



Religious Character Building through Cultural Acculturation: An Ethnographic Study of Islamic Ritual Traditions in Tangerang

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Abstract

The relationship between Islamic teachings and local cultural traditions provides an important context for understanding how religious character is developed within contemporary communities. This study examines how cultural acculturation through Islamic ritual traditions contributes to religious character formation and social cohesion in Tangerang, Indonesia. A qualitative ethnographic design was employed to explore the meanings, practices, and social interactions surrounding syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil. Data were obtained through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes involving religious leaders, community elders, cultural practitioners, neighborhood leaders, and local residents. The data were analyzed through data reduction, coding, thematic categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing, while source and method triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking were used to strengthen trustworthiness. The findings indicate that these traditions function not only as religious ceremonies but also as informal spaces for learning and practicing gratitude, responsibility, empathy, generosity, cooperation, and mutual respect. Their repeated participation also facilitates intergenerational transmission of Islamic values, strengthens interpersonal trust and solidarity, and supports harmonious relationships within the multicultural community. The study further develops an initial Community-Based Character Education Model linking Islamic values, cultural acculturation, ritual participation, religious character formation, and social cohesion. These findings highlight the potential of culturally embedded religious traditions as complementary educational resources for sustaining religious character and community harmony.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious character is often associated with formal education, yet many of the values that shape people's everyday conduct are learned and reinforced through family and community life. This situation creates an important paradox in contemporary society: while globalization, urbanization, and digitalization are changing patterns of social interaction, long-established religious traditions continue to survive as part of everyday community practices (Allayarova et al., 2023; Duc, 2026; Kanagasapapathy & Earl, 2026). In Indonesia, where religious life has historically developed alongside diverse local cultures, this interaction has produced forms of religious practice that combine Islamic teachings with culturally embedded traditions. Rather than simply replacing local customs, Islam has frequently become intertwined with existing social practices, creating new contexts for expressing gratitude, responsibility, solidarity, and communal identity. At the same time, rapid social transformation may reduce opportunities for sustained face-to-face interaction and weaken traditional mechanisms of value transmission (Badawy & Shaban, 2026; Maihasni et al., 2025). Religious character, therefore, cannot be understood solely as the outcome of classroom instruction because its development is also influenced by repeated social experiences within families and communities. Participation in shared religious activities may provide opportunities for individuals to observe, practice, and internalize moral values in meaningful social situations (Stein

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et al., 2021). This condition raises an important question concerning whether cultural and religious traditions that persist in contemporary communities can function as informal spaces for religious character formation.

This question is particularly relevant in Tangerang, an increasingly dynamic urban area characterized by diverse social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Despite ongoing modernization, Islamic communal traditions such as syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil continue to be practiced within families and neighborhoods. These traditions involve more than ritual activities because they commonly include collective prayer, religious advice, food sharing, voluntary assistance, and interaction among people of different generations. Such practices create recurring social situations in which religious principles are expressed through concrete behaviors rather than communicated only through formal teaching. Research on local wisdom has demonstrated that culturally embedded practices can support the integration of religious values into educational and social life (Ahmar & Azzajjad, 2025). Similarly, the haul tradition has been identified as a medium for transmitting local wisdom and moral values across generations Khoiriyah et al. (2025) and Rusmana et al. (2024), while community-based character education has shown the importance of collective participation in developing discipline and responsibility (Makmur et al., 2026). These findings suggest that the continuation of Islamic traditions in an urban environment should not simply be viewed as cultural preservation. Instead, their persistence may indicate an adaptive process through which religious values remain meaningful within changing social conditions.

The educational significance of these traditions becomes clearer when character formation is viewed as a process of learning through experience. Formal Islamic education provides structured knowledge about religious principles, but communal participation allows individuals to see how those principles are translated into social conduct. Previous research has emphasized that religious education becomes more meaningful when it contributes to ethical development rather than remaining limited to the transmission of religious knowledge (Saada & Magadlah, 2021). Studies of religious character building have likewise shown that institutional environments can strengthen students' religious attitudes and moral dispositions (Adilan & Mu'min, 2025). However, character development also takes place through interactions with parents, elders, religious leaders, and community members who model particular forms of behavior in everyday situations. During communal rituals, for example, younger participants can learn responsibility by helping prepare activities, respect by interacting with elders, and generosity through food sharing and assistance to others. Such repeated participation may transform abstract religious principles into habitual social behavior. Understanding this process is therefore important because it extends the discussion of character education beyond formal institutions toward the cultural environments in which religious values are continuously practiced.

The issue is also closely related to the challenge of maintaining social cohesion in an increasingly complex urban society. Modern lifestyles, occupational demands, technological dependence, and individualistic patterns of interaction can limit opportunities for residents to engage regularly with one another. Previous studies have demonstrated that social cohesion is strengthened through communication, social networks, mutual assistance, and repeated collective interaction (Feinberg et al., 2023; Forsyth, 2021; Tahmasebi & Askaribezayeh, 2021). Strong social cohesion is also associated with community resilience because interpersonal trust and collective responsibility enable communities to respond more effectively to social difficulties (Sobhaninia, 2024; Tamasiga et al., 2024). Islamic rituals may contribute to these processes by creating regular occasions for residents to meet, cooperate, provide emotional support, and share resources. Their significance consequently extends beyond individual religious observance because the same activities that encourage religious values may also strengthen interpersonal relationships. In multicultural communities, shared religious activities can provide common spaces in which differences in social and cultural backgrounds become less prominent than shared responsibilities and values. Investigating this dual function is therefore essential for understanding how religious traditions can contribute simultaneously to moral development and harmonious community life.

