

Assyfa Journal of Islamic Studies

AJIS. Vol. 4 No. 2 (2026) Page 299-311

e-ISSN: [2988-7399](#) p-ISSN: [2988-7399](#)



[DOI: 10.61650/ajis.v4i2.1305](https://doi.org/10.61650/ajis.v4i2.1305)

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Development Strategies for Strengthening Organizational Culture in High-Performing Madrasahs

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Article History: Received: 30 Jun 2026 • Revised: 25 Jul 2026 • Accepted: 10 Aug 2026 • Published: 30 Aug 2026

ABSTRACT

Organizational culture has increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of educational quality and institutional performance. However, previous studies have primarily examined organizational culture as a factor influencing school effectiveness, while limited attention has been given to the organizational mechanisms through which culture is strengthened to produce sustainable achievement. This study aims to analyze the strategies for strengthening organizational culture in outstanding madrasahs and to develop a conceptual model explaining how organizational culture contributes to sustainable institutional excellence. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed in three outstanding madrasahs in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving principals, vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, school committee members, and students. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, complemented by cross-case analysis. The findings reveal that sustainable achievement is generated through a continuous organizational culture reinforcement cycle consisting of three interconnected stages: internalization, institutionalization, and sustainability. Internalization embeds organizational and Islamic values through exemplary leadership, communication, and habituation; institutionalization integrates these values into governance systems, quality assurance, and organizational routines; while sustainability maintains organizational culture through continuous evaluation, professional development, leadership succession, innovation, and stakeholder engagement. These mechanisms collectively create a resilient organizational culture that continuously supports academic, non-academic, religious, and institutional achievement.

Keywords: organizational culture, High-Performing Madrasahs, outstanding madrasah, Islamic education.



ABSTRAK

Budaya organisasi semakin diakui sebagai faktor penting dalam menentukan mutu pendidikan dan kinerja kelembagaan. Namun, sebagian besar penelitian sebelumnya masih memandang budaya organisasi sebagai faktor yang memengaruhi efektivitas sekolah, sementara mekanisme penguatan budaya organisasi yang menghasilkan prestasi berkelanjutan belum banyak dikaji. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis strategi penguatan budaya organisasi pada madrasah berprestasi serta mengembangkan model konseptual yang menjelaskan bagaimana budaya organisasi membentuk keunggulan institusi secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus multipel pada tiga madrasah berprestasi di Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi dengan melibatkan kepala madrasah, wakil kepala madrasah, guru, tenaga kependidikan, komite madrasah, dan peserta didik. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang dipadukan dengan analisis lintas kasus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa prestasi madrasah yang berkelanjutan dibangun melalui siklus penguatan budaya organisasi yang terdiri atas tiga tahapan yang saling berkaitan, yaitu internalisasi (*internalization*), institusionalisasi (*institutionalization*), dan keberlanjutan (*sustainability*). Internalisasi dilakukan melalui keteladanan kepemimpinan, komunikasi, dan pembiasaan nilai-nilai organisasi serta nilai-nilai Islam; institusionalisasi diwujudkan dengan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai tersebut ke dalam tata kelola, sistem penjaminan mutu, dan rutinitas organisasi; sedangkan keberlanjutan dicapai melalui evaluasi berkelanjutan, pengembangan profesional, regenerasi kepemimpinan, inovasi, serta keterlibatan para pemangku kepentingan. Ketiga mekanisme tersebut membentuk budaya organisasi yang mampu mempertahankan prestasi akademik, nonakademik, religius, dan kelembagaan secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: budaya organisasi, Madrasah Berkinerja Tinggi, madrasah unggul, pendidikan Islam.

How to cite: Ade Mubarak, Ali Kuswadi, Dwi Sugianik, Dinata, F. R., & Muslih Qomarudin. (2026). Strategies for Strengthening Organizational Culture in High-Performing Madrasahs. *Assyfa Journal of Islamic Studies*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.61650/ajis.v4i2.1305>

