

Understanding Organizational Culture in an Integrated Islamic School: A Qualitative Case Study in Indonesia

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Abstract: This qualitative single-case study examines how organizational culture is manifested and internalized at SMP IT Al-Hijrah Islamic Global School (AIGS), Deli Serdang, Indonesia. Guided by Edgar H. Schein's three-level framework, the study analyzes visible artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions, together with differences in how school members understand and enact those cultural elements. The study involved 25 purposively selected participants representing school leadership, teachers, and students. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. A thematic procedure combined deductive coding based on Schein's framework with inductive coding of patterns emerging from the field data, while source and technique triangulation supported credibility. The findings show that Islamic architecture, uniforms, language practices, rituals, and visual messages form a coherent artifact system. These artifacts are connected to espoused values of discipline, cooperation, openness, responsibility, and Islamic character. At the deepest level, members share assumptions that education is worship, knowledge should integrate religious and general learning, and service should be grounded in familial bonds. Cultural internalization was strongest among leaders and longer-serving teachers, while newer staff showed more normative and less detailed understanding. The study contributes an integrated explanation of how Islamic values move from visible practices to underlying organizational assumptions. Practically, it highlights the need for structured orientation, sustained role modeling, cultural evaluation, and stronger school-parent partnerships.

Keywords: Cultural Internalization, Institutional Identity, Integrated Islamic School, Organizational Culture, Schein's Framework

A. Introduction

Organizational culture shapes how educational institutions interpret their mission, coordinate work, establish behavioral expectations, and communicate identity to internal and external stakeholders (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Gara & La Porte, 2020). In schools, culture is not limited to formal rules or written statements. It is also expressed through recurring rituals, patterns of interaction, spatial arrangements,

leadership practices, and assumptions about teaching, learning, discipline, and service. A coherent culture can strengthen institutional continuity and member commitment, whereas fragmented cultural messages can produce inconsistency between official values and everyday practice.

This study uses Edgar H. Schein's three-level model as its primary analytical framework. At the first level, artifacts include visible and observable manifestations such as architecture, uniforms, slogans, routines, language, ceremonies, and codes of conduct (Schwarzkopf et al., 2024). At the second level, espoused values refer to the principles that an institution formally promotes as desirable guides for decisions and behavior. At the third level, basic underlying assumptions are taken-for-granted beliefs that members rarely question because they have become accepted as natural ways of understanding organizational life. The model is useful because it prevents analysis from treating visible religious symbols as complete evidence of culture; instead, it requires examination of whether those symbols are connected to shared values and deeper assumptions.

Integrated Islamic schools in Indonesia provide an important context for examining this relationship. These institutions seek to combine national academic requirements with Islamic moral, spiritual, and social development. Their identity is commonly communicated through worship routines, Qur'anic programs, dress codes, gender arrangements, school language, and partnerships with families. At the same time, they face pressure to maintain religious distinctiveness while responding to contemporary expectations related to educational quality, global competence, technology, and public accountability. Their organizational culture therefore develops at the intersection of religious commitment, institutional management, and social change (Khan et al., 2025; Van Buren et al., 2020).

Previous educational culture studies generally show that leadership, ritual, shared language, teacher modeling, and member participation can strengthen institutional identity (van Lankveld et al., 2021). Studies of Islamic educational institutions likewise emphasize religious habituation and value-based management. However, much of this work concentrates on visible programs and formally declared values. Fewer studies trace how daily practices are interpreted by different groups or examine whether those practices have reached the level of basic assumptions. The literature also gives limited attention to variation between leaders, experienced teachers, newer employees, and students, even though differences in tenure and participation may affect the depth of cultural internalization.

The gap is therefore not the absence of studies using Schein's model, but the limited contextual explanation of how the three levels interact within an integrated Islamic school undergoing institutional development (Massouti et al., 2024). A culture may appear strong because artifacts are consistent, while new members may understand its meaning only superficially. Similarly, compliance with routines may reflect

acceptance, habit, or social pressure rather than deep internalization. Examining these distinctions is important for identifying which cultural elements are stable and which require more systematic socialization.

