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The Dhuha Prayer and Students' Emotional and Character Development: A Psychospiritual Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, increasing academic pressure and emotional challenges among university students have highlighted the need for practices that support both emotional well-being and character development. This study examines how students of the Islamic Education Department (PAI) at FISH UNJ interpret the role of the Dhuha prayer in supporting emotional balance and character formation from a psychospiritual perspective. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological inquiry, the research explores students' lived experiences and perceived changes following the regular performance of the Dhuha prayer. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the Dhuha prayer is perceived not only as a recommended religious practice, but also as a reflective moment that helps students organize their thoughts, reduce academic pressure, and manage emotional challenges within the campus environment. Regular engagement in the prayer is also associated with the development of discipline, inner calmness, and a stronger sense of personal responsibility. This study contributes to the understanding of religious practices as psychospiritual resources and suggests that the Dhuha prayer can be integrated into student development programs to support emotional stability and positive character formation in higher education contexts.

Keywords: Dhuha Prayer, Emotional Balance, Character Formation

ABSTRAK

Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, meningkatnya tekanan akademis dan tantangan emosional di kalangan mahasiswa telah menyoroti kebutuhan akan praktik-praktik yang mendukung kesejahteraan emosional dan pengembangan karakter. **Studi ini meneliti** bagaimana mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di FISH UNJ menafsirkan peran shalat Dhuha dalam mendukung keseimbangan emosional dan pembentukan karakter dari perspektif psikospiritual.



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Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan penyelidikan **fenomenologis**, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup mahasiswa dan perubahan yang dirasakan setelah pelaksanaan shalat Dhuha secara rutin. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. **Temuan menunjukkan** bahwa shalat Dhuha tidak hanya dianggap sebagai praktik keagamaan yang dianjurkan, tetapi juga sebagai momen reflektif yang membantu mahasiswa mengatur pikiran mereka, mengurangi tekanan akademis, dan mengelola tantangan emosional dalam lingkungan kampus. Keterlibatan rutin dalam shalat juga dikaitkan dengan pengembangan disiplin, ketenangan batin, dan rasa tanggung jawab pribadi yang lebih kuat. **Studi ini berkontribusi** pada pemahaman praktik keagamaan sebagai sumber daya psikospiritual dan menunjukkan bahwa shalat Dhuha dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam program pengembangan mahasiswa untuk mendukung stabilitas emosional dan pembentukan karakter positif dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Sholat Dhuha, Keseimbangan Emosional, Karakter Mahasiswa

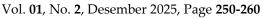
INTRODUCTION

Students play a strategic role as the younger generation in the development of human resources and the formation of national character. However, contemporary campus life is increasingly characterized by intense academic demands, organizational responsibilities, and complex social interactions. These conditions often place students under significant psychological pressure, leading to stress, anxiety, mental fatigue, and emotional imbalance. Students are required to manage time effectively, meet academic expectations, and maintain healthy social relationships simultaneously, which becomes a considerable challenge, particularly during the critical stage of self-development and identity formation (Dwi & Arifin, 2025; Labibah et al., 2025).

Previous studies have shown that emotional imbalance among university students is a common phenomenon and is often understood as a natural response to academic and social pressures. Research in educational psychology emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation, self-discipline, and coping strategies in supporting students' well-being and character development. Several studies have highlighted the role of religious and spiritual practices in reducing stress, fostering inner calmness, and strengthening moral values among students. However, much of this research tends to focus on measurable outcomes or general correlations, rather than exploring students' subjective experiences in depth.

In the context of Islamic education, the Dhuha prayer is commonly understood as a recommended religious practice with spiritual merit. Existing studies have discussed its theological significance and its general benefits for discipline and spiritual growth. Nevertheless, empirical research that specifically examines how students personally experience the Dhuha prayer as a psychospiritual practice—particularly in relation to emotional balance and character formation—remains limited. Moreover, few studies employ a phenomenological approach that centers on students' lived experiences and personal interpretations of this practice within the academic environment.





