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Reducing Student Apathy in Religious Activities: Islamic Education Strategies for Sustainable Character Development (SDG 4.7)

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the implementation of school religious activities, students' apathy toward participation, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher strategies in strengthening sustainable character development aligned with SDGs principles, particularly SDG 4.7. **Theoretical framework:** This research applies the theoretical framework of character education, religious school culture, and humanistic pedagogy within Islamic education. Previous studies indicate that religious activities contribute significantly to moral development, although student participation is often influenced by motivation, family background, peer interaction, and digital lifestyles associated with contemporary SDGs educational challenges. **Literature review:** The literature review shows that religious activities in schools can shape students' character, but student involvement often varies and is influenced by motivational factors, family, social environment, and digital culture. **Methods:** This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach using interviews, observations, and documentation analyzed through the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model. **Results:** The findings reveal that religious activities were implemented systematically through routine habituation, structured programs, and spontaneous spiritual practices. Nevertheless, several students demonstrated apathetic attitudes caused by internal psychological conditions and external social influences. PAI teachers addressed these conditions through persuasive communication, relational guidance, exemplary behavior, and collaborative educational approaches. **Implications:** The study implies that strengthening contextual, humanistic, and participatory Islamic education management is essential for sustainable student character formation and achievement of SDGs-oriented educational transformation. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis connecting school religious culture, student apathy, teacher intervention strategies, and sustainable character education within the broader framework of SDGs implementation in education sectors.

Keywords: sdgs, religious activities, student apathy, islamic religious education, sustainable character development.

INTRODUCTION

Religious activities in schools play an important role in shaping students' morality, spirituality, discipline, and social responsibility. However, many previous studies mainly focused on religious programs as ceremonial activities without examining students' apathetic attitudes and the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in overcoming disengagement. This research gap becomes increasingly important because

student apathy toward religious participation may weaken sustainable character formation in contemporary education. In the context of globalization and digital culture, schools require contextual and humanistic approaches supporting SDGs values, especially quality education and character development. Therefore, this study is significant because it integrates religious culture, teacher strategies, student participation, and sustainable educational transformation within the broader framework of SDGs implementation, SDGs achievement, SDGs awareness, SDGs orientation, and SDGs-based education [1].

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic position in the national education system because it functions not only as a means of transmitting religious knowledge, but also as a vehicle for internalizing moral, spiritual, and social values that are the foundation for the formation of students' character. From the perspective of value education, PAI is directed to build a complete religious consciousness, covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions [1]. Therefore, the success of PAI cannot be measured solely from the mastery of teaching materials, but from the extent to which religious values are internalized in students' attitudes and actions in daily life.

In the global context, strengthening religious and character education has strategic relevance to the sustainable development agenda. The *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, especially SDG 4 on quality education, emphasize the importance of education that is not only oriented towards academic achievement, but also on the development of students' values, ethics, and character. Target 4.7 explicitly affirms the need for education that promotes sustainable development, a culture of peace, and social responsibility. In this perspective, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in building the religious character, moral awareness, and social integrity of students in a sustainable manner.

At the junior high school level, the implementation of PAI faces increasingly complex challenges. Adolescence is a phase of psychological development characterized by the search for identity, the increasing need for social recognition, and the strong influence of the social environment and digital media. In the framework of developmental psychology, this condition makes students vulnerable to experiencing a dissonance between the religious teachings accepted at school and the social reality they face. Therefore, schools have a strategic role as a social space that not only transmits values but also facilitates the process of internalization and habituation of religious values in a contextual manner.

Table 1. Dimensions of Islamic Religious Education and Indicators of Its Internality

PAI Dimensions	Key Focus	Indicators in Students
Cognitive	Understanding of Islamic teachings and norms	Knowing the obligation of worship, understanding the meaning of prayer
Affective	Appreciation and value awareness	The growth of a sense of responsibility, religious awareness
Behavior (Conative)	Practice of value in action	Discipline of worship, active participation in religious activities

The habituation of religious practices in schools is an integral part of religious character education. The theory of value internalization emphasizes that religious values will be effectively embedded if the educational process includes the stages of understanding values (*Knowing*), value appreciation (*Feeling*), and the practice of values (*Doing*). Religious activities that are carried out regularly and consistently, such as congregational dzuhur prayers, function as a medium for the formation of religious habitus that allows students to experience religious values directly, rather than just understanding them normatively.

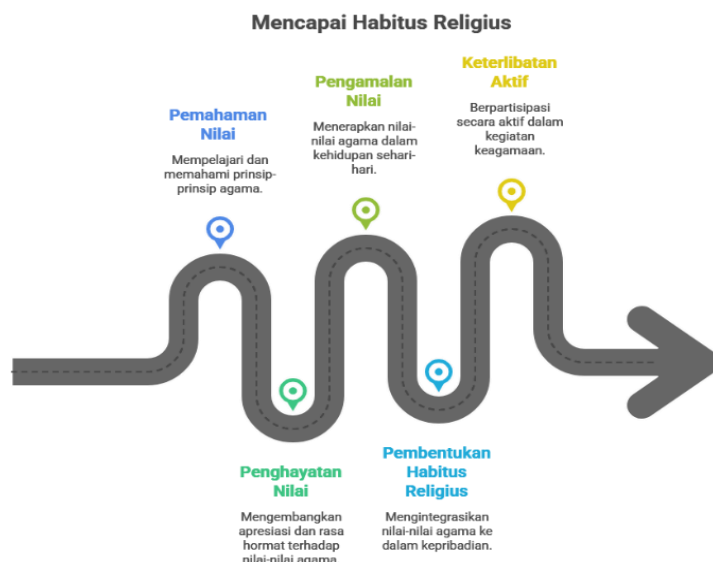


Figure 1. Integrated Religious Habituation Strategies Strengthening Student Character Development and Participation Sustainability

However, in practice, the implementation of religious activities in schools does not always run according to these ideal goals. A number of studies show a tendency to decrease student participation in formal religious activities in the school environment. This phenomenon is often characterized by low enthusiasm, minimal involvement, and a reluctance to participate in congregational worship activities [2]. From the perspective of attitude theory, this condition shows the weak integration between cognitive, affective, and conative aspects in the formation of students' religious attitudes.