Existing literature provides important foundations for understanding the relationship between religious education, local culture, and character development. Masturin (2022) and Rachman (2026) proposed a religious ethical learning model that connected Islamic education with character development, while Hadi & Prayogi (2025) examined religious character building within

an Islamic school environment. Mansur & Sholeh (2024) highlighted the integration of local wisdom into Islamic character education, and Djazilan & Wuryandani (2024) emphasized the complementary roles of families, schools, and communities in character formation. Other studies have examined the role of Islamic teachers and educational leadership in strengthening students' religious attitudes and ethical behavior. Research on community-based character education has further indicated that collective educational activities can strengthen discipline, responsibility, and other positive dispositions (Yadi et al., 2025). In relation to local religious traditions, demonstrated the educational value of haul, while Fuadi et al. (2024) showed that local traditions can coexist with Islamic principles through processes of cultural interpretation and adaptation. Collectively, these studies establish that religious character is influenced by the interaction of educational, cultural, familial, and community environments.

Nevertheless, the existing literature remains fragmented and leaves several important questions unanswered. First, research on religious character has predominantly concentrated on formal educational institutions, while community-based religious traditions have received less attention as sustained environments for character education (Desfitri et al., 2024). Second, studies of Islamic rituals and local traditions have often emphasized cultural preservation, religious legitimacy, or theological dimensions rather than examining their educational and social functions simultaneously (Adinugraha & Al-Kasyaf, 2025). Third, research on social cohesion generally focuses on interaction, networks, and collective relationships without sufficiently explaining how religious practices contribute to the moral processes underlying those relationships (Battiston et al., 2025). Fourth, relatively limited attention has been given to the way cultural acculturation connects Islamic values with everyday ritual practices and subsequently facilitates religious character formation and social cohesion (Bozbaş & Bozbaş, 2025). This limitation is particularly relevant in an urban setting such as Tangerang, where cultural diversity and social transformation create a distinctive context for the continuation and reinterpretation of religious traditions. Thus, previous studies have rarely integrated cultural acculturation, Islamic ritual traditions, religious character formation, and social cohesion within a single analytical perspective. This gap indicates the need for an ethnographic investigation that examines not only what rituals are practiced, but also how their meanings are negotiated, experienced, and transmitted through everyday community interaction.

Cultural acculturation provides a useful conceptual lens for addressing this gap because it allows religion and culture to be examined as interacting processes rather than as separate or competing domains. Earlier scholarship has argued that local wisdom can provide a context through which Islamic values become socially meaningful without necessarily compromising their religious foundations (Faizah et al., 2022; Roibin et al., 2021). More recent studies similarly demonstrate the importance of culturally responsive approaches in strengthening Islamic character education within changing social environments (Husni et al., 2025). From this perspective, syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil can be understood as living traditions through which Islamic values are expressed, practiced, and transmitted within specific cultural settings. Their educational function is not limited to religious messages delivered during ceremonies, but also emerges through observation, imitation, cooperation, sharing, respect, and repeated participation. Such experiential processes are consistent with the broader argument that meaningful character development is strengthened when learners actively engage in authentic social experiences (Alzubi et al., 2024; Hsbollah & Hassan, 2022; Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). Cultural acculturation may therefore serve as the connecting process through which Islamic values become embedded in local practices, religious character is reinforced through participation, and social cohesion develops through collective interaction (Fahmi et al., 2025). This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for viewing community traditions as part of a broader educational ecosystem rather than merely as inherited cultural ceremonies.

Based on this background, the present study aims to explore how the acculturation of Islamic values and local cultural traditions contributes to religious character building within the multicultural community of Tangerang. Specifically, it examines the social meanings and educational functions of syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil and investigates how participation in these traditions facilitates the transmission and internalization of religious values across generations. The study also seeks to explain how these practices contribute to cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, mutual trust, and harmonious social relationships. Through an ethnographic approach, the research

examines religious traditions as lived social practices rather than treating them solely as ceremonial or theological phenomena. Theoretically, the study contributes by integrating cultural acculturation, Islamic ritual traditions, religious character formation, and social cohesion within a community-based analytical framework. The findings further inform an initial Community-Based Character Education Model in which Islamic values are translated into culturally embedded practices through continuous participation, intergenerational interaction, and community engagement. Practically, this perspective may assist educators, religious leaders, community organizations, and policymakers in developing culturally responsive approaches to character education that complement formal educational institutions. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate that sustainable religious character development can emerge from the continuous interaction between religious principles, local cultural practices, family participation, and community life in a changing multicultural society.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with an ethnographic design to examine how Islamic values are acculturated into local cultural traditions and how this process contributes to religious character formation and social cohesion in Tangerang, Indonesia. An ethnographic design was selected because the research focuses on the meanings, practices, values, and social interactions that emerge naturally within community life rather than on measuring predetermined variables. The approach enabled the researcher to examine religious rituals as lived cultural practices and to understand how community members interpret, practice, and transmit their religious and cultural values across generations. Particular attention was given to four Islamic ritual traditions, namely syukuran kehamilan (pregnancy thanksgiving), aqiqah, haul, and tahlil. The ethnographic perspective was also appropriate for examining the interaction between religious teachings and local customs, including the ways in which traditions are maintained, interpreted, and adapted within a multicultural urban environment. In this study, the unit of analysis was the social and cultural practice surrounding these rituals, including participants' interactions, meanings, responsibilities, and expressions of religious values. The design therefore allowed the study to capture the relationship between cultural acculturation, experiential religious learning, character formation, and community cohesion within their natural social context.