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Based on this research gap, this study aims to explore how students of the Islamic Education Department (PAI) at FISH UNJ interpret and experience the role of the Dhuha prayer in supporting their emotional regulation and character development. Using a psychospiritual phenomenological inquiry, the study focuses on students' narratives, reflections, and perceived changes resulting from the regular performance of the Dhuha prayer.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on the psychospiritual dimension of the Dhuha prayer as experienced by students, rather than viewing it solely as a ritual obligation or behavioral habit. By foregrounding students' lived experiences, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of religious practices as meaningful resources for emotional well-being and character formation in higher education contexts

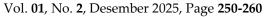
This phenomenon is seen among university students in general, many of whom face various pressures that affect their emotional stability. This is particularly evident among students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Jakarta State University. Based on initial observations, some Islamic Religious Education students experience changes in their emotional state during their studies, such as easily feeling stressed when faced with mounting assignments, losing focus during lessons, and experiencing mental fatigue when having to balance various academic and non-academic activities. As future educators, Islamic Religious Education students are expected to possess mature character, good emotional stability, and consistent spiritual role models. This situation indicates a need to find emotional strengthening strategies that align with the religious values they are studying.

This situation encourages many students to seek ways to calm themselves and balance their emotions. One religious practice that is seen as helpful in this process is the Dhuha prayer, a prayer performed in the morning that has spiritual, psychological, and reflective dimensions. Several studies have shown that the Dhuha prayer plays a role in providing calm, increasing focus, and supporting students' emotional stability amidst the busy campus activities.

This student's experience is supported by various previous studies showing that the practice of Dhuha prayer significantly contributes to student emotional management. One relevant finding was demonstrated by a study of students from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Indonesia (UMI), which revealed that Dhuha prayer helped increase inner peace, reduce emotional stress, and strengthen students' ability to cope with stressful academic situations (Rahmawati dkk., 2020). These findings demonstrate that consistent religious activities can foster effective self-regulation and self-healing in students.

Another study by (Rosad, 2020) corroborates these findings by showing that Dhuha prayer can increase spiritual intelligence and inner peace. This calmer state of mind contributes to an individual's ability to more steadily navigate the dynamics of learning and environmental pressures.





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Similarly, (Zulfa & Asiyah, 2021) found that consistent Dhuha prayer performance is associated with increased self-discipline and focus. These two aspects are crucial for emotional regulation and positive character development in students.

In shaping student character, other research findings that align with this study include the results of a study (Khofi, 2024), which showed that the habit of performing the Dhuha prayer plays a role in developing discipline, particularly in terms of time management and responsibility. In the students who participated in this study, this discipline was evident in the ability to organize daily activities, maintain composure, and be more focused in facing academic demands. Although not all informants performed the Dhuha prayer regularly, they felt that this act of worship helped stabilize emotions and foster a more conscious and controlled attitude.

These findings suggest that the Dhuha prayer has the potential to strengthen emotional regulation and build character, especially for students facing significant academic pressure. However, most previous research using a quantitative approach has focused more on the relationship between prayer frequency and emotional stability scores. Very few studies have delved

deeply into students' subjective experiences regarding how they interpret the Dhuha prayer and how it helps them manage their emotions and develop new character traits in their campus life.

However, emotional and spiritual experiences are highly personal, influenced by each student's environment, family background, level of activity, and psychological state. Therefore, this research is necessary to understand the profound meaning students feel in performing the Dhuha prayer and how this practice plays a role in maintaining emotional balance and shaping their character as they navigate college life.

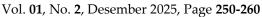
METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences of performing the Dhuha prayer and how they interpret this practice in supporting emotional balance and character development. A phenomenological inquiry was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences, focusing on how they consciously experience, perceive, and assign meaning to the Dhuha prayer within their academic and personal lives.