Apathy towards religious activities is a serious problem in Islamic religious education. In attitude theory, apathy arises when affective and behavioral dimensions do not develop along with the knowledge possessed. As a result, religious activities are perceived as administrative routines, rather than as meaningful spiritual needs. In the framework of sustainable development, apathy towards religious and moral values has the potential to weaken the goal of education in forming a generation with character, responsibility, and social competitiveness [3]. Therefore, the problem of student apathy is not only a pedagogical issue, but also a strategic challenge in realizing inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable education.

Table 2. The Dimension of Apathy in Students' Religious Activities

Attitude Dimension	Characteristics	Manifestations in Schools
Cognitive	Understanding without attachment	Knowing the obligation of prayer but not interpreting it
Affective	Lack of interest and care	Not enthusiastic, feeling forced
Behavior	Low participation	Arriving late, less solemn, passive

The appearance of apathy cannot be separated from various interrelated factors. The influence of the social environment, the weak role model of religion in the family, and the dominance of digital culture that emphasizes instant and pragmatic values have all shaped students' views on religion [4]. In addition, the PAI learning approach that is still oriented towards the cognitive aspect without being balanced with affective reinforcement and reflective religious experiences has the potential to create an emotional distance between students and the religious values taught. In this context, students' religious motivation tends to be external and fragile, so it is easy to turn into apathy [5]. This condition shows that

religious education in schools faces serious challenges in ensuring the sustainability of value internalization, so an adaptive and long-term oriented character education strategy is needed, in line with the principles of sustainable education emphasized in the SDGs.

Transformasi Sikap Apatitis Siswa

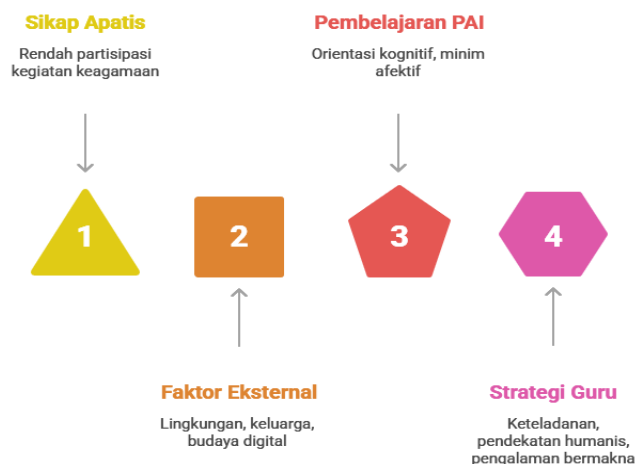


Figure 2. Transforming Student Apathy Through Humanistic Islamic Education and Teacher Strategies

The phenomenon of apathy towards religious activities was also found at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi. Based on initial observations, the implementation of congregational dzuhur prayer activities, which became a routine school agenda, has not been fully followed by students with adequate awareness and enthusiasm. Some students, especially in class IX, showed late arrival behavior to the place of prayer, a lack of solemnity in the implementation of worship, participating in prayers limited to fulfilling obligations, and low participation in maintaining order in congregational activities. Out of a total of 135 grade IX students, about 25 students consistently showed symptoms of apathy towards religious activities at school.

This condition shows that the problems faced are not just technical problems in the implementation of religious activities, but are also related to the process of internalizing religious values that have not run optimally. If this situation is not dealt with systematically, schools risk losing their role as institutions for the formation of religious character, and religious activities have the potential to be degraded into mere formal symbols [6].

It is in this context that the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers becomes very crucial. From a pedagogic and moral leadership perspective, PAI teachers not only function as conveyors of teaching materials but also as spiritual guides, role models, and agents of change in school culture [7]. PAI teachers' strategies in building humanistic communication, providing examples, creating meaningful religious experiences, and integrating affective approaches in learning are key factors in fostering students' motivation and religious awareness.

However, empirical studies that specifically examine the strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in overcoming students' apathy towards religious activities at the junior high school level, especially in the context of public schools, are still relatively limited. Some research emphasizes the effectiveness of PAI learning methods or the normative aspects of religious character education [8]. This gap is the basis for the importance of this research. By examining in depth the strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in overcoming students' apathy towards religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic religious education studies, as well as practical contributions in strengthening sustainable

character education in junior high schools, especially in supporting the SDGs agenda in the field of quality education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious activities in schools have long been recognized as an essential component of character education, particularly within the framework of Islamic Religious Education. These activities function not only as ritual practices but also as pedagogical tools for internalizing moral and spiritual values. In the context of value education, the effectiveness of religious activities depends on their ability to integrate cognitive understanding, affective engagement, and behavioral practice. When students are exposed to consistent and meaningful religious experiences, they are more likely to develop a stable religious disposition that shapes their attitudes and actions in everyday life [8].

The concept of school religious culture further explains how values are embedded within institutional practices. A strong religious culture is formed through the interaction between structured programs, daily habituation, and the symbolic environment of the school. This culture creates shared norms and expectations that guide student behavior. However, the success of such a culture is not solely determined by the presence of religious programs, but by the extent to which these programs are perceived as meaningful by students. Without reflective engagement, religious activities risk becoming routine obligations that lack personal significance. Student apathy toward religious activities has emerged as a critical issue in contemporary education. Apathy is often understood as a condition where students possess knowledge of religious obligations but lack emotional attachment and motivation to practice them. This phenomenon is closely related to the imbalance between cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. In adolescent development, this condition is further complicated by identity exploration, peer influence, and exposure to digital culture, all of which can weaken students' engagement with religious practices [9].