Research Setting and Time

The research was conducted in several neighborhoods in Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia, where Islamic ritual traditions remain actively practiced as part of community and family life. Tangerang was selected because the city represents a multicultural urban environment in which religious traditions interact continuously with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The research setting included community environments where syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil were regularly organized and attended by residents. These settings enabled the researcher to observe religious practices as they occurred in their natural social context, including preparation activities, ritual implementation, interpersonal interaction, and post-ritual community engagement. The fieldwork involved direct engagement with community members and religious figures who possessed knowledge and experience concerning the traditions under investigation. The original manuscript does not specify the exact fieldwork period; therefore, the actual month and year of data collection should be inserted based on the research records before submission. Providing this information is important to ensure methodological transparency and facilitate replication by other researchers.

Participants and Sampling

The participants comprised individuals who possessed direct knowledge of, experience with, or regular involvement in the Islamic ritual traditions examined in the study. They included religious leaders, community elders, cultural practitioners, neighborhood leaders, and local residents who regularly participated in syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because the study required information-rich participants who could provide detailed accounts of the meanings, procedures, religious values, and social functions

associated with the traditions. The inclusion of participants from different community roles was intended to capture diverse perspectives rather than relying exclusively on religious authorities or ordinary ritual participants. Religious leaders were particularly relevant for explaining the relationship between Islamic teachings and local practices, whereas elders and cultural practitioners provided information concerning historical continuity and cultural transmission. Local residents contributed perspectives concerning participation, interpersonal interaction, and the perceived character-building and social functions of the rituals. The original manuscript does not report the exact number of participants or detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria; these details should therefore be added from the original field records before publication. This sampling strategy was consistent with the ethnographic objective of obtaining contextualized information from individuals directly involved in the cultural practices under investigation.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using three principal qualitative instruments: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, supported by field notes. The participant observation protocol was used to record ritual activities, patterns of interaction, forms of participation, division of responsibilities, expressions of religious values, and intergenerational engagement during community events. The semi-structured interview guide was organized around the research objectives and focused on participants' experiences and interpretations of the relationship between Islamic teachings, local traditions, religious character, and social cohesion. Interview questions explored the meanings attached to the rituals, reasons for maintaining the traditions, transmission of religious values between generations, and perceived effects of participation on cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, responsibility, empathy, and other character-related behaviors. Document analysis was used as supporting evidence through the examination of community records, religious-event documentation, photographs, and local archives relevant to the rituals. Field notes were maintained to record contextual observations, researcher reflections, and details that might not have been fully captured through interviews or documentary materials. These instruments were used complementarily so that observed practices could be compared with participants' explanations and available documentary evidence.

Data Trustworthiness

Because this study employed a qualitative ethnographic design, research quality was established through trustworthiness procedures rather than statistical reliability testing. Four complementary strategies were applied: source triangulation, method triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different categories of participants, including religious leaders, elders, cultural practitioners, neighborhood leaders, and local residents. Method triangulation involved comparing findings derived from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Prolonged engagement in the research setting enabled the researcher to develop a contextual understanding of community practices and reduce the possibility of interpreting isolated observations as representative of broader patterns. Member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review preliminary interpretations and confirm whether the emerging findings adequately represented their experiences and perspectives. During the analytical process, field notes, interview materials, and documentary evidence were compared continuously to identify convergent and divergent information. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings and reduced the risk that interpretations would rely solely on the researcher's individual perspective.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through a systematic sequence beginning with the selection of the ethnographic design and research setting and continuing through participant selection, field engagement, data organization, thematic analysis, verification, and conceptual development. First, the researcher identified neighborhoods and community members who were actively involved in the four ritual traditions examined in the study. Second, participant observation was conducted during religious gatherings to document ritual procedures, community interactions, participation patterns, intergenerational relationships, and the expression of religious and social values in their natural

context. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to obtain detailed explanations of the meanings, experiences, and perceived functions of the traditions. Fourth, supporting documents, including community records, photographs, religious-event documentation, and local archives, were collected and examined to complement the observational and interview data. Fifth, the collected materials were organized and reduced through systematic review and initial coding before being grouped into broader thematic categories. Sixth, emerging patterns and relationships were examined across observations, interviews, and documents. Finally, the interpretations were verified through source and method triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking before conclusions and the conceptual model were developed. Figure 1 summarizes the complete research procedure and illustrates the sequential relationship between fieldwork, qualitative analysis, verification, and conceptual development.



Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research procedure consisted of eight interconnected stages. The process began with the qualitative ethnographic research design and proceeded to the identification of the research setting and participants, followed by data collection through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes. The collected materials were then organized and reduced before being subjected to coding and thematic categorization around religious values, cultural acculturation, religious character formation, intergenerational transmission, and social cohesion. The subsequent data display and interpretation stage was used to identify patterns and relationships across the different sources of evidence. The findings were then subjected to trustworthiness verification through source triangulation, method triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. The final stage connected the empirical findings to the conceptual relationship between cultural acculturation, religious character formation, and social cohesion, providing the basis for the development of an initial Community-Based Character Education Model. Thus, the flowchart represents not only the chronological sequence of the research but also the analytical progression from community-based empirical evidence toward conceptual interpretation.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis process consisting of four interconnected stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, interview materials, observation records, field notes, and documentary evidence were organized and reviewed repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data and identify information relevant to the research objectives. Second, data reduction was conducted by selecting, coding, and condensing information related to the principal analytical dimensions, namely religious values, cultural acculturation, religious character formation, intergenerational transmission, and social cohesion. Third, related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories based on conceptual and contextual similarities. These categories were subsequently developed into themes representing recurring patterns across participant accounts, observations, and documents. Fourth, the organized data were displayed through thematic descriptions and systematic comparisons to

clarify relationships among ritual practices, value transmission, character formation, and community relationships. Finally, conclusions were developed by interpreting the emerging themes in relation to the research objectives and repeatedly comparing interpretations with the available empirical evidence. The conclusions were not treated as final until they had been checked against different data sources and collection methods through triangulation and member checking. This analytical process enabled the study to move from individual observations and participant narratives toward an integrated interpretation of cultural acculturation as a mechanism of community-based religious character formation and social cohesion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Cultural Acculturation as the Foundation of Religious Character Formation

The ethnographic findings reveal that the interaction between Islamic teachings and local cultural traditions in Tangerang has created a dynamic process of cultural acculturation that serves as the foundation for religious character formation within the community. Rather than existing as separate social systems, religion and culture complement one another in shaping collective values, daily behavior, and interpersonal relationships. Throughout the field observations, religious activities were consistently intertwined with local customs that have been practiced for generations. Community members perceived these traditions not merely as inherited cultural ceremonies but as meaningful expressions of Islamic devotion that reinforce moral responsibility, social solidarity, and spiritual awareness.

The process of cultural acculturation observed in Tangerang demonstrates that local traditions have gradually adapted to Islamic principles without losing their cultural identity. Community leaders explained that many traditional ceremonies had undergone a process of religious reinterpretation in which cultural symbols were maintained while practices considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings were gradually transformed. As a result, local customs evolved into religiously meaningful social practices accepted by different generations. This adaptive process illustrates that cultural preservation and religious commitment are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing elements that contribute to community stability.

Participant observations during several religious gatherings showed that the implementation of local Islamic traditions encouraged active participation from individuals of different ages and social backgrounds. Preparation for communal ceremonies involved collective planning, shared responsibilities, and voluntary cooperation among community members. Younger participants learned organizational responsibilities by assisting elders in preparing ceremonial venues, arranging food, welcoming guests, and participating in religious recitations. At the same time, older community members acted as cultural transmitters by explaining the historical and religious significance of each tradition. Such intergenerational interaction created an informal educational environment where religious values were transmitted naturally through observation, participation, and daily social experience rather than through formal instruction.

Interviews with religious leaders further indicated that cultural acculturation strengthens religious understanding because Islamic teachings become closely connected with the social realities experienced by the community. Instead of perceiving religion as an abstract theological concept, participants understood religious obligations through practical communal activities that emphasized gratitude, compassion, humility, and mutual assistance. Religious values were therefore internalized not only through sermons delivered in mosques but also through repeated participation in community traditions that required cooperation, respect, and collective responsibility. This continuous engagement gradually transformed religious knowledge into habitual moral behavior practiced in everyday life.

Another important finding concerns the role of family as the primary agent of cultural transmission. Parents commonly introduced children to religious traditions from an early age by involving them in family ceremonies and neighborhood religious events. During these activities, children observed how adults expressed respect toward elders, shared food with neighbors, participated in collective prayers, and demonstrated generosity toward guests. These experiences

enabled children to understand religious values through direct participation rather than verbal instruction alone. Consequently, religious character was developed through continuous social interaction in which family members, religious leaders, and the wider community collectively contributed to the moral education of younger generations.

The ethnographic data also demonstrate that cultural acculturation promotes inclusiveness within Tangerang's multicultural society. Although participants originated from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds, local Islamic traditions functioned as shared cultural spaces where social differences became less significant than collective religious identity. Community members emphasized that participation in religious ceremonies was open to all residents regardless of social status, educational background, or economic condition. Such inclusiveness strengthened interpersonal trust and reduced social distance among community members, creating an atmosphere characterized by mutual respect and harmonious coexistence. The rituals therefore served not only religious purposes but also social functions that reinforced community integration.

Furthermore, repeated participation in local religious traditions contributed to the formation of enduring moral dispositions. The values most frequently identified during interviews included sincerity, gratitude, discipline, patience, empathy, generosity, responsibility, and cooperation. Rather than being taught through formal moral instruction, these values emerged from continuous involvement in collective religious activities where individuals experienced the practical consequences of helping others, maintaining social relationships, and fulfilling communal obligations. The findings indicate that character formation occurred through repeated social practice, allowing religious principles to become embedded in everyday behavior and community norms.

The findings suggest that cultural acculturation constitutes the fundamental mechanism through which religious character is cultivated in Tangerang. The integration of Islamic teachings with local cultural traditions has produced a sustainable system of informal character education that connects religious belief with social practice. Instead of functioning merely as cultural heritage, local religious traditions operate as living social institutions that continuously reproduce moral values, strengthen intergenerational relationships, and preserve communal harmony. This ethnographic evidence demonstrates that cultural acculturation should be understood not simply as the coexistence of religion and culture but as a dynamic social process through which religious character is continuously constructed, negotiated, and strengthened within contemporary Indonesian society.

