present study extends this argument by showing how such policy is operationalized differently in two institutional settings, namely a public senior high school and a private Islamic madrasah governed by a foundation.

The finding that school leadership plays a central role in translating Islamic values into school culture is also in line with previous studies on educational leadership and teacher professionalism. At SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon, the principal acts as a visionary leader who mobilizes teachers, develops religious programs, strengthens Qur'anic literacy, and integrates Islamic values into school routines. This finding supports He et al. (2024), who found that principals' instructional leadership is a significant predictor of teachers' professional development. It also confirms Alzoraiki et al. (2024), who show that transformational leadership strengthens school culture and teaching performance. Nevertheless, this study provides a more contextual contribution by demonstrating that leadership in Islamic school culture is not only instructional or transformational, but also value-based, moral, and culturally embedded within the Islamic and Acehnese educational context.

The implementation pattern found in MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon shows that foundation-based governance can strengthen policy consistency through statutes, standard operating procedures, Islamic boarding culture, and institutional rules. This finding differs slightly from studies that emphasize principal autonomy as the main driver of school improvement. In this case, the principal's authority is relatively limited by the foundation's policies, but this limitation is balanced

by a strong institutional system, clear rules, and consistent religious routines. This finding enriches the discussion on distributed and institutional leadership. Harris et al. (2022) emphasize that distributed leadership requires shared responsibility and collective capacity, while Liu et al. (2021) show that supportive school culture and teacher collaboration mediate the effect of leadership on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. The present study confirms these arguments by showing that Islamic school culture becomes more sustainable when leadership is not only centered on an individual principal, but also supported by institutional norms, foundation authority, teacher participation, and community involvement.

Another important finding is that Islamic school culture contributes to teacher professionalism through the formation of an Islamic professional work culture. In both schools, teacher professionalism is reflected in discipline, responsibility, integrity, collaboration, pedagogical commitment, and moral example. This finding is consistent with studies on professional learning communities, which argue that teacher professionalism develops more effectively in schools that support collaboration, shared values, reflective practice, and continuous learning. Antinluoma et al. (2021) explain that professional learning communities serve as a strategy for school development and student achievement, while Admiraal et al. (2021) emphasize that school-based professional learning requires institutional support and collaborative culture. The present study strengthens these findings by showing that, in Islamic school contexts, professional culture is not only built through pedagogical collaboration, but also through religious commitment, moral responsibility, and the internalization of Islamic work ethics.

The findings also indicate that religious habituation and Qur'anic programs function as important instruments for shaping school identity and professional responsibility. In SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon, the Tahfizh Al-Qur'an program serves as a distinctive institutional program that strengthens religious identity and student character while requiring teacher involvement in guidance and supervision. In MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon, tahfiz, tahsin, congregational prayer, Islamic speech, hadrah, nasyid, and dormitory-based religious routines form an integrated Islamic culture. This finding is consistent with studies on Islamic education that emphasize the importance of integrating religious values into curriculum, school climate, and daily institutional practices. However, this study contributes a deeper understanding by showing that religious programs can also become mechanisms for strengthening teacher professionalism when teachers are positioned as moral models, supervisors, facilitators, and carriers of institutional values.

The evaluation of Islamic school culture policy in both institutions shows that internal and external accountability are essential for maintaining program sustainability. SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon conducts evaluation through program monitoring, supervision, parental involvement, community assessment, and education office oversight. MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon applies evaluation through foundation statutes, student discipline monitoring, web-based parental monitoring, madrasah supervision, and character development mechanisms. This finding is relevant to policy implementation theory, which emphasizes that effective implementation requires clear communication, resources, implementer commitment, bureaucratic structure, and an evaluation system. However, the findings also reveal that evaluation in both schools remains relatively descriptive and has not fully used measurable indicators to assess the direct relationship between Islamic school culture and teacher professional performance. This indicates that Islamic school

culture policy needs more systematic evaluation instruments that can connect religious programs, teacher professionalism, student character outcomes, and school quality improvement.