The study was conducted at Jakarta State University (UNJ), specifically in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law (FISH). Participants consisted of active PAI FISH UNJ students from the 2021-2025 cohorts who had experience performing the Dhuha prayer, either regularly or occasionally. No specific frequency of practice was required, as the study focused on students' subjective experiences and interpretations rather than the intensity of ritual performance.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria aligned with the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were: (1) active students of the PAI FISH UNJ Study





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Program, (2) having experience performing the Dhuha prayer, and (3) willingness to share reflections on how this practice influences their emotional state and character development. To enrich the diversity of experiences, snowball sampling was also employed by obtaining recommendations from initial participants.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, depending on participants' availability and comfort. The interview questions explored students' motivations for performing the Dhuha prayer, emotional experiences before and after the practice, and the meanings they attributed to the prayer in relation to their daily lives as university students. In addition, non-participatory observations were conducted in campus settings, particularly in mosques, to understand the contextual implementation of the Dhuha prayer within the academic environment. Field notes were also used as supporting documentation.

In phenomenological qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument. To minimize personal bias and preconceptions, the researcher applied epoché (bracketing) by consciously suspending prior assumptions, beliefs, and experiences related to the Dhuha prayer and students' emotional conditions during the processes of data collection and analysis. Supporting instruments included interview guides, audio recorders, and field notes to ensure comprehensive and accurate data documentation.

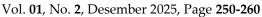
Data analysis followed the phenomenological analysis procedures. The first stage involved phenomenological reduction, in which the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of participants' narratives and to identify significant statements related to emotional balance and character development. These statements were then coded and clustered into meaning units. The second stage involved imaginative variation, whereby the researcher explored multiple possible meanings and structural conditions underlying participants' experiences in order to identify essential themes that transcended individual accounts. The final stage involved synthesizing the essence of the phenomenon by integrating textural descriptions (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how the experiences occurred), resulting in a comprehensive interpretation of students' psychospiritual experiences of the Dhuha prayer.

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, several validation strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by returning summarized interpretations of the findings to selected participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation, thereby enhancing the credibility and dependability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dhuha prayer is a highly recommended sunnah prayer with numerous virtues. Numerous hadiths emphasize the urgency and virtue of the Dhuha prayer, including its ability to





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erase minor sins, earn rewards, act as a form of charity, and even open the door to sustenance. Beyond these virtues, the Dhuha prayer is essentially a means of drawing closer to Allah SWT. Amidst the dynamics and busyness of worldly activities, the Dhuha prayer is crucial in helping a person achieve inner peace and serves as a reminder to always utilize time optimally so that every activity can be considered an act of worship. Therefore, many Muslims perform the Dhuha prayer as part of their regular worship, including university students. This study focuses on how the Dhuha prayer is practiced by students, particularly those in the Islamic Religious Education study program at FISH UNJ, and its implications for emotional balance and character development.

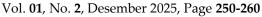
Based on interview data we conducted with several Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students in each year, we found variations in the frequency of performing the Dhuha prayer, with some performing it regularly and others less frequently. However, all interviewees admitted that they had been practicing the Dhuha prayer since junior high school, high school, and some even since elementary school. In general, students viewed the Dhuha prayer as a way to start the day with a lighter heart, clearer minds, and a more stable spirit. They didn't view the Dhuha prayer merely as a routine, but as a means to achieve inner peace. This repeated spiritual experience then shaped the students' understanding that the Dhuha prayer is not only related to worship but also has a very real emotional impact on their academic lives. This is a strong point in the following findings.

1) Emosional Dhuha Prayer as a Means of Achieving Emotional Balance

Emotional balance, also known as "euthymia" in psychology, is a condition where a person is mentally stable. This means they can control all their emotions, whether happy, sad, or angry, in a balanced manner, preventing drastic emotional changes .(Nasya Desnita Putri, t.t.). Conversely, unbalanced emotions can cause anxiety, which impacts the brain's performance in solving problems. Islamic psychology is a branch of psychology that addresses human mental health issues, incorporating Islamic spiritual aspects. Previous studies revealed that ritual worship, such as prayer, plays a role in fostering emotional intelligence because it gives a person time for self-reflection. Regarding the Dhuha prayer, several previous studies have revealed a correlation between the Dhuha prayer and emotional balance. Research conducted on students at the Faculty of Medicine, UMI, found that the Dhuha prayer had an effect on their emotional stability (Rahmawati dkk., 2020). Other research has shown that the more frequently a person performs the Dhuha prayer, the lower their anxiety levels (Fitrianingrum, 2025)