1. INTRODUCTION

Improving educational quality has become one of the primary priorities in developing high-quality human resources. Within the context of Islamic education, madrasahs are expected not only to produce students with outstanding academic achievement but also to cultivate religious character, leadership, integrity, and twenty-first-century competencies (Yusuf et al., 2026). Various educational reform policies and quality assurance initiatives have encouraged madrasahs to continuously strengthen their institutional capacity through effective and sustainable management practices. Nevertheless, empirical evidence indicates that not all madrasahs are able to maintain their excellence over time. Many institutions experience remarkable achievements only during certain periods, followed by a decline after changes in school leadership, teaching personnel, or organizational policies. This phenomenon suggests that the long-term success of a madrasah is not merely determined by short-term improvement programs or individual leadership, but rather by the strength of its organizational culture that has become deeply embedded within the institution (Java, 2026).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that organizational culture positively influences teacher performance, leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, educational service quality, and students' academic achievement. Other research has emphasized the critical role of madrasah

principals in cultivating organizational culture through exemplary leadership, effective communication, value internalization, and stakeholder empowerment. Furthermore, studies on quality culture in Islamic educational institutions have highlighted the importance of academic culture, religious culture, disciplinary culture, and collaborative culture as key determinants of educational quality. These findings confirm that organizational culture is one of the essential factors contributing to institutional success (Yakin et al., 2025).

Despite these contributions, existing studies generally position organizational culture as an independent variable that influences educational quality, organizational performance, or student achievement. Most research focuses on examining the relationship between organizational culture and leadership, teacher motivation, job satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, or learning outcomes. Consequently, limited attention has been given to understanding how organizational culture is strategically strengthened, institutionalized, and sustained within outstanding madrasahs. Likewise, studies on high-performing madrasahs predominantly attribute institutional success to principal leadership, teacher competence, instructional innovation, infrastructure, or quality management systems. Such perspectives implicitly regard achievement as the ultimate organizational objective to be attained through various improvement programs.

Madrasahs capable of sustaining high levels of achievement over time generally possess deeply embedded organizational values, consistent collective behaviors, exemplary leadership, systematic value habituation, collaborative working environments, and continuous evaluation mechanisms (Tri Oktaviani et al., 2026). From this perspective, achievement should not be regarded as the ultimate goal of the organization, but rather as a natural consequence of a strong organizational culture. Sustainable excellence therefore emerges from an organizational culture that continuously guides institutional behavior, decision-making, and quality improvement.

Based on these conditions, several research gaps remain unresolved. First, previous studies have primarily identified the dimensions or characteristics of organizational culture without explaining how such culture can be strategically strengthened within outstanding madrasahs. Second, existing research tends to analyze organizational culture as a supporting factor for educational quality, yet pays insufficient attention to the mechanism through which organizational values are internalized, institutionalized, and sustained as an integrated organizational strategy. Third, only a limited number of studies conceptualize madrasah achievement as an organizational outcome resulting from a strong and sustainable organizational culture rather than as a target achieved through short-term quality improvement initiatives. Consequently, there remains a lack of a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining how organizational culture reinforcement contributes to the sustainability of outstanding madrasah performance.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the strategies employed by outstanding madrasahs to strengthen their organizational culture and to explain the mechanisms through which organizational culture is developed, reinforced, and sustained in generating long-term institutional excellence. The study is grounded in the perspective that achievement is not the ultimate organizational objective but rather the consequence of a strong organizational culture, thereby shifting the research focus from achievement indicators to the processes through which organizational culture becomes the primary source of sustainable institutional excellence.

The novelty of this study lies in proposing a new conceptual perspective on the relationship between organizational culture and madrasah achievement. Unlike previous studies that primarily regard achievement as the final objective attained through various quality improvement programs, this study argues that achievement is not the ultimate organizational goal but the consequence of a strong, deeply internalized, and sustainable organizational culture. This paradigm shifts the focus from pursuing achievement indicators toward developing a system of shared values, norms, and collective behaviors that consistently produce institutional excellence.

Furthermore, this study introduces a conceptual mechanism for organizational culture reinforcement consisting of three interconnected stages: internalization, institutionalization, and sustainability. The internalization stage emphasizes embedding organizational core values through value-based leadership, exemplary practices, habituation, and organizational communication. The institutionalization stage explains how these values become integrated into organizational policies, governance, work systems, teaching and learning processes, and collaborative practices, thereby transforming organizational values into established institutional routines.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple-case study design. A qualitative case study was selected because the study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how organizational culture is strengthened within outstanding madrasahs and how such culture contributes to sustainable institutional achievement (Fitria, 2026). Rather than measuring causal relationships, this research explored the processes, interactions, shared values, and organizational practices that shape a strong organizational culture. The multiple-case design enabled cross-case comparison, allowing the identification of common patterns as well as unique strategies implemented across different madrasahs, thereby enhancing the robustness and transferability of the findings (Abdullah et al., 2025).