Islamic Ritual Traditions as Informal Institutions for Religious Character Building

The ethnographic findings demonstrate that Islamic ritual traditions in Tangerang function far beyond their ceremonial and devotional purposes. Rather than being understood merely as religious events performed to fulfill cultural expectations, these traditions operate as informal social institutions through which religious knowledge, moral values, and communal responsibilities are continuously transmitted across generations. Unlike formal educational institutions that rely on structured curricula and classroom instruction, these ritual traditions provide experiential learning environments where individuals internalize religious values through direct participation in collective religious practices. The repeated involvement of community members in these rituals enables Islamic teachings to become embodied in everyday behavior, transforming religious principles into lived social realities.

Field observations indicate that every stage of religious ceremonies involves active collaboration among community members. Preparations begin several days before the event, during which neighbors voluntarily contribute labor, food, financial assistance, and logistical support without expecting material compensation. This collective participation reflects a deeply rooted culture of mutual assistance that has become inseparable from the performance of religious rituals. Community members perceive helping others during these ceremonies as both a social obligation and an act of worship. Consequently, cooperation is not merely a practical necessity for organizing communal events but also a religious expression that strengthens collective responsibility and reinforces moral commitments toward fellow community members.

One of the most significant observations concerns the role of pregnancy thanksgiving (syukuran kehamilan) as an early stage of religious character formation within the family. The ceremony is understood as an expression of gratitude for God's blessings while simultaneously strengthening relationships among relatives and neighbors. Families invite religious leaders to lead

prayers, recite verses from the Qur'an, and deliver moral advice concerning parental responsibility and child upbringing. During these gatherings, participants share meals, exchange prayers, and reinforce social bonds through collective interaction. Although the ritual centers on a family event, its broader social function lies in cultivating gratitude, humility, compassion, and collective care. Children who attend these gatherings observe patterns of respectful communication, hospitality, and generosity, gradually learning religious values through participation rather than formal instruction.

Similar educational functions were identified during aqiqah ceremonies. Beyond commemorating the birth of a child, aqiqah represents an important opportunity for families to demonstrate gratitude, generosity, and social responsibility. The distribution of food to relatives, neighbors, and individuals in need reflects the Islamic principles of sharing blessings and strengthening communal solidarity. Participants consistently emphasized that the significance of aqiqah extends beyond fulfilling a religious recommendation; it also teaches children and family members the importance of generosity, equality, and concern for others. Parents often described these ceremonies as the beginning of their children's moral journey, expressing hope that participation in religious traditions would shape positive character throughout their lives. Such practices illustrate how ritual activities simultaneously fulfill spiritual obligations and perform educational functions within everyday community life.

The haul tradition provides another important mechanism through which religious character is cultivated. Commemorating the lives of respected religious scholars or deceased family members encourages reflection on exemplary moral conduct and spiritual dedication. During haul gatherings, participants engage in collective prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and religious lectures highlighting sincerity, humility, discipline, patience, and devotion to God. Informants explained that these events are not intended solely to remember the deceased but also to inspire living generations to emulate virtuous behavior demonstrated by respected religious figures. Younger participants are introduced to local religious history, community identity, and ethical leadership through narratives shared by elders and religious scholars. Consequently, haul functions as an intergenerational learning space where historical memory, religious identity, and moral education are integrated into a single communal experience.

Likewise, tahlil gatherings illustrate how routine religious practices contribute to the continuous reinforcement of religious character within the community. These gatherings, commonly organized following bereavement or during periodic commemorations, provide opportunities for collective remembrance of God while strengthening emotional support among community members. Field observations reveal that tahlil meetings consistently encourage empathy, patience, mutual encouragement, and social solidarity. Participants do not attend solely to recite prayers but also to comfort grieving families, provide emotional assistance, and reaffirm communal relationships. The presence of neighbors during difficult times symbolizes shared responsibility and reinforces the belief that every individual is part of a larger moral community. Such repeated experiences gradually cultivate compassion, emotional resilience, and social sensitivity among participants.

Another notable finding concerns the educational process embedded within these rituals. Learning does not occur through formal instruction or explicit moral lectures alone but emerges naturally through observation, imitation, participation, and repeated social interaction. Children observe adults organizing ceremonies, respecting religious leaders, assisting elderly participants, sharing responsibilities, and expressing gratitude before gradually adopting similar behaviors. Adolescents begin assuming organizational roles during community events, while adults become responsible for maintaining the continuity of traditions and mentoring younger generations. This progression illustrates an informal yet systematic process of religious socialization in which moral values are continuously reproduced through everyday communal practices.

Religious leaders also occupy a central position within these informal educational institutions. Their role extends beyond leading prayers or delivering sermons; they serve as cultural mediators who interpret Islamic teachings within the context of local traditions. Interviews revealed that religious leaders consistently encourage the preservation of traditions that strengthen faith, promote social harmony, and maintain communal unity while discouraging practices considered inconsistent with Islamic principles. This adaptive approach enables local traditions to remain socially relevant despite ongoing urbanization and cultural transformation. Community members

therefore perceive religious leaders not only as spiritual authorities but also as guardians of cultural continuity who ensure that religious practices remain meaningful for contemporary society.

The findings further demonstrate that the effectiveness of these ritual traditions lies in their continuity and collective participation. Unlike formal educational programs that operate within limited institutional settings and scheduled learning periods, religious traditions are repeatedly practiced throughout the life cycle, from pregnancy and birth to death and annual commemorations. This continuity creates lifelong opportunities for individuals to experience, reinforce, and internalize religious values within authentic social contexts. Every participation becomes a process of moral learning in which religious beliefs are translated into practical actions through cooperation, respect, generosity, responsibility, and compassion.