The Dhuha prayer also has a psychospiritual function that helps reduce anxiety levels by increasing spiritual closeness, self-control, optimism, and the value of tawakkul (religious commitment) through a mechanism called spiritual coping (Khaira dkk., 2023)Spiritual coping is a way for someone to reduce stress levels caused by life's problems by approaching God through spiritual practices such as prayer, rituals, and religious beliefs (Purnama, 2017)The Dhuha prayer is a form of emotional coping, where a person finds solutions to their mental state,





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such as feeling calmer, even though they have not yet found a practical solution to the problem they are facing. This is in line with the results of interviews we conducted with several PAI FISH UNJ students who revealed that the Dhuha prayer helps them control their emotions, calm their hearts, and inspire them to face lecture activities. The Dhuha prayer is seen as a means of 'mental reset' when facing academic pressure. Informants feel calmer and can think clearly. This aligns with research conducted by (Shiddiqoh, 2022a) which states a positive relationship between the Dhuha prayer and positive thinking in students from out of town. Furthermore, they also experience spiritual beliefs such as the blessing of time and ease of sustenance and worldly affairs. This is what makes them feel more prepared to undertake their studies after performing the Dhuha prayer.

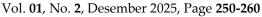
2) Dhuha Prayer as a Means of Character Building

Based on the interview results, we concluded that practicing the Dhuha prayer fosters positive character traits such as discipline, responsibility, patience, trust in God, optimism, gratitude, and sincerity. Informants reported that practicing the Dhuha prayer made them more disciplined individuals because they were accustomed to setting aside time in the morning for worship. This habit also fosters a sense of responsibility, regularity, and consistency, which have a positive impact on academic activities. This aligns with Thomas Lickona's theory of character education, which states that a person's character is influenced by habits, and good habits will shape good things. The Dhuha prayer is also seen as a form of spiritual responsibility that can foster a responsible attitude. Another informant added that the Dhuha prayer has a positive impact on their behavior on campus. The informant admitted to feeling calmer, able to think positively, and accept everything with sincerity. Furthermore, in social life, the Dhuha prayer also fosters patience, respect for others, and caution in interactions with friends and lecturers. Several informants reported that performing the Dhuha prayer improved their time management skills, as they were accustomed to making time for it despite their busy schedules and uncertain lecture schedules. This study's findings align with those of several previous studies, such as ((Safitri, 2018)which found that the Dhuha prayer influenced the discipline of students in the STAIN Parepare dormitory. Socially, the Dhuha prayer has been shown to positively impact students' social and religious attitudes (Athiyyah & Ridwan, 2024).

3) Dynamics, Challenges, and Factors Affecting Consistency

Consistency in performing the Dhuha prayer is influenced by both internal and external dynamics experienced by the individual. Based on interview data, the motivations or factors that drive informants to perform the Dhuha prayer vary, both internal and external. Informants' internal motivation stems from their desire to improve themselves. One informant admitted that this occurred because of a specific event that influenced them to change. This aligns with Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun's (1995) theory of Post-Traumatic Growth, which states that after individuals struggle with challenging or traumatic life situations, positive changes occur.





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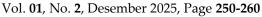
This theory does not ignore the suffering caused by trauma, but rather suggests that these difficulties can lead to positive transformation. One aspect of this is positive spiritual change. Meanwhile, external motivation comes from environmental influences, including family, friends, and school. One informant said that she began performing the Dhuha prayer because she imitated her parents. Meanwhile, other informants said they started practicing the Dhuha prayer because of the activities that encouraged the Dhuha prayer at the school, madrasah, or Islamic boarding school where they previously studied. Initially, informants considered the Dhuha prayer merely a routine habit from school, but over time, informants realized the urgency of the Dhuha prayer for maintaining spirituality, emotional stability, and self-development. In general, the challenge for informants in performing the Dhuha prayer during college was time management. Several informants admitted to having difficulty finding time for the Dhuha prayer amidst their busy and uncertain class schedules. In addition, their friendship environment and sometimes low self-motivation also affected the informants' consistency in performing the Dhuha prayer.