The role of teachers is central in addressing this challenge. Humanistic pedagogy emphasizes the importance of empathy, dialogue, and personal relationships in fostering meaningful learning experiences. Teachers who act as role models and facilitators of reflection can help bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. In addition, collaborative approaches involving families and the broader social environment are necessary to ensure consistency in value formation. In the context of sustainable education, particularly aligned with SDG 4.7, religious education is expected to contribute to the development of ethical awareness, social responsibility, and holistic character. Therefore, addressing student apathy requires not only pedagogical strategies but also systemic efforts to create a supportive and meaningful educational ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design of a case study, as it aims to understand in depth social phenomena, which are related to the strategy of Islamic Religious Education teachers in overcoming students' apathy towards religious activities at school [9]. The unit of analysis in this study is the strategic practice of PAI teachers in the context of school religious activities and students' apathy in response to these practices. The case study was chosen because the research was focused on one research location, namely SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi, so as to allow researchers to gain a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the dynamics of internalizing religious values in the school environment. The sources of information in this study include Islamic Religious Education teachers in grade IX as key informants and grade IX students as supporting informants, who were purposively selected based on their involvement in school religious activities. The research was carried out for approximately three months, from December 2025 to February 2026, which included the initial observation stage, field data excavation, and deepening of findings [8].

The data collection process is carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation is used to directly observe the behavior of students in participating in religious activities, especially congregational dzuhur prayers, as well as to see the strategies of PAI teachers in guiding, directing, and managing these activities. Interviews were conducted in a structured and in-depth manner with PAI teachers and students to explore information related to the forms of apathy that emerged, the factors that caused them, and the strategies applied by teachers in overcoming these conditions. Meanwhile, documentation is used to complement and strengthen field data through the review of relevant school documents, such as religious activity programs, school organizational structures, and other supporting archives. The use of these diverse techniques is intended to obtain rich, in-depth, and complementary data [8].

Data analysis is carried out interactively and continuously with reference to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana analysis model, which includes the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Since the early stages of data collection, researchers have reduced data by sorting, coding, and categorizing data according to the focus of the research, so that the information obtained remains directed and relevant [10]. The reduced data is then presented in the form of thematic narratives and analysis matrices to make it easier for researchers to understand patterns, relationships between categories, and the meanings contained in them. Research conclusions are drawn gradually and verified through triangulation of sources and methods, re-checking field data, and critical reflection of researchers, so that the findings produced have a level of credibility and validity that can be scientifically accounted for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Activities as an Effort to Establish School Religious Culture

The results of the study show that religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi are systematically designed as part of institutional efforts to build the school's religious culture. Based on an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher, Santi Ismianti, religious activities are not positioned as additional activities, but as part of the daily rhythm of the school. He stated that *"Religious activities here start from routine habits such as prayer before and after studying, congregational dhuha and dzuhur prayers, and tadarus Al-Qur'an"*. These findings suggest that schools utilize the habituation approach as the foundation for the formation of religious behavior [11]. From the perspective of religious cultural theory, habituation that is carried out consistently will form a pattern of shared values (*Shared values*) which is gradually internalized in the school community. Thus, religious practices are not only normative but also function as a medium for the formation of a sustainable and institutionalized religious climate in school life.

In addition to routine habituation, schools also develop religious programs that are structured and periodic. The PAI teacher explained that *"We also have a flash Islamic boarding school program, guidance on reading and writing the Qur'an, religious competitions, and commemoration of Islamic holidays"*. The programs show that the school does not stop at the daily routine, but seeks to expand the religious experience of students through thematic and intensive activities. In the study of Islamic education, this kind of structured program serves as a space for strengthening the meaning (*The Meaning of Creating*), because students are not only worship, but also invited to understand the values and spirit behind religious practices [12]. This is in line with the theory of meaningful habituation, which emphasizes that the repetition of behavior must be accompanied by an educational context so as not to lead to formality. Thus, religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi can be understood as a pedagogical strategy that integrates ritual and educational aspects simultaneously.

Interestingly, religious activities at this school also include spontaneous and contextual activities, such as Friday infaq. According to PAI teachers, *"We make it a habit for Friday*

infaq so that children learn to care and share, even though the number is not targeted". These findings show that schools are trying to instill religious values that are social, not just *Individual-Ritual*. In the theory of religious culture of schools, the social dimension is an important element because religious values will be more easily internalized when they are manifested in real practices that touch daily life [13]. Friday Infaq functions as a symbol as well as a concrete practice of the values of empathy, care, and social responsibility. Thus, religious activities not only form personal piety but also lead to the social piety of students as part of the holistic Islamic religious education goals.

The findings of this research are strengthened by the statement of the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, who stated that religious activities have become part of the school's identity. He said, *"We have included religious activities in the school agenda, so it is not only a matter of PAI teachers, but a shared responsibility"*. This statement emphasizes that the formation of religious culture at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi is institutional, not individual. From the perspective of education management, the structural involvement of schools is a major prerequisite for the successful formation of organizational culture. When religious activities are supported by school policies and structures, religious practices have strong legitimacy and have a high chance of being sustainable. This shows that religious culture in schools does not grow sporadically, but rather through planned and integrated social engineering in the school system [14].

From the student side, the results of an interview with one of the grade IX students showed that religious activities have become a known and understood routine. The student said, *"At school, prayer and prayer are common, so if you don't join it, it feels strange"*. This statement indicates that habituation has formed a new social norm among students. In habituation theory, this condition indicates the initial internalization stage, in which religious behavior begins to be accepted as part of collective habits. Although it does not yet fully reflect intrinsic consciousness, the normalization of religious practices is an important foundation for the formation of religious culture [15]. In other words, religious activities in schools have succeeded in creating positive social pressure that encourages student involvement in religious practices.

Table 3. Forms of Religious Activities and Institutional Meaning in the Formation of School Religious Culture

Types of Religious Activities	Form of Implementation	Institutional Meaning
Routine habituation	Prayers before and after learning, dhuha prayers, congregational dhuhur prayers, and reciting the Qur'an	Forming religious discipline and normalizing religious practices in school daily life
Structured programs	Islamic boarding schools, Qur'an literacy guidance, religious competitions, commemoration of Islamic holidays	Strengthening religious understanding and experience through thematic and intensive activities
Spontaneous activities	Friday Infaq	Instilling the value of social care and empathy as part of social piety
School structural support	Integration of religious activities in the school agenda	Institutional legitimacy and sustainability of religious culture
Student response to routine	Regular engagement and social acceptance	The formation of social-religious norms among students

The findings of this study are in line with the concept of the school's religious culture that emphasizes the integration between structure, activities, and values. Routine habituation serves to form religious discipline, structured programs strengthen spiritual understanding and experience, while spontaneous activities instill religious social values.