This study was conducted in three outstanding Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior secondary schools) in South Sumatra, Indonesia. The selected madrasahs were recognized for their consistent academic and non-academic achievements, strong institutional reputation, successful quality assurance implementation, and distinctive organizational cultures. Rather than representing average-performing institutions, these madrasahs were intentionally selected as information-rich cases that provide valuable insights into how organizational culture is strategically developed and sustained to support long-term institutional excellence.

The selection of research sites followed purposeful criterion sampling, in which institutions were required to meet several criteria: (1) demonstrating consistent achievements at regional and national levels for at least the past five years; (2) implementing systematic quality management and organizational development programs; (3) possessing distinctive organizational values reflected in daily practices and institutional policies; and (4) being acknowledged by educational stakeholders as high-performing madrasahs. These criteria ensured that the selected cases were appropriate for exploring organizational culture reinforcement strategies rather than merely describing successful educational institutions.

The research was undertaken across multiple cases to capture both shared patterns and contextual variations in strengthening organizational culture. Although each madrasah operates within different organizational contexts and leadership dynamics, they share a common commitment to developing a culture that integrates academic excellence, Islamic values, collaborative practices, and continuous quality improvement (Abdullah et al., 2025). Examining these similarities and differences enabled the study to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the processes through which organizational culture contributes to sustainable institutional achievement.

The context of this research reflects the ongoing transformation of Indonesian madrasahs toward becoming learning organizations capable of adapting to educational reforms, technological developments, and increasing societal expectations. Consequently, the selected madrasahs provide an appropriate setting for investigating how organizational culture functions as a strategic organizational capability that sustains institutional performance beyond individual leadership and short-term improvement programs.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, in which informants were intentionally chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and active involvement in developing, strengthening, and sustaining organizational culture within the madrasahs (Nur Wahida Md Tahaa, Betania Kartika Muflih, 2025). This sampling technique was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain rich and in-depth information from individuals who possessed comprehensive understanding of the institutional values, organizational practices, leadership processes, and quality improvement initiatives implemented in outstanding madrasahs. The participants consisted of madrasah principals, vice principals, senior teachers, administrative staff, student organization leaders, school committee members, and madrasah supervisors.

Participant recruitment was conducted progressively until data saturation was achieved, indicating that additional interviews and observations no longer generated new or meaningful information. Therefore, this study emphasized the richness and depth of information rather than the number of participants, enabling a comprehensive understanding of organizational culture reinforcement strategies in outstanding madrasahs.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Chand, 2025). The combination of these methods enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive information while enhancing the credibility of the findings through methodological and source triangulation.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview protocol developed from the research objectives and conceptual framework (Khoiriyah & Riyadi, 2026). Participant observation was undertaken to examine how organizational culture was manifested in everyday institutional practices. The researcher observed various organizational activities, including morning assemblies, Qur'an recitation and religious habituation programs, classroom learning, coordination meetings, extracurricular activities, academic supervision, teacher collaboration, and daily interactions among members of the madrasah community. Document analysis was conducted to complement the interview and observational data.

Data were analyzed concurrently with the data collection process using the Interactive Model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of four interconnected stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). As this study adopted a multiple-case study design, the analysis was extended through cross-case analysis to compare findings across the participating madrasahs. This process enabled the identification of common patterns as well as context-specific strategies for strengthening organizational culture. The findings from each case were then synthesized to develop a conceptual model explaining how organizational culture is reinforced through three interconnected stages: value internalization, culture institutionalization, and culture sustainability, ultimately leading to sustainable institutional achievement. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the success of madrasahs in sustaining achievement is not determined solely by quality improvement programs, individual competence, or the leadership of the madrasah principal, but is more strongly influenced by a systematic and continuous mechanism of organizational culture reinforcement. Based on interviews, observations, and document analysis conducted in high-performing madrasahs, it was found that organizational culture is strengthened through three main mechanisms, namely internalization, institutionalization, and sustainability. These three mechanisms form an interconnected cycle that generates an organizational culture capable of continuously promoting academic, non-academic, religious, and institutional achievement. The following is an overview of the cycle for strengthening organizational culture in high-achieving madrasahs.