The ethnographic evidence indicates that Islamic ritual traditions in Tangerang function as sustainable informal institutions for religious character building. Their educational influence emerges not through formal pedagogical structures but through continuous communal engagement that integrates religious belief with cultural practice and social interaction. These traditions transform ordinary community gatherings into enduring spaces of moral education where Islamic values are learned, practiced, and transmitted across generations. Consequently, religious character is constructed not only through individual devotion but also through sustained participation in shared cultural traditions that nurture ethical behavior, strengthen communal identity, and preserve harmonious social relations within an increasingly diverse urban society.

Religious Traditions Strengthening Social Cohesion in Multicultural Communities

The ethnographic findings indicate that Islamic ritual traditions in Tangerang play a significant role in strengthening social cohesion within a multicultural urban community. Beyond their spiritual dimensions, these traditions function as collective social practices that encourage interaction, reinforce interpersonal trust, and cultivate a strong sense of belonging among community members. The repeated implementation of religious rituals creates opportunities for individuals from different social, educational, occupational, and regional backgrounds to participate in shared activities that emphasize cooperation, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. As a result, religious traditions become important social mechanisms that sustain harmonious relationships despite the increasing complexity of urban life.

Field observations revealed that religious ceremonies consistently brought together residents who rarely interacted in their daily routines. Preparations for communal events involved collaborative activities such as organizing venues, preparing meals, arranging religious equipment, welcoming guests, and distributing food after ceremonies. Participation was entirely voluntary, with individuals contributing according to their abilities without distinctions based on economic status or social position. Such cooperation gradually strengthened interpersonal familiarity and reduced social distance among residents. Community members frequently described these occasions as opportunities to renew friendships, strengthen neighborhood relationships, and reaffirm collective commitments to maintaining communal harmony.

The findings further demonstrate that religious traditions facilitate the development of social trust, which constitutes one of the essential foundations of social cohesion. Interviews with participants revealed that repeated collaboration during religious events enabled community members to develop confidence in one another's reliability, sincerity, and willingness to provide assistance whenever needed. This trust extended beyond ceremonial occasions and influenced everyday social interactions, including neighborhood cooperation, conflict resolution, charitable initiatives, and responses to family emergencies. Participants consistently emphasized that individuals who regularly participated in religious gatherings were generally perceived as trustworthy members of the community because their commitment to collective activities reflected responsibility and social concern.

Another important finding concerns the role of religious traditions in preserving inclusiveness within Tangerang's multicultural society. Although residents originated from diverse ethnic backgrounds, regional cultures, and educational experiences, participation in Islamic ritual traditions created a common social identity rooted in shared religious values and mutual respect. Informants explained that differences in language, local customs, and family backgrounds rarely became sources of social division because collective religious activities emphasized common

spiritual objectives rather than cultural distinctions. Community members were encouraged to appreciate diversity while maintaining solidarity through shared participation in religious ceremonies. Consequently, local traditions served as social spaces where cultural diversity was transformed into communal strength rather than social fragmentation.

Observations also revealed that Islamic ritual traditions contributed significantly to the strengthening of intergenerational relationships. Elderly community members actively involved younger generations in every stage of religious ceremonies by assigning practical responsibilities and explaining the cultural as well as religious significance of each activity. Young participants learned organizational skills, communication ethics, respect for elders, and communal responsibilities through direct involvement rather than formal instruction. At the same time, older generations strengthened their social roles by transmitting historical knowledge, local wisdom, and religious values to younger participants. This reciprocal interaction fostered mutual appreciation between generations and ensured the continuity of both cultural traditions and communal identity.

The ethnographic evidence further suggests that religious traditions function as effective mechanisms for preventing social isolation within rapidly urbanizing communities. Urban lifestyles often reduce opportunities for direct interpersonal interaction due to occupational demands, technological dependence, and increasingly individualistic patterns of living. However, regular religious gatherings create recurring moments in which residents temporarily suspend personal routines and reengage in face-to-face social communication. These gatherings encourage meaningful conversations, emotional support, and collective reflection that reinforce social connectedness. Participants frequently acknowledged that attending religious ceremonies enabled them to maintain close relationships with neighbors whom they might otherwise rarely encounter in everyday life.

Another significant finding concerns the role of religious traditions in managing social tensions and reinforcing community resilience. Interviews indicated that collective participation in religious rituals encouraged open communication and mutual understanding among community members, thereby reducing the likelihood of prolonged interpersonal conflicts. When disagreements emerged within the neighborhood, religious gatherings often became informal spaces where dialogue and reconciliation naturally occurred. Religious leaders, respected elders, and family representatives utilized these occasions to encourage forgiveness, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution grounded in Islamic ethical principles. Consequently, religious traditions contributed not only to strengthening social relationships but also to maintaining social stability within the broader community.

The study additionally found that charitable practices embedded within religious ceremonies substantially enhanced collective solidarity. Food distribution, voluntary donations, financial assistance, and mutual support for economically disadvantaged families were consistently integrated into various ritual activities. Community members interpreted these charitable actions as practical manifestations of Islamic teachings concerning compassion, generosity, and social justice. Rather than viewing charity solely as an individual religious obligation, participants regarded it as a collective responsibility shared by the entire community. Such practices strengthened feelings of social equality and reduced perceptions of economic disparity by emphasizing collective care for vulnerable members of society.