These three forms of activities complement each other and form a relatively intact religious ecosystem. However, the religious culture that was formed was still in the stage of praxis, which was dominant in visible behavior [16]. Therefore, the next challenge is to encourage a shift from a religious culture that is ritualistic in nature to a religious culture that is reflective and meaningful. This emphasizes that the success of habituation needs to be followed by strengthening aspects of meaning through reflection and value dialogue.

The results and discussions in this sub show that religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi have functioned as a strategic instrument in the formation of the school's religious culture. Through a combination of regular habituation, structured programs, and spontaneous activities, schools build a religious environment that is relatively conducive to the internalization of Islamic values. School structural support, the active role of PAI teachers, and student involvement are key factors in this process [17]. However, these findings also suggest that the religious culture that has been formed still needs to be strengthened in the aspects of awareness and appreciation of values. Therefore, religious activities need to continue to be developed not only as an institutional routine but also as a pedagogical space that allows students to understand, feel, and interpret religious values more deeply.

Variation in Students' Attitudes to Religious Activities: Between Formal Obedience and Value Appreciation

The results of the study show that students' attitudes towards religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi are not homogeneous, but are on a diverse spectrum, ranging from active-participatory attitudes to formal compliance that is minimally appreciated. Islamic Religious Education Teacher, Santi Ismianti, said that "*In general, students are quite active in routine worship activities, discipline, and show responsibility*". But he also acknowledged that not all students have the same level of awareness. These findings indicate that students' attendance in religious activities does not fully reflect the deep internalization of values [18]. From the perspective of attitude theory, this condition shows a difference in integration between the cognitive dimensions (knowledge of religious obligations), affective (feelings and mental attitudes towards worship), and conative (tendency to act). Students who are active and disciplined represent the integration of these three dimensions, while students who attend formally show the dominance of the conative aspect without being supported by strong religious affection. Thus, the variety of students' attitudes is an important indicator for reading the quality of religious education, not just the intensity of religious programs implemented by schools.

Field findings also show that there are groups of students who participate in religious activities, mainly because of the encouragement of school rules, not on the basis of personal awareness. This was revealed from an interview with one of the grade IX students, who stated that "*We participated in prayer because it was already on the school schedule; if we didn't participate, we would be reprimanded.*" This statement suggests that student obedience is more structural-administrative than reflective-spiritual. Within the framework of value internalization theory, the condition represents the initial stage of internalization, i.e., compliance, in which individuals act out of external pressures, not because of internal beliefs [19]. This kind of obedience is indeed important as an entrance to habituation, but it risks stopping at the level of formality if it is not followed by the process of meaning. In the adolescent context, formal compliance is often an adaptive response to school authority, but does not necessarily develop into a value commitment. Therefore, the variation in students' attitudes reflects that religious habituation in schools is still in the process of transitioning from external regulations to more mature internal awareness.

In addition to formal compliance, this study also found that there were students who showed a deeper appreciation of religious values. Based on observations and interviews, students in this category not only attend on time but also show a solemn attitude and emotional involvement in the implementation of worship. One of the students revealed that

congregational prayers at school *"make you calmer and feel closer to friends"*. This statement signifies that religious activities have served as meaningful religious experiences, not just routines [20]. From the perspective of habituation theory (*Habituation*), repeated experiences with personal meaning can form a relatively stable religious habitus. Students in this category show that the internalization of values has reached the stage of identification, where religious values begin to be lived as part of their identity. These findings reinforce the argument that the success of religious education is not only determined by the structure of the activities but by the extent to which students are given space to experience, feel, and reflect on religious values in the context of their lives.

On the other hand, the results of the study also identified the existence of students with a passive attitude and who tend to be apathetic, although the number is not dominant. The PAI teacher stated that *"There are students who participate in prayer, but look lazy or less serious, although not many"*. This attitude is reflected in the behavior of arriving late, lacking focus, and participating in worship limited to fulfilling obligations. In attitude theory, this condition shows an insynchronization between cognitive and affective aspects, in which the student understands religious obligations but does not have an emotional attachment to the practice [21]. This phenomenon can also be understood through the perspective of adolescent developmental psychology, which emphasizes that the phase of identity search often gives rise to resistance to values perceived as "forced". Thus, passive and apathetic attitudes do not necessarily mean rejection of religion, but rather a reflection of the internalization process that has not yet been completed and is still influenced by the psychosocial dynamics of adolescents.

The variation of students' attitudes towards religious activities is also influenced by the social and environmental context outside of school. Some students revealed that religious practices at school were different from their habits at home. A student stated that *"at home it is rare to pray in congregation, so at school sometimes it feels forced"*. This statement shows the tension between the religious culture of the school and the family environment. In the theory of educational ecology, student behavior is the result of the interaction of various systems, ranging from family to school, to the broader social environment [22]. When the values instilled in the school do not receive reinforcement from the family environment, the internalization of values tends to be slow and unstable. Therefore, the variation in student attitudes can be understood as a product of the complex interaction between the school structure, personal experience, and the socio-cultural background of the students. These findings confirm the importance of synergy between schools and families in building sustainable religious awareness.

The variation in students' attitudes towards religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi shows that the success of religious habituation is not linear. Formal obedience, value appreciation, and passive attitude are natural stages and dynamics in the process of internalizing religious values, especially in adolescence. From the point of view of value education theory, this condition demands a pedagogic approach that is not only normative, but also dialogical and reflective. PAI teachers have a strategic role to shift structural compliance towards internal awareness through strengthening the affective dimension and giving meaning to every religious practice. Thus, the variation in students' attitudes is not solely understood as a matter of discipline, but as an indicator of the depth of the ongoing religious education process [23]. These findings are an important basis for the development of PAI learning strategies that are more contextual, humanist, and oriented towards the formation of authentic religious awareness.