SMP IT Al-Hijrah Islamic Global School was selected as an information-rich case because it combines a long-standing Islamic school identity with a recent orientation toward global standards. The school has visible religious routines, a dual curricular orientation, distinctive rules, active parent involvement, and an ongoing identity transition from Al-Hijrah 2 to AIGS. Preliminary observations also indicated that leaders and established teachers could articulate the school's values more fully than some newly recruited staff. This combination of cultural continuity, institutional transition, and uneven member understanding provides a suitable setting for examining cultural manifestation and internalization (Kunst et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How is organizational culture manifested through artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions at SMP IT Al-Hijrah Islamic Global School? (2) To what extent do school members understand and internalize the organization's cultural values across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions? (3) What factors support or constrain cultural internalization among different groups of school members?

B. Methods

Research Design and Site

The study employed a qualitative single-case study design supported by ethnographic techniques (Warwick et al., 2023). The case-study design bounded the inquiry within one institution, while participant observation and attention to routines, symbols, language, and shared meanings provided the ethnographic sensitivity needed to interpret organizational culture. The study was conducted at SMP IT Al-Hijrah Islamic Global School in Laut Dendang, Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra. The school operates under the Al-Hijrah Islamic Global School Foundation and combines the national curriculum with the standards and religious orientation of the Integrated Islamic School Network.

Participants and Researcher Role

The study involved 25 purposively selected participants representing school leadership, teachers, and students. Selection considered organizational role, length of involvement in the school, participation in cultural programs, and ability to provide information relevant to the research questions. The available research records did not consistently preserve the numerical distribution and demographic characteristics of each participant subgroup; this reporting limitation is acknowledged in the discussion (Liu et al., 2023; Wallace et al., 2023). The researcher

acted as a participant-observer during selected school activities and as the interviewer during formal data collection. Reflexive field notes were maintained to distinguish observed events, participant explanations, and the researcher's interpretations (Dado et al., 2023; Nicmanis, 2024). In the revised reporting, personal names were replaced with role-based descriptions to reduce identification risk and to focus analysis on patterns rather than individual personalities.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary techniques (Mishra et al., 2020). First, participant observation focused on school architecture, spatial arrangements, uniforms, greetings, worship routines, language practices, meetings, classroom interaction, discipline, cleanliness, and parent-related programs. Second, semi-structured interviews explored participants' interpretations of school identity, core values, rules, religious practices, organizational change, cultural socialization, and differences between formal expectations and daily behavior. Interviews were conducted individually or in small groups according to participant role. The original field records did not consistently document standardized interview duration, number of sessions, or language of each session, and these omissions are treated as methodological limitations rather than reconstructed retrospectively. Third, document analysis covered the school vision and mission, handbook, rules, program descriptions, visual messages, photographs, and other institutional records relevant to culture and identity (Dahlgren, 2024).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The analysis followed an iterative thematic procedure. In the first cycle, data were organized deductively using the categories of artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions (Hedsköld et al., 2021). In the second cycle, inductive subthemes were developed to capture patterns of cultural understanding, emotional acceptance, behavioral enactment, socialization, tenure, leadership modeling, and parent-school reinforcement. Evidence matrices were then used to compare interview statements, observed practices, and documents. Themes were retained when they were supported by more than one source or technique, while inconsistent evidence was examined as an indication of variation rather than removed. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation across leadership, teacher, and student perspectives and through technique triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. Interpretive claims were qualified when supporting evidence was limited. Formal member checking, independent inter-coder reliability, and peer debriefing were not consistently documented in the available study records; therefore, they are not claimed as completed procedures and are reported as limitations (Cole, 2024; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Table 1. Data Sources and Analytical Purposes