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of Islamic school culture policy as an organizational mechanism for strengthening teacher professionalism. Previous studies have often examined Islamic education policy from legal, curricular, or normative perspectives, while studies on school culture and teacher professionalism have often been conducted separately. This study integrates these dimensions by showing that Islamic school culture policy operates through a sequence of value-based policy formulation, leadership-driven implementation, Islamic professional work culture, and continuous policy evaluation. The comparison between a public senior high school and a foundation-based Islamic madrasah also provides a distinctive contribution because it reveals how different governance structures shape different patterns of policy implementation while still producing similar commitments to Islamic values, teacher professionalism, and school identity.

The theoretical implication of this study is that Islamic school culture should be understood not only as a cultural or religious phenomenon, but also as a policy implementation process that connects values, leadership, organizational structure, teacher professionalism, and institutional accountability. The findings expand the discourse on educational policy implementation by adding a value-based and religious-cultural dimension, particularly in the context of Aceh, where Islamic values and local identity are embedded in formal educational policy. The study also contributes to the literature on teacher professionalism by showing that professional performance in Islamic schools is shaped not only by pedagogical competence and administrative supervision, but also by moral example, religious commitment, work discipline, and collective responsibility.

Practically, this study implies that school leaders and policymakers need to design Islamic school culture policies that are not limited to symbolic religious activities, but are integrated into school vision, teacher development, curriculum practice, student discipline, and evaluation systems. Public schools can learn from the structured governance of madrasahs in developing clearer statutes, standard operating procedures, and measurable indicators of Islamic culture implementation. Conversely, private Islamic madrasahs can learn from public schools in strengthening principal leadership autonomy, stakeholder participation, and program innovation. For teachers, the findings imply that professionalism in Islamic educational institutions requires the integration of pedagogical competence, ethical conduct, religious commitment, collaboration, and continuous self-development. For policymakers, the study highlights the need for clearer technical guidelines, evaluation instruments, and professional development programs that support the implementation of Islamic school culture policy at the school level.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted only in two educational institutions in North Aceh, so the findings cannot be generalized to all schools or madrasahs in Aceh or Indonesia. Second, the study relied on qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents, which means that the findings are interpretive and contextual. Third, the study did not quantitatively measure the direct impact of Islamic school culture policy on teacher performance or student learning outcomes. Fourth, the evaluation of policy implementation was analyzed based on school practices and institutional documents, while more systematic performance indicators were not yet available. Future research is therefore recommended to involve more schools, compare different districts, include quantitative measures of teacher professionalism and student outcomes, and develop validated instruments for evaluating Islamic school culture policy

implementation. Further studies may also examine how Islamic school culture interacts with digital leadership, teacher professional learning communities, and student character development in different educational contexts.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of Islamic school culture policy in North Aceh is shaped by the interaction between Islamic values, Aceh's educational regulations, school leadership, stakeholder participation, institutional governance, and continuous evaluation. The findings show that SMA Negeri 1 Lhoksukon and MAS Al Muslimun Lhoksukon both formulate Islamic school culture policy through value-based and contextual processes, but they differ in governance patterns: the public school is more strongly characterized by principal-driven leadership and program-based innovation, whereas the private madrasah is more strongly guided by foundation statutes, institutional rules, and boarding-based Islamic culture. Policy implementation in both institutions is reflected in religious habituation, Qur'anic programs, Islamic discipline, teacher role modelling, community involvement, and the development of an Islamic professional work culture that emphasizes discipline, responsibility, integrity, collaboration, pedagogical commitment, and moral example. Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on Islamic educational management by conceptualizing Islamic school culture policy as an organizational mechanism for strengthening teacher professionalism, rather than merely as a set of symbolic religious activities. Practically, the findings imply that school leaders, foundations, teachers, and policymakers need to design clearer policy instruments, measurable evaluation indicators, and sustainable professional development programs to ensure that Islamic values are internalized into school governance, teaching practices, and institutional quality improvement. However, this study is limited to two educational institutions in North Aceh and relies on qualitative data, so future research should involve broader school contexts, comparative regional analysis, and mixed-method approaches to measure the direct impact of Islamic school culture policy on teacher performance, student character, and educational outcomes.

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