Table 4. Variations in Students' Attitudes to Religious Activities and Theoretical Analysis

Categories of Student Attitudes	Behavioral Characteristics	Theoretical Interpretation
Active-participatory	Be on time, solemn, and emotionally involved	Cognitive–affective–conjunctive integration; Internalization of the Value of the Identification Stage
Formal compliance	Present because of the rules, minimal reflection	Compliance; External regulation has not become an internal awareness
Passive–apathy	Arriving late, lack of focus	Value dissonance; weak religious affection
Contextual factors	Home–school culture differences	Educational ecological perspective
Pedagogical implications	There is a need for a humanistic approach	Experiential value education

Manifestations of Student Apathy in Daily Religious Practice

The results of the study show that students' apathy towards religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi does not appear in the form of open rejection, but is subtly manifested in daily religious practice. Islamic Religious Education Teacher, Santi Ismianti, conveyed that *"there are students who participate in congregational prayers, but look less serious or just attend"*. This statement suggests that apathy does not necessarily mean absence, but can be present in the form of minimal involvement without appreciation. In attitude theory, this phenomenon describes the dominance of behavioral aspects (*Behavioral compliance*) without the support of affective and evaluative aspects. Students continue to participate in activities because of the demands of the school system, but they are not accompanied by internal awareness [24]. This kind of manifestation of apathy often goes unnoticed because, administratively, students are considered "obedient." In fact, from the perspective of value education, meaningless obedience has the potential to empty spiritual values from religious practice itself. Thus, religious apathy needs to be read not only from physical presence, but from the quality of student involvement in worship.

One of the most prominent manifestations of apathy is the habit of arriving late during the implementation of Dzuhur prayers in congregation. Based on field observations, some students only enter the prayer area when the iqamah is almost finished or even after the prayer begins. A grade IX student revealed that *"sometimes you come late because you are still chatting or not ready, anyway, still participate in prayer"*. This statement reflects the low *sense of urgency* for congregational worship. From the perspective of habituation theory, repeated delays indicate that the routine has not yet fully formed a disciplined religious habitus [25]. Worship is positioned as an additional obligation, not a spiritual need that demands inner readiness. From the point of view of religious psychology, tardiness can also be read as a weak internalization of the value of the sacredness of time in worship. Thus, the manifestation of apathy through delay is not just a technical problem, but an indication of a lack of appreciation of the meaning of worship as an activity of transcendental value.

Another manifestation of apathy is seen in a less solemn attitude during the implementation of congregational worship. The results of observations showed that there were students who talked quietly with friends, looked around, or showed a bored expression during prayer. The PAI teacher stated that *"Some children do pray, but don't seem to be focused"*. This phenomenon suggests that the physical presence of students is not always in line with inner engagement. In value internalization theory, solemnity is an indicator of affective connectedness between individuals and the values that are practiced [26]. When

affection is not formed, the practice of worship has the potential to become a mechanical activity. This is in line with the view that the internalization of religious values requires religious experiences that touch on emotional and reflective dimensions. The lack of solemnity can also be understood as the impact of a culture of distraction, especially the influence of digital media that forms the habit of short attention spans in adolescents. Thus, religious apathy is manifested in the inability of students to bring full awareness to the practice of worship.

In addition to tardiness and lack of solemnity, apathy is also reflected in the lack of student participation in supporting aspects of religious activities, such as maintaining order, tidying up places of worship, or engaging in tadarus activities. An education worker said, "*Usually those who are active are just that; some students tend to be passive*". These findings suggest that religious activities are not yet fully understood as a collective responsibility [27]. In character education theory, active involvement in socio-religious activities is an important means of establishing empathy and moral responsibility. When students choose to be passive participants, social values in congregational worship are not optimally internalized. This attitude also indicates that worship is perceived as a purely personal matter, not a social practice that contains a dimension of togetherness. Therefore, the manifestation of apathy is not only seen in ritual worship, but also in the weak social participation that accompanies religious practices in schools [28].

Interestingly, the results of the study showed that some students were aware of this apathetic behavior, but did not have the internal drive to change. One student stated, "*I know that prayer should be taken seriously, but sometimes it feels normal*". This statement illustrates the gap between cognitive awareness and affective drive. In attitude theory, this condition is known as the *cognitive–affective gap*, i.e., when knowledge does not automatically encourage positive attitudes or meaningful behaviors. This phenomenon often appears in adolescents who are in the phase of searching for the meaning of life and self-identity. In this context, *Religious apathy* is not a form of ideological rejection of religion, but rather an expression of boredom or inability to interpret religious practices personally [29]. These findings reinforce the argument that religious education needs to move beyond a normative approach toward a reflective approach that helps students discover the relevance of religious values to their lives.

The manifestation of apathy was also influenced by students' comparisons between religious practices at school and outside of school. Some students revealed that the atmosphere of worship at school felt "monitored" and "mandatory," in contrast to practice at home or the surrounding environment. In an interview, a student mentioned that "*If you are at school, it is more relaxing*". From a theoretical perspective, *Bronfenbrenner's ecology*, these differences in context can affect the way students interpret the same activity. When religious practices are more dominant as institutional regulations, students tend to display formal obedience. On the other hand, when worship is practiced in the context of a more personal relationship, the potential for appreciation becomes greater [30]. Therefore, the manifestation of apathy in schools cannot be separated from the tension between institutional logic and students' personal experiences in religion.

The manifestation of student apathy in religious practice shows that the process of internalizing values is still in its early stages and prone to stagnation. Within the framework of Lickona's internalized value theory, students who only attend without appreciation have not reached the stage of *moral commitment*. Religious practice is still positioned as an external obligation, not a worthwhile choice. This condition has the potential to create what is called empty ritualism, which is the implementation of worship without any connection to meaning. These findings are important because they show that indicators of the success of religious activities are not enough to be measured by the quantity of attendance, but by the quality of student involvement [31]. Thus, the manifestation of apathy needs to be understood as a pedagogic signal for teachers and schools to evaluate the approach to religious development that has been applied.