Figure 1: cycle for strengthening organizational culture in high-achieving madrasahs.

The first stage in strengthening organizational culture is the internalization of core organizational values among all members of the madrasah community. The findings show that values such as integrity, discipline, professionalism, collaboration, innovation, responsibility, and Islamic values are not only communicated through the vision and mission documents, but are also continuously embedded through various organizational activities.

The madrasah principal plays the role of a cultural leader who internalizes organizational values through exemplary conduct, intensive communication, values-based decision-making, and regular guidance for teachers and education staff. Teachers then translate these values into classroom instruction, student character development, and daily interactions within the madrasah environment. At the same time, students gain direct experience of organizational culture through various habituation practices, such as congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, literacy activities, morning assemblies, punctuality, participation in student organizations, and other academic and religious activities.

Observation results show that the internalization process takes place consistently through repeated behaviors, organizational symbols, motivational slogans, recognition of positive behavior, and communication at every level of the organization. This condition creates a shared understanding of organizational values so that all members of the madrasah develop the same commitment to educational quality achievement.

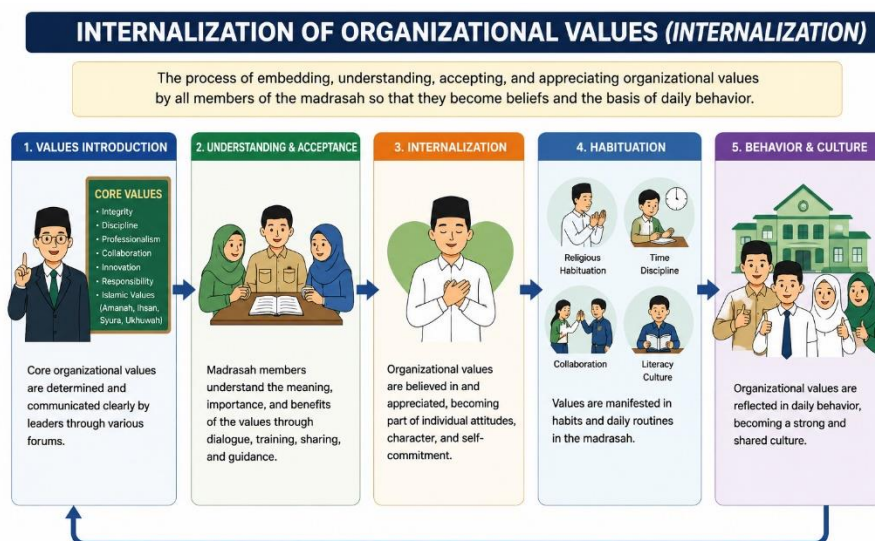


Figure 2: Internalization of Organizational Values

Once organizational values are understood by all members of the madrasah, the next stage is the institutionalization of organizational culture, namely the process of integrating those values into the organization's system and governance. The findings indicate that organizational culture does

not remain at the level of individual belief, but is manifested in various policies, operational procedures, work programs, and madrasah management mechanisms.

The value of discipline is realized through the implementation of clear standard operating procedures, teacher performance evaluation systems, and regular academic supervision mechanisms. The value of collaboration is realized through the formation of teacher learning communities, routine coordination meetings, madrasah development teams, and forums for sharing best practices among educators. Meanwhile, the culture of innovation is realized through the development of learning media, administrative digitalization, the use of information technology, and the provision of space for teachers and students to develop various academic and non-academic innovations. In the religious dimension, Islamic values are integrated into all institutional activities through worship habituation, character education strengthening, Qur'an memorization programs, moral development, and the application of deliberation principles in decision-making processes. In this way, organizational culture develops into a system that regulates the way members think, work, communicate, and make decisions at all levels of the organization.

Document analysis shows that organizational values are also reflected in strategic planning documents, performance indicators, internal quality assurance systems, human resource development programs, and reward policies for teachers and students who demonstrate outstanding performance. This indicates that organizational culture has undergone institutionalization and has become an inseparable part of madrasah governance.

The third stage is the sustainability mechanism of organizational culture. The findings show that high-performing madrasahs not only succeed in building organizational culture, but also have strategies that enable them to maintain that culture despite changes in principals, teachers, or educational policies.