Furthermore, repeated participation in religious traditions contributed to the construction of a collective moral identity shared by the community. Individuals did not merely identify themselves as participants in isolated religious ceremonies but increasingly perceived themselves as members of a moral community united by common values, responsibilities, and aspirations. This shared identity encouraged individuals to prioritize communal interests over personal preferences, strengthening cooperation in addressing neighborhood concerns and supporting community development initiatives. The continuity of these traditions therefore reinforced both individual commitment and collective responsibility toward maintaining harmonious social life.

The findings demonstrate that Islamic ritual traditions serve as powerful instruments for strengthening social cohesion in multicultural communities. Their influence extends beyond religious observance by creating sustainable opportunities for cooperation, trust building, intergenerational interaction, conflict resolution, charitable engagement, and the formation of a shared moral identity. Through continuous communal participation, these traditions transform religious devotion into practical social action, enabling diverse individuals to cultivate harmonious

relationships while preserving cultural continuity within an increasingly dynamic urban environment. The ethnographic evidence therefore suggests that religious traditions should be understood not only as expressions of spiritual belief but also as enduring social institutions that reinforce collective resilience, strengthen community integration, and sustain peaceful coexistence in contemporary multicultural societies.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that cultural acculturation between Islamic teachings and local traditions constitutes a substantive mechanism of religious character formation rather than merely a strategy for preserving cultural heritage. In the Tangerang context, *syukuran kehamilan*, *aqiqah*, *haul*, and *tahlil* provide culturally recognizable settings in which religious principles are translated into observable forms of gratitude, responsibility, generosity, respect, and mutual assistance. This finding suggests that religious character is constructed through the interaction between normative religious knowledge and repeated social practice, rather than being formed exclusively through formal religious instruction. Theoretically, this supports the perspective that religious education becomes more meaningful when learners encounter religion as a lived ethical experience rather than as a body of abstract knowledge (Saada & Magadlah, 2021). It is also consistent with research showing that the integration of local cultural values into Islamic education can strengthen contextual understanding and character development (Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Jabar & Salsabila, 2025). More importantly, the present study extends this argument by positioning cultural acculturation as a mediating social process through which Islamic values acquire practical meaning within everyday community life, thereby addressing a limitation of previous studies that have tended to examine religious education and local wisdom as relatively separate domains.

A particularly important aspect of the findings is that acculturation in Tangerang does not appear to operate as a simple replacement of local culture by Islamic norms; instead, it represents an adaptive process of reinterpretation and selective integration. Community members maintain culturally familiar forms while modifying meanings and practices so that they remain compatible with Islamic values. This pattern supports the argument of Roibin et al. (2021) and Fuadi et al. (2024) that interaction between religion and local culture can create adaptive forms of religious practice capable of maintaining both cultural continuity and religious commitment. The finding also resonates with Faizah et al. (2022), who demonstrated that local traditions can become vehicles for religious moderation when they are interpreted within an inclusive social framework. However, the ethnographic evidence adds an important dimension by showing that this process is not merely ideological or theological; it is reproduced through everyday participation, intergenerational interaction, and collective responsibility. Consequently, the contribution of acculturation lies not simply in reconciling religion and culture, but in creating a social environment in which religious values can be repeatedly enacted and consequently become embedded in community norms.

The second major finding concerns the function of Islamic rituals as informal institutions for religious character education. The four traditions examined in this study create recurring opportunities for individuals to learn through observation, imitation, participation, and habituation, particularly when children and adolescents are involved in preparing events, interacting with elders, sharing food, and assisting other community members. This mechanism is theoretically consistent with experiential and socially situated approaches to learning, in which values become internalized more effectively when individuals participate directly in meaningful social practices (Hsbollah & Hassan, 2022; Alzubi et al., 2024). The finding is also supported by Stein et al. (2021), who argue that rituals can strengthen group survival by creating shared commitments and reinforcing collective identity. Recent studies on community-based character education similarly emphasize the importance of families, communities, religious figures, and culturally embedded practices in the internalization of character values (Desfitri et al., 2024; Makmur et al., 2026). Nevertheless, this study moves beyond the conventional school-centered conception of character education by demonstrating that ritual participation itself can constitute a sustained pedagogical environment, particularly because these practices recur throughout different stages of the family and community life cycle.

The educational function of the rituals becomes particularly visible through their different social meanings across the life cycle. Syukuran kehamilan introduces gratitude and responsibility within the context of impending parenthood, aqiqah translates gratitude into generosity and social sharing, haul connects moral education with collective memory and exemplary figures, while tahlil provides an experiential context for empathy, emotional support, patience, and solidarity during periods of loss. These differences indicate that the character-building function of ritual traditions is not uniform but emerges from the particular social situations in which religious values are enacted. Such findings reinforce Khoiriyah et al. (2025) and Rusmana et al. (2024), who identified haul-related traditions as important media for transmitting moral values and local wisdom across generations. They also complement Yadi et al. (2025), whose findings indicate that community religious activities can strengthen faith and character through sustained participation. Theoretically, this suggests that community-based character education should be conceptualized as a life-course process rather than as a program restricted to particular ages or educational institutions. The contribution of the present study therefore lies in showing that different ritual contexts can provide differentiated but interconnected opportunities for character formation, allowing moral values to be reinforced repeatedly as individuals move through changing family and social roles.