The manifestation of students' apathy towards religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi appears in various concrete forms that are latent and veiled, such as tardiness, lack of solemnity, minimal participation, and worship formalities. These findings confirm that religious apathy is a multidimensional phenomenon related to psychological, pedagogical, and cultural aspects. The dialogue between empirical data and theory shows that apathy is not just a matter of discipline, but a reflection of the imperfect process of internalizing religious values [32]. Therefore, the strengthening of Islamic religious education needs to be directed at the creation of religious experiences that are meaningful, dialogical, and relevant to the world of adolescents. By comprehensively understanding the manifestations of apathy, PAI schools and teachers have a stronger basis for designing pedagogic interventions that not only demand obedience but also foster authentic religious awareness.

Table 5. Manifestations of Student Apathy in Daily Religious Practice

Forms of Manifestation of Apathy	Behavioral Indicators	Data Source	Theoretical Interpretation
Delay in prayer	Coming after iqamah	Observation, students	Habituation has not yet formed a habitus of discipline
Less solemn	Unfocused, talking	Observation, PAI teacher	Weak religious affection
Minimal participation	Passive in support activities	Education staff	Weak collective responsibility
Formal compliance	Present without appreciation	Students, PAI teachers	External compliance
Consciousness without impulse	Aware of the Responsibilities of Being Self-Reliant	Students	Cognitive–affective gap
Contextual factors	Worship feels "forced"	Students	Educational ecology
Pedagogical implications	Need for a reflective interpretation	Researcher analysis	Experiential value education

Factors Causing Student Apathetic Attitude: Interaction of Internal and External Factors

The results of the study show that students' apathy towards religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi does not stand as a single phenomenon, but is the result of a complex interaction between internal and external factors of students. Internal factors are mainly related to intrinsic motivation, religious awareness, and students' affective experiences of religious practices. Islamic Religious Education Teacher, Santi Ismianti, stated that "*There are students who participate in religious activities only because of school obligations, not because of personal awareness*". This statement indicates that some students have not yet reached the stage of internalizing grades, as explained in motivational theory *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan), where religious behavior is still at the level of external regulation. At this stage, religious activity is perceived as an institutional demand, not an inner need. As a result, student engagement tends to be mechanical and easily turns into apathy when external controls are weakened. These findings reinforce the view that low intrinsic motivation is the initial entrance to the emergence of apathy, especially when religious activities are not meaningfully associated with students' life experiences.

In addition to intrinsic motivation, the psychological condition and developmental phase of adolescents also contribute to student apathy. At junior high school, students are in the phase of identity search (*Identity versus role confusion*) as Erikson explained, thus tending to question the authority, values, and routines that are considered "forced". In an interview, Santi Ismianti revealed that "*Sometimes children feel bored because they feel that their activities are just that, especially if their mood is not good*". This statement suggests that emotional factors and saturation also play a significant role. If religious activities are not presented in a varied and contextual manner, then it is difficult for students to build emotional attachment. From the perspective of Islamic educational psychology, this condition shows that there has not been a *Tazkiyatun nafs* optimally, because the habituation process has not been accompanied by the strengthening of meaning and reflective example [33]. Thus, apathy is not merely a form of rejection of religion, but a reflection of the psychological needs of students that have not been met in the design of school religious activities.

The dominant external factor comes from the family environment. Interview data showed that family background greatly influenced students' attitudes towards religious practices at school. Ani emphasized that "*Children who are not accustomed to praying or reciting at home, usually at school, are also less enthusiastic*". These findings are in line with Bronfenbrenner's theory of educational ecology, which places the family as the most influential microsystem in the formation of children's attitudes and values. When religious values are not reinforced at home, then schools work in uneven ecological conditions. School religious activities are ultimately only a temporary substitution, not a continuation of family culture [34]. This situation causes students to experience value dissonance, where what is accustomed at school is not in line with daily practices at home. As a result, passive resistance arises in the form of indifference, laziness, or simply carrying out obligations without appreciation. These findings confirm that the formation of religious attitudes cannot be imposed entirely on school institutions without synergy with the family.

The social environment and peer association are also external factors that strengthen or weaken students' religious attitudes. In the context of SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi, PAI teachers mentioned that "*The influence of friends is strong, if the environment is ignorant of worship, the child follows*". This statement corroborates Bandura's social learning theory, that student behavior is largely formed through observation and imitation of reference groups. If peer groups view religious activities as a formality, then apathy will easily spread collectively. From the perspective of the sociology of Islamic education, this condition shows the weakness of the formation of a collective religious culture based on horizontal example [35]. Without role models from peers or role models who are close to the world of students, religious values are difficult to transform into living social norms. Therefore, apathy is not only individual, but also structural and cultural, formed through repeated social interactions within the student community.

Digital culture and social media exposure are significant new external factors in shaping student apathy. The Vice President of Student Affairs revealed that "*children are now more interested in cell phones, games, and social media than religious activities*". This phenomenon is in line with the theory of contemporary educational ecology that places digital media as part of the mesosystem that influences students' mindsets and attention. Dependence on gadgets causes a shift in value orientation, where instant pleasure is more dominant than reflective activities such as worship [36]. From the perspective of Islamic education, this condition can be understood as a challenge to modernity that shifts the spiritual dimension to the periphery of consciousness. When religious activities are not able to compete symbolically and emotionally with the appeal of the digital world, apathy becomes a natural response. These findings show the importance of pedagogical innovation based on religious digital literacy so that religious values remain relevant to the world of students.

The interaction between internal and external factors forms a dynamic and layered pattern of apathy. Students with low intrinsic motivation who come from less religious families and are in a social environment that neglects worship have a greater potential to show apathy. This is confirmed by the teacher's statement that "*Usually, children who are apathetic have problems that are interrelated, not just one factor*". These findings are in line with the systemic approach in the theory of educational ecology, which rejects linear explanations of learner behavior. Apathy is understood as the result of an accumulation of experiences, relationships, and social contexts that affect each other [37]. Therefore, partial interventions, such as simply advising students, tend to be less effective if they are not accompanied by a comprehensive approach that involves family, the social environment, and strengthening internal motivation.