Data Source	Primary Focus	Analytical Use
Participant observation	Rituals, symbols, interaction, discipline, space, and routine	Identify enacted artifacts and recurring behavioral patterns
Semi-structured interviews	Meanings, values, experiences, acceptance, and socialization	Interpret cognitive, affective, and behavioral internalization
Institutional documents	Vision, mission, rules, handbook, programs, and visual messages	Compare formal values with observed practice and participant accounts

C. Results and Discussion

1. Result

Overview of the School's Cultural System

The findings indicate that SMP IT Al-Hijrah/AIGS has a recognizable cultural system rather than a collection of unrelated religious activities. Visible symbols, formal values, and taken-for-granted beliefs generally point in the same direction: the school seeks to form students who are religiously grounded, disciplined, socially responsible, and prepared for wider global engagement. The coherence is strongest in long-established rituals and expectations, although the meaning of those practices is not understood equally by all members (Li et al., 2025).

Artifacts: Visible Manifestations of Culture

Physical artifacts communicate Islamic identity before members enter formal learning spaces. A mosque positioned near the entrance functions as a visible center of religious life (Khanzadeh, 2024). The three-story school building, Islamic class names, shoe-removal rules, metal racks, uniforms, posters, identity monuments, and the "School of Civilization" message create a consistent visual environment. The AIGS Mart adds an element of institutional self-management, while the transition from Al-Hijrah 2 to AIGS signals an effort to communicate global orientation without abandoning the school's religious foundation. Behavioral artifacts reinforce these visual messages. The TELITI morning recitation routine, All Class Tahfidz Day, Dhuha prayer, Islamic greetings, the 4S culture, gender-sensitive worship arrangements, Friday English practice, and structured uniform schedules make cultural expectations observable and repeatable. Students described the school environment as comfortable and teachers as approachable, suggesting that physical order and interpersonal warmth operate together. At the same time, some rules, including language expectations and limits on pocket money, were initially experienced as demanding by some students, indicating that compliance does not always begin with immediate emotional acceptance.

Espoused Values: Discipline, Cooperation, Openness, and Responsibility

School leaders consistently identified discipline, cooperation, openness, and responsibility as the principal organizational values. Discipline was enacted through punctuality, dress, worship schedules, classroom order, and agreed consequences for lateness. Importantly, discipline was commonly mediated through discussion and a family-oriented approach rather than punishment alone. Cooperation appeared in teacher coordination, student group activities, parent-school communication, home visits, and religious programs. Openness was reflected in routine meetings and the expectation that problems should be discussed (Myren et al., 2021). Responsibility was expressed through teaching preparation, cleanliness, worship commitments, and student accountability. The findings also show that Islamic character functions as an overarching value that gives the four principles their meaning. The school does not present discipline merely as administrative compliance; it is connected to *istiqamah* and self-regulation. Cooperation is framed as *ukhuwah* and mutual support, while openness is linked to consultation. Responsibility is associated with accountability before the institution, family, and God. This religious interpretation helps explain why similar practices are experienced as both organizational requirements and moral obligations.

Basic Underlying Assumptions

Three basic assumptions were repeatedly inferred across data sources. First, education is understood as worship and moral service rather than only paid employment or academic instruction. Second, learning is assumed to be holistic, requiring the integration of religious knowledge, general knowledge, character, and practical behavior. Third, organizational relationships are expected to resemble a family, with care, consultation, correction, and shared responsibility (Gustafsson et al., 2021; Haar & Martin, 2022). These assumptions explain why *adab* is emphasized before achievement, why worship is embedded in daily schedules, and why parent participation is treated as part of the educational process. Other practices reveal assumptions about purity, health, and social boundaries (House & Moslener, 2023). Gender separation, rules for dress and interaction, the absence of a conventional canteen, and monitoring of worship at home are interpreted within the school as protective and formative arrangements. English practice and institutional rebranding reveal an additional assumption that Islamic identity and global competence are compatible rather than contradictory.