Another critical finding is the central role of families, religious leaders, elders, and community members as distributed agents of religious socialization. The evidence suggests that no single institution possesses exclusive responsibility for character formation; rather, moral learning emerges from interactions among several social actors who model, explain, supervise, and reproduce valued behaviors. This finding supports Djazilan and Wuryandani (2024), who emphasize the synergistic role of parents and communities in character development, while also extending the argument by demonstrating that religious leaders and cultural elders perform educational functions outside formal educational institutions. Hadi and Prayogi (2025) similarly show the importance of institutional religious culture in developing religious character, but the present findings suggest that comparable processes can occur within community-based cultural environments without formal curricular structures. From a theoretical perspective, this distributed model challenges a narrowly institutional understanding of Islamic character education because the mechanisms of modeling, habituation, social reinforcement, and cultural transmission operate simultaneously across family and community settings. Its practical implication is that strengthening religious character may require educational policies and community programs that recognize families, religious leaders, elders, and local organizations as interconnected components of a broader educational ecosystem rather than treating schools as the sole locus of character development.

The findings also reveal that the character-building function of religious traditions is closely connected to the development of social cohesion. Collective participation requires residents to cooperate, exchange resources, communicate, provide assistance, and repeatedly encounter one another, thereby generating interpersonal familiarity and trust. This interpretation is consistent with Forsyth's (2021) account of group cohesion and with Feinberg et al. (2023), who emphasize trust, involvement, and social cohesion as important components of resilient urban communities. It also corresponds with Sobhaninia (2024) and Tamasiga et al. (2024), who demonstrate that social cohesion and social capital can strengthen collective capacity and resilience in responding to social challenges. However, the present study contributes a more culturally grounded explanation by showing that trust is not generated only through generic social interaction but can be cultivated through religiously meaningful acts of cooperation, charity, emotional support, and shared responsibility. Thus, the findings suggest a reciprocal relationship in which religious character supports social cohesion while cohesive social environments simultaneously provide the conditions necessary for religious values to be repeatedly practiced and reinforced.

The multicultural context of Tangerang further complicates the relationship between religious practice and social cohesion, because shared religious traditions could theoretically strengthen either inclusion or social boundaries depending on how participation is organized. The ethnographic evidence in this study indicates that the rituals examined generally operated as inclusive communal spaces in which differences in ethnicity, regional origin, economic position, and educational background became less socially salient than shared responsibilities and values. This finding is compatible with Fahmi et al. (2025), who identify multicultural Islamic education as a strategy for strengthening social cohesion, and with contemporary scholarship emphasizing the

capacity of culturally responsive Islamic education to respond to social and cultural change (Husni et al., 2025). At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that religious rituals automatically produce social harmony in every setting, because their integrative potential depends on the norms of participation, leadership, interpretation, and openness established by the community. The role of religious leaders is therefore theoretically significant: they function as cultural mediators who determine how Islamic teachings are interpreted in relation to local traditions and whether ritual participation encourages solidarity rather than exclusion. This qualification strengthens the study's contribution by framing religious traditions as context-dependent social institutions whose effects on cohesion depend on the inclusiveness of the cultural and religious environment in which they are practiced.

Taken together, the findings support an expanded conceptual understanding of community-based character education in which cultural acculturation functions as the connecting mechanism between Islamic values, ritual participation, character internalization, and social cohesion. Rather than viewing religious character as an individual outcome produced primarily by formal instruction, the evidence positions character formation as a relational and cumulative process occurring through repeated participation in culturally meaningful social practices. This perspective is consistent with recent attempts to develop religious character education models grounded in local wisdom and community participation, including the ethnographic model proposed by Darisman et al. (2025), which emphasizes religious, cultural, and social dimensions of character formation. The present study extends such approaches by explicitly connecting ritual participation with both character internalization and community cohesion, thereby integrating two outcomes that have frequently been examined separately in previous research. The resulting Community-Based Character Education Model consequently offers a conceptual contribution by explaining how religious values become socially embedded through acculturation, experiential participation, intergenerational transmission, and collective interaction. At the practical level, the model suggests that educators, religious leaders, families, and community organizations can treat culturally embedded religious traditions as complementary educational resources, while maintaining critical reflection to ensure that inherited practices remain inclusive, ethically constructive, and compatible with contemporary social conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that religious character formation within the multicultural community of Tangerang develops through a continuous interaction between Islamic values and locally embedded cultural traditions. The ethnographic findings show that syukuran kehamilan, aqiqah, haul, and tahlil function beyond their ceremonial and devotional purposes by providing recurring social spaces in which religious values are experienced, practiced, and transmitted across generations. Through participation in these traditions, community members encounter practical expressions of gratitude, sincerity, responsibility, empathy, generosity, mutual assistance, and respect. The findings further indicate that families, religious leaders, elders, and community members collectively contribute to this process by creating an informal environment in which moral learning occurs through observation, participation, and repeated social interaction. Cultural acculturation consequently appears not as a separation between religious teaching and local tradition, but as a process through which Islamic values are given meaning within the cultural practices of everyday community life. At the same time, collective participation in religious traditions strengthens interpersonal trust, solidarity, cooperation, and a shared sense of responsibility, thereby contributing to social cohesion. On this basis, the study proposes an initial Community-Based Character Education Model that connects Islamic values, cultural acculturation, ritual traditions, religious character internalization, and social cohesion within an integrated community-based educational process. The study therefore highlights the importance of recognizing community cultural traditions as complementary educational environments alongside families and formal educational institutions, while further

comparative or mixed-method research is needed to examine the applicability of this conceptual model in other cultural and religious settings.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Siti Munawati Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, writing original draft, writing review and editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

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