The sustainability of organizational culture is realized through periodic evaluation of value implementation, continuous professional development for teachers, leadership regeneration, mentoring systems for new teachers, documentation of best practices, and the strengthening of organizational reflection culture. Madrasahs also develop continuous innovation mechanisms by providing space for all members of the organization to propose new ideas, improve work processes, and adapt organizational culture to the dynamics of educational development. In addition, the involvement of parents, madrasah committees, alumni, and the wider community further strengthens the sustainability of organizational culture. The support of these stakeholders expands the internalization of organizational values beyond the madrasah environment, thereby creating an educational ecosystem that supports the achievement of sustainable performance.

The findings show that the sustainability of organizational culture is reflected in the consistency of academic and non-academic achievements, improved teacher professionalism, high levels of discipline among madrasah members, strong religious character among students, increased public trust, and the madrasah's ability to adapt to change without losing its organizational identity.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that sustainable achievement in outstanding madrasahs is generated through a cyclical mechanism of organizational culture reinforcement consisting of internalization, institutionalization, and sustainability. Rather than viewing achievement as the primary organizational objective, the findings indicate that achievement emerges as the outcome of a deeply embedded organizational culture. This finding shifts the focus from achievement-oriented management toward culture-driven organizational development.

These findings strongly support Edgar H. Schein's Organizational Culture Theory, which argues that organizational culture develops through three interconnected levels: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions (Research Gate, 2020). According to Schein, organizational culture becomes sustainable when formally articulated values are gradually transformed into deeply embedded assumptions accepted collectively by organizational members. The present study demonstrates that the internalization process follows this theoretical trajectory (Gutterman, 2024). Initially, organizational values are communicated through visible organizational artifacts, including institutional vision statements, religious rituals, school ceremonies, symbols, and organizational traditions. These values are subsequently reinforced through leadership practices and organizational communication until they become shared beliefs that unconsciously guide decision-making and everyday behavior.

More importantly, this study extends Schein's framework by illustrating that value internalization within madrasahs is achieved not only through organizational socialization but also through religious habituation and value-based leadership. Daily congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, character education, moral exemplification, and collective religious activities function as mechanisms for embedding organizational values into the institutional culture. These findings indicate that Islamic values serve as cultural reinforcers that strengthen organizational commitment and behavioral consistency. Therefore, within the context of Islamic educational institutions, organizational culture encompasses both managerial and spiritual dimensions that mutually reinforce institutional identity.

The findings are also consistent with Denison's Organizational Culture Model, particularly the dimensions of Mission and Involvement (Denison, 1990). Denison argues that effective organizations possess a clearly articulated mission while simultaneously encouraging employee involvement in realizing organizational goals (Bijalwan et al., 2024). In the outstanding madrasahs investigated in this study, institutional values are not imposed through hierarchical control but are collectively interpreted and practiced by principals, teachers, administrative personnel, and students. Organizational commitment emerges because members understand the meaning of organizational values and perceive them as shared responsibilities rather than administrative obligations. Consequently, value internalization strengthens collective ownership, organizational commitment, and collaborative behavior across the institution.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that principals play a pivotal role as cultural leaders, a concept that aligns with Schein's assertion that leaders are the primary architects of organizational culture. Rather than merely communicating organizational expectations, principals consistently

model desired behaviors through integrity, discipline, transparency, fairness, and commitment to continuous improvement. Such exemplary leadership encourages organizational members to imitate and gradually internalize organizational values. This confirms Schein's proposition that leadership behavior is one of the most influential mechanisms through which organizational culture is created and maintained.

Within Islamic educational settings, the present findings are also consistent with studies demonstrating that religious values contribute significantly to institutional effectiveness. Previous research has reported that integrating Islamic values into educational management strengthens teachers' commitment, improves organizational discipline, and enhances institutional performance. However, unlike earlier studies that primarily examined the influence of Islamic values on organizational outcomes, the present study explains the mechanism through which those values become internalized. The findings indicate that organizational values do not automatically influence institutional performance; rather, they must first be embedded through continuous leadership practices, organizational communication, religious habituation, and collective participation before they become part of members' basic assumptions.

The findings of this study indicate that the second stage of strengthening organizational culture is institutionalization, in which organizational values are transformed from shared beliefs into formal organizational systems, governance structures, policies, and daily operational practices. The findings reveal that values such as discipline, collaboration, innovation, accountability, and Islamic principles are no longer limited to individual commitment but are embedded in standard operating procedures, quality assurance systems, academic supervision, teacher professional development, strategic planning, reward mechanisms, and decision-making processes. This demonstrates that organizational culture evolves from an intangible value system into an institutionalized organizational practice that guides the behavior of all members of the madrasah.