Table 2. Organizational Culture Across Schein's Three Levels

Level	Key evidence	Dominant meaning	Area requiring attention
Artifacts	Mosque, uniforms, Islamic class names, posters, TELITI, tahfidz, 4S, English Friday	Visible integration of Islamic identity, order, and global orientation	Avoid relying on symbols without explaining their meaning to new members
Espoused	Discipline, cooperation,	Formal principles	Clarify how each value

Values	openness, responsibility, Islamic character	guide routines, communication, and accountability	should influence decisions in complex situations
Basic Assumptions	Education as worship, holistic learning, service as family, adab before achievement	Deep beliefs connect organizational work with spiritual purpose	Make tacit assumptions discussable during orientation and evaluation

Variation in Cultural Understanding and Internalization

Cognitive understanding was strongest among school leaders and longer-serving teachers, who could connect routines with the vision, core values, dual curriculum, and institutional history. Some newer teachers recognized the expected behaviors but could not explain their broader cultural meaning in comparable detail rein. Among students, visual messages and repeated routines supported recognition of school identity, although their explanations were often more concrete and rule-based than those of adults. Affective internalization was visible in pride, belonging, spiritual motivation, and willingness to comply with demanding routines. However, acceptance was not uniform. Some students initially experienced selected rules as burdensome and only later understood them through habituation and explanation. This finding shows that cultural commitment develops over time and should not be inferred from compliance alone (Kim, 2025). Behavioral internalization was evident when members enacted values without immediate supervision, including maintaining cleanliness, removing shoes, using respectful greetings, participating in worship, and accepting agreed consequences. Four factors supported deeper internalization: length of membership, repeated participation in rituals, consistent modeling by leaders and teachers, and reinforcement by parents. The main constraining factor was the absence of a sufficiently structured orientation process for new staff, which left some members dependent on informal observation and imitation.

Table 3. Dimensions and Conditions of Cultural Internalization

Dimension	Observed manifestation	Variation	Supporting conditions
Cognitive	Ability to explain values, programs, identity, and institutional purpose	Leaders and senior teachers showed greater depth than newer staff	Orientation, explicit explanation, access to institutional history
Affective	Pride, belonging, spiritual motivation, and acceptance of expectations	Some rules were initially experienced as demanding	Relational trust, dialogue, repeated positive experience
Behavioral	Consistent worship, discipline, cleanliness, respectful interaction, and responsibility	Habit was stronger in frequently reinforced practices	Role modeling, routine, peer norms, and parent-school reinforcement

2. Discussion

Theoretical Interpretation of the Findings

The findings support Schein's proposition that organizational culture becomes analytically meaningful when artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions are examined together (Asare Obeng et al., 2025). At AIGS, artifacts are not isolated decorations; most are connected to formal values and deeper assumptions about worship, adab, holistic education, and family-based service. This alignment helps explain the stability of routines and the strong sense of institutional identity reported by established members. The study also demonstrates that cultural strength should not be equated with identical understanding (Palmieri et al., 2020). A school can display highly coherent artifacts while still having unequal internalization across membership groups. New teachers may reproduce routines correctly without understanding their historical or philosophical basis. Students may comply with rules before they emotionally accept or conceptually interpret them. This distinction extends analysis beyond the visible consistency of practice to the developmental process through which meaning is acquired (Kjellström et al., 2020).

Relationship to Previous Research

The results are consistent with educational culture research that identifies leadership modeling, ritual, shared language, and member participation as major mechanisms of cultural transmission. They also reinforce studies of Islamic schools that describe religious habituation as a bridge between institutional values and daily behavior. The present case adds nuance by showing that repeated religious practice is most effective when members understand why the practice exists and how it relates to organizational purpose (Vu et al., 2024). The case further suggests that institutional rebranding does not necessarily weaken religious identity (Madueke, 2025). The AIGS transition combines global language and modern organizational aspirations with existing Islamic assumptions. However, such transitions can create interpretive gaps if the new identity is communicated mainly through symbols rather than structured discussion. Cultural continuity therefore depends on making the relationship between old and new meanings explicit.