Based on the results and theoretical analysis, it can be concluded that students' apathy towards religious activities is a multidimensional phenomenon that demands a holistic approach. Schools need to devise a religious construction strategy that not only emphasizes formal obedience but also touches on aspects of students' intrinsic motivation and meaningful experiences. Synergy with the family, strengthening the collective religious culture, and adapting to digital culture are important prerequisites. In the context of Islamic education, this effort is in line with the goal of *tarbiyah*, which emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Thus, apathy is not understood as a failure of students alone, but as a mirror of the education ecosystem that needs to be continuously improved.

Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Students' Apathy

The results of the study show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi develop strategies for handling student apathy through a persuasive approach that emphasizes value communication, example, and a heart-to-heart approach. Teachers do not necessarily use a coercive approach or formal sanctions, but rather prioritize personal dialogue. This was revealed by Santi Ismianti that, "*If the child looks lazy or reluctant to participate in religious activities, I don't scold them right away, but I talk to them carefully*". This approach is in line with the humanistic pedagogic principles developed by Carl Rogers, which emphasize the importance of empathy, unconditional acceptance, and the authenticity of teachers in the educational process. In this context, PAI teachers are positioned not only as normative teachers but as moral and emotional companions of students [38]. This persuasive strategy allows students to feel valued as subjects, not objects of coaching. These findings suggest that the handling of apathy is more effective when teachers are able to establish a safe psychological atmosphere, so that students are open to reflecting on their religious behavior without pressure.

The relational approach is the next important strategy applied by PAI teachers in overcoming student apathy. Teacher-student relationships are built through intense, consistent, and trust-based interactions. Teachers try to get to know the students' backgrounds personally so that they can understand the root of the problem behind apathy. Ani said, "*I try to understand the condition of children, sometimes the problem is not at school, but from home*". This strategy is in line with humanistic pedagogic theory that places interpersonal relationships as the foundation of meaningful learning. From the perspective of Islamic education, this approach reflects the concept of *Tarbiyah bil hikmah*, that is, to educate with wisdom and compassion [39]. Positive relationships allow teachers to become significant figures (*significant others*) for students, so that religious advice and instruction are easier to accept. These findings suggest that apathy can be minimized when teachers can build healthy emotional closeness, as students feel cared for not only as learners, but also as individuals with complex life dynamics.

In addition to the individualized approach, PAI teachers also apply collaborative strategies by involving parents as educational partners. This collaboration is carried out

through direct communication when students are found to show repeated apathy. The Vice President of Student Affairs explained, *"If it has been repeated, I usually contact his parents to find a solution together"*. This strategy reinforces previous findings that family is a significant factor in the formation of students' religious attitudes. Within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's theory of educational ecology, the collaboration of school and family creates a more harmonious mesosystem, so that the message of religious values is not contradictory. This collaborative approach also reflects the moral leadership of PAI teachers, where teachers act as a link of values between school and home. By involving parents, teachers do not position themselves as a single actor, but as part of a complementary educational ecosystem [40]. This shows that dealing with apathy requires collective work, not just pedagogical interventions in the classroom.

The exemplary strategy is also the main pillar in an effort to overcome student apathy. PAI teachers strive to display consistency between speech and action, especially in daily religious practice. Santi Ismianti emphasized, *"The children see more examples, if the teacher participates in congregational prayers, they are more embarrassed if they don't participate"*. These findings are in line with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of modeling in behavior formation. In the context of moral leadership, exemplary is a form of value leadership (*Value-based leadership*), where teachers lead through personal integrity. Example creates positive moral pressure that is not coercive in nature, but moves students' consciousness slowly. This strategy shows that apathy is not always overcome through verbal instruction, but rather through real, consistent examples that can be observed directly by students in school day-to-day.

PAI teachers also develop adaptive strategies by modifying the coaching approach according to the character and needs of students. Not all students are treated the same way, as their levels of apathy and backgrounds are different. The teacher stated, *"There are children who are quite admonished, but there are also those who must be approached slowly"*. This approach reflects the principle of pedagogical differentiation in humanistic education, where learning and coaching are tailored to individual needs. From the perspective of Islamic education, this strategy is in line with the principles of *Al-Tadarruj* (gradual) in the construction of morals. With an adaptive approach, students do not feel standardized, so resistance to religious activities can be minimized. These findings show that teachers' flexibility in reading students' situations is the key to the success of strategies for handling apathy.

From the perspective of moral leadership, the PAI teacher's strategy shows the role of teachers as agents of value transformation in the school environment. Teachers not only carry out the administrative functions of the curriculum, but also bear the ethical responsibility to shape the religious character of students. The persuasive, relational, and collaborative approach reflects a moral leadership style that emphasizes the influence of values rather than structural authority. In moral leadership theory (*Moral Leadership*), leaders influence behavior through example, empathy, and commitment to noble values. The findings of this study show that PAI teachers have carried out this role contextually according to the conditions of students [41]. This strategy strengthens the argument that religious formation in schools requires teacher figures who are not only pedagogically competent but also morally and emotionally mature.

Table 6. PAI Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Students' Apathetic Attitudes

Key Strategies	Form of Implementation	Theoretical Foundations	Impact on Students
Persuasive	Personal dialogue, non-coercive advice	Humanistic Pedagogics (Rogers)	Students are more open and non-defensive

Relational	Emotional approach, understanding the background	Humanistic & Tarbiyah bil Hikmah	Build trust
Collaborative	Communication with parents	Educational Ecology	School–home grade consistency
Example	Teachers actively participate in worship	Social Learning & Moral Leadership	Positive moral pressure
Adaptive	Different approaches for each student	Pedagogical Differentiation	Reduced resistance

Obstacles to Implementation and School Adaptive Strategies in Strengthening Religious Activities

The results of the study show that one of the main obstacles in the implementation of religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi is the limited time in the school schedule structure. The dense academic agenda, the demands for the completion of curriculum materials, and the strict division of lesson hours often cause religious activities to have to be adjusted flexibly. The Islamic Religious Education teacher revealed that, *"Time at school is limited, while there are also many academic activities, so religious activities must be good at adjusting"*. This condition is in line with the theory of education management, which emphasizes the importance of time management (*Time Management*) as part of the school's planning and organizing function. In the perspective of school-based management (*School-based management*), time constraints are not just technical constraints, but structural challenges that demand internal policy innovation [42]. These findings show that the strengthening of religious activities cannot be separated from the policy of curriculum management and academic calendar that is adaptive to the needs of student character development.