These findings strongly support Edgar H. Schein's Organizational Culture Theory, particularly the concept of primary and secondary embedding mechanisms (Schein, 2017). Schein argues that leaders institutionalize organizational culture by embedding core values into organizational structures, resource allocation, performance evaluation, reward systems, recruitment, training, and organizational routines (Research Gate, 2020). The present findings demonstrate that the principals of outstanding madrasahs do not merely communicate organizational values but translate them into formal governance mechanisms. Consequently, organizational culture becomes institutionalized within the daily operations of the institution, ensuring that organizational values remain consistent despite changes in leadership or organizational members. This finding extends Schein's theory by illustrating that, within Islamic educational institutions, institutionalization also occurs through the integration of religious values into governance practices, including Qur'an memorization programs, character education, congregational worship, and deliberative decision-making (*shura*), thereby reinforcing both organizational effectiveness and institutional identity.

Research by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) further supports these findings by emphasizing that sustainable educational improvement depends on professional collaboration and organizational routines rather than individual performance alone. In the present study, teacher learning communities, collaborative planning, academic supervision, and shared responsibility for

educational quality illustrate how institutionalized organizational culture promotes collective professionalism and continuous organizational learning(Saks et al., 2025).

Although the findings support existing theories and previous studies, this research offers an important conceptual contribution. Previous studies generally explain that organizational culture influences organizational effectiveness after values have already become embedded within institutional systems. However, they provide limited explanation regarding how institutionalization functions as a strategic mechanism connecting value internalization with sustainable organizational performance. This study demonstrates that institutionalization is not merely the formal implementation of organizational values but rather the process through which values are systematically transformed into governance structures, organizational routines, quality management systems, and professional practices. Through this mechanism, organizational culture becomes self-reinforcing and less dependent on individual leaders.

Accordingly, this study refines existing organizational culture theories by positioning institutionalization as the critical bridging mechanism between value internalization and culture sustainability. Organizational values that have been successfully institutionalized become organizational capabilities that continuously shape decision-making, professional behavior, innovation, and quality improvement. Consequently, sustainable institutional achievement emerges not from temporary improvement programs but from organizational systems that consistently embody and reproduce shared cultural values. This finding strengthens the proposed Organizational Culture Reinforcement Cycle Model, in which institutionalization functions as the central process that transforms organizational values into sustainable organizational excellence.

The findings further indicate that organizational culture is maintained through continuous evaluation, leadership succession, professional development, innovation, and stakeholder involvement. This supports Peter Senge's Learning Organization Theory (2006), which emphasizes that organizational sustainability depends on continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation. Likewise, Denison's Adaptability dimension explains that effective organizations sustain performance by continuously responding to environmental changes while preserving their core values.

The findings also correspond with Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece, 2018), which argues that long-term organizational success depends on the ability to integrate, renew, and reconfigure organizational capabilities in response to changing environments. The participation of parents, school committees, alumni, and the wider community further demonstrates that organizational culture extends beyond internal organizational members and becomes a shared institutional ecosystem(Dukhaykh & Alangri, 2026). This finding is consistent with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), who argue that sustainable educational improvement is achieved through collective professionalism and strong stakeholder collaboration.

While previous studies generally examine organizational culture as one of the factors influencing school effectiveness, leadership, or educational quality, this study offers a different conceptual perspective. The findings demonstrate that organizational culture functions as a strategic organizational capability that generates sustainable achievement through a cyclical reinforcement mechanism consisting of internalization, institutionalization, and sustainability.

Accordingly, the principal novelty of this study lies in two contributions. First, it proposes a paradigm shift by positioning achievement not as the ultimate goal of the organization, but as the consequence of a strong and sustainable organizational culture. Second, it introduces an Organizational Culture Reinforcement Cycle Model, explaining the mechanism through which organizational values are internalized by organizational members, institutionalized into governance systems and organizational routines, and continuously sustained through learning, innovation, leadership regeneration, and stakeholder engagement. This model extends existing organizational culture theories by explaining how organizational culture is strategically reinforced to produce sustainable institutional excellence, rather than merely identifying its influence on organizational performance.

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