The Role of Socialization in Cultural Internalization

The variation between established and newer staff identifies socialization as the central organizational challenge. Informal learning through observation is useful, but it may produce selective or inconsistent understanding. A structured orientation should therefore explain the history of the institution, the meaning of core values, the rationale behind major practices, expected examples of value-based decision making, and the relationship between Islamic identity and global orientation. Follow-up mentoring is needed because cultural internalization is unlikely to occur

in a single induction session (Parker et al., 2022). Socialization should also remain dialogical. Members need opportunities to ask why rules exist, discuss tensions between values, and reflect on whether daily practice remains aligned with institutional commitments. This is especially important when students initially experience rules as burdensome or when new staff interpret culture as a list of obligations. Dialogue enables compliance to develop into informed acceptance and responsible action (Gurzawska, 2020; Keeling et al., 2021).

Practical Implications

Four practical actions follow from the findings. First, the school should establish a staged orientation and mentoring program for new employees. Second, it should conduct periodic cultural audits that compare written values, observed routines, and member interpretations. Third, leaders and senior teachers should be supported as explicit cultural models who explain the meaning of practices rather than only enforce them. Fourth, parent-school partnerships should continue to reinforce worship, discipline, and responsibility across school and home settings. These actions can help protect cultural coherence during staff turnover, curriculum development, and institutional rebranding (Clark et al., 2020).

Study Limitation

This study is limited by its single-site design and cannot be statistically generalized to all integrated Islamic schools. The findings may also reflect social desirability because participants discussed a culture that carries strong moral expectations (Loyens et al., 2022). The available records did not consistently retain participant subgroup counts, demographic characteristics, interview duration, session frequency, or interview language. Formal member checking, peer debriefing, and inter-coder reliability were not documented. In addition, the study captured culture during a particular period of institutional transition; cultural meanings may change as rebranding and staff renewal continue.

D. Conclusions

This study examined organizational culture at SMP IT Al-Hijrah Islamic Global School through Schein's three-level framework and addressed how culture is manifested, understood, and internalized. The findings show an overall coherent cultural system. At the artifact level, Islamic architecture, uniforms, visual messages, worship routines, respectful language, cleanliness practices, and English activities communicate a combined religious and global identity. At the level of espoused values, discipline, cooperation, openness, responsibility, and Islamic character guide organizational expectations. At the level of basic assumptions, members understand education as worship, learning as an integration of religious and general knowledge, adab as a foundation for achievement, and service as a familial responsibility. These

levels reinforce one another, but their meanings are not internalized equally by all members. Leaders and longer-serving teachers demonstrated deeper cognitive understanding, affective commitment, and behavioral consistency, whereas some newer staff relied more heavily on imitation and formal compliance. Internalization was strengthened by repeated rituals, leader and teacher modeling, length of membership, and parent-school reinforcement. The principal practical implication is that strong artifacts cannot replace systematic cultural socialization. The school should develop staged orientation and mentoring for new staff, conduct regular cultural audits, create structured opportunities to discuss the meaning of rules and rituals, and maintain parent partnerships that extend values beyond school. The study contributes a contextual explanation of how Islamic values move from visible symbols to shared assumptions while showing that cultural coherence may coexist with uneven member understanding. However, the single-site design, possible social-desirability bias, incomplete participant and interview documentation, absence of formal member checking and inter-coder reliability, and the school's ongoing identity transition limit transferability. Future research should compare integrated Islamic schools across regions, examine public and Islamic school cultures, follow institutional change longitudinally, and investigate how organizational culture relates to teacher performance, student development, and public trust nationally.

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