In addition to time constraints, the organizational structure of the school is also a factor that affects the effectiveness of the implementation of religious activities. Religious activities often still depend on the initiative of PAI teachers, so they are not fully integrated as the collective responsibility of all school residents. The PAI teacher said that, *"religious activities are usually coordinated by PAI teachers, other teachers help if there is time"*. These findings show that there are structural limitations in the division of roles and responsibilities. In education management theory, this condition reflects the weak coordination and integration function between school work units. In fact, strengthening religious culture should ideally be part of the institutional vision that involves school principals, teachers of other subjects, education staff, and students. Without strong structural support, religious activities risk being perceived as an ancillary activity, rather than as a deep-rooted school culture. This emphasizes the importance of school leadership in institutionalizing religious values into the school structure and system.

The next obstacle faced by schools is the low motivation of some students to participate in religious activities, which has an impact on the sustainability of the program consistently. The PAI teacher stated, *"Not all children have the same motivation, some participate because of habit, not because of awareness"*. This phenomenon shows that the success of religious activities is not only determined by the availability of the program, but also by the degree of internalization of values in students. In school culture theory (*School Culture*), new values and habits will survive if they are supported by a common understanding. The low motivation of students indicates that the process of cultivating religious values is still at the stage of formal obedience, not yet a fully internal culture [43]. Therefore, this challenge demands an adaptive strategy that is not only structural, but also cultural, namely

through strengthening religious meanings, symbols, and practices that are relevant to the world of students.

In response to these constraints, schools developed adaptive strategies through scheduling and using time more flexibly. Waka Curriculum explained that, *"We try to create a structured schedule and take advantage of free time, for example, after a certain lesson"*. This strategy reflects the application of adaptive management principles in education, namely the ability of institutions to adapt policies to real conditions on the ground. From a strategic management perspective, this step is included in the short-term operational strategy that aims to maintain the sustainability of the school's core programs. Schedule adjustments allow religious activities to continue without sacrificing academic demands [44]. These findings suggest that managerial flexibility is key in maintaining a balance between academic achievement and fostering students' religious character.

In addition to time adjustments, schools also develop adaptive strategies through strengthening school culture based on example and habituation. Religious activities are not only positioned as a formal program, but as a daily practice that continues to be repeated. The PAI teacher said, *"The important thing is to get used to it, even if it's simple"*. This approach is in line with the theory of school culture, which emphasizes that values will be rooted through repetitive and consistent practice. In this context, habituation serves as a cultural mechanism to overcome structural limitations [45]. Schools harness the power of informal culture to sustain the weaknesses of the formal system. These findings suggest that adaptive strategies do not always have to be in the form of written policies, but can be realized through consistent and meaningful daily practices.

The obstacles to the implementation of religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi include structural, cultural, and managerial aspects. However, schools do not position these obstacles as absolute obstacles, but rather as a space for adaptation and innovation. The dialogue between empirical findings, education management theory, and school culture shows that the success of strengthening religious activities is largely determined by the ability of institutions to strategically manage limitations. The adaptive strategies applied, ranging from adjusting schedules and division of roles to strengthening the culture of habituation, show the existence of institutional awareness to make religious activities an integral part of school life. Thus, the strengthening of religious activities does not only depend on normative idealism, but on the managerial and cultural capacity of schools in responding to the reality of the education contextually and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that religious activities at SMP Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi have been designed and implemented systematically through routine habituation, structured programs, and spontaneous activities as an effort to form the school's religious culture and support SDGs-based character education. This implementation pattern shows that there is an institutional awareness that religious education is not enough to be conveyed through classroom learning, but needs to be internalized through consistent daily practice. Activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitals, flash pesantren, and Friday infaq function as a medium for habituating religious values that form student discipline, togetherness, responsibility, and SDGs-oriented social awareness. However, the findings of the study also show that the existence of a structured religious program does not fully guarantee the deep internalization of religious values in all students, so that the formation of religious culture is still on the spectrum between formal obedience and value appreciation. The variation in students' attitudes towards religious activities, ranging from active, passive, to apathetic, reflects the complexity of the process of internalizing religious values in adolescent students. Apathy that manifests in behaviors such as arriving late, lacking solemnity, and participating in activities in a formal manner indicates the existence of a gap between cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects in students' religious attitudes. The factors that cause this apathy do

not stand alone, but are the result of interactions between internal factors such as low intrinsic motivation and weak value appreciation, as well as external factors in the form of family influences, social environment, and digital culture within contemporary SDGs educational challenges. These findings confirm that students' apathy towards religious activities cannot be understood simplistically, but rather needs to be seen in the framework of educational ecology that places students in complex social and cultural networks. In facing these dynamics, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers and school adaptive strategies is a key factor in strengthening religious activities. Teachers' persuasive, relational, and collaborative approaches through personal advice, communication with parents, and example have been proven to be more effective in responding to students' apathy than repressive approaches. On the other hand, schools show adaptive ability through scheduling, use of free time, and strengthening habituation as a school culture. These findings confirm that the success of strengthening religious activities is not only determined by the intensity of the program, but also by the quality of educational management, moral leadership, SDGs values, and the school's ability to build a contextual and sustainable religious culture. Thus, Islamic religious education in schools needs to be positioned as an integrative process between structure, culture, human relations, sustainable development, and SDGs implementation.

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Author Contribution

Marhamah designed research methodology, Nasir analyzed educational strategies and data interpretation, while Mowafg Masuwd supervised manuscript development, revisions, and international academic collaboration.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts influencing research implementation, data interpretation, manuscript preparation, or publication decisions within this study.

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