4) Phenomenological Analysis: The Meaning of the Dhuha Prayer in the Lives of Students

Based on a phenomenological analysis of the experiences of all informants, it appears that the Dhuha Prayer has a deeper meaning than simply a sunnah prayer performed in the morning. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students at FISH UNJ interpret the Dhuha Prayer as a spiritual space for personal interaction with Allah, a place where they organize their thoughts, express their concerns, and restore clarity of heart. This experience emerged among both students who performed it consistently and those who performed it at specific times, indicating that frequency is not the sole factor determining the depth of their understanding. The primary meaning evident in the informants' experiences was inner calm. Students described a feeling of lightness, relief, and stability after performing the Dhuha Prayer, especially when they were stressed, anxious, or feeling burdened by academic assignments. Several informants reported that the Dhuha Prayer helped them deal with feelings of sadness, loss, and life pressures, making it an important part of their emotional recovery (self-healing).

In addition to serenity, informants also experienced the Dhuha prayer as a source of direction in life and inner clarity. After performing this prayer, they felt better able to prioritize, more easily manage their study rhythm, and more confident in making decisions. This indicates a shift in meaning from mere ritual to an existential experience—where worship contributes to self-understanding, strengthening values, and deepening spiritual understanding. Another dominant meaning was gratitude and trust in God. Many informants realized that in times of academic, economic, and social pressure, the Dhuha prayer served as a reminder that they were not entirely dependent on themselves but needed God's help and peace. This spiritual awareness fostered a more patient, open-minded, and less anxious state. Thus, for PAI FISH UNJ students,





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the Dhuha prayer is not simply an act of worship, but a spiritual experience that helps them find balance between worldly demands and spiritual needs.

5) Research Implications for Students, Campuses, and Islamic Education

The findings of this study indicate that the Dhuha prayer plays a significant role in supporting students' emotional stability and character development as experienced and interpreted through their lived experiences. From a phenomenological perspective, participants described the Dhuha prayer as a psychospiritual moment that facilitates emotional regulation, inner calmness, and reflective self-awareness amid academic pressures. This experiential meaning aligns with perspectives in Islamic psychology that conceptualize worship ('ibadah) not merely as a ritual obligation, but also as a process of inner purification (tazkiyat al-nafs) and emotional resilience.

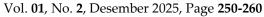
For students, these findings suggest that the Dhuha prayer functions as a form of self-regulation that integrates spiritual consciousness with emotional management. Participants' narratives reveal that engagement in this sunnah practice contributes to the development of discipline, patience, emotional awareness, and self-control—key components of emotional intelligence within an Islamic psychological framework. Thus, the practice of the Dhuha prayer extends beyond religious observance and serves as a meaningful psychospiritual resource in navigating the emotional demands of contemporary student life.

At the institutional level, the findings highlight the importance of campuses providing environments that support students' spiritual practices. Participants' experiences indicate that accessible and comfortable prayer spaces, along with a supportive religious atmosphere, positively influence students' emotional well-being. According, spiritual development programs at the faculty and study programs levels may be designed no only to enhance religiosity, but also to promote student's mental health through reflective, humanistic, and contextually grounded religious approaches.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this study reinforces the pedagogical value of sunnah worship as part of a holistic educational framework. The findings suggest that Islamic education should move beyond the transmission of normative religious knowledge to include the facilitation of meaningful spiritual experiences that support emotional maturity and moral development. Integrating the psychospiritual dimensions of worship into PAI curricula can strengthen the relationship between religious learning, character education, and students' emotional development.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The findings are based on a limited number of participants within a single institutional context, which may restrict the transferability of the results. Furthermore, the phenomenological approach emphasizes subjective depth, which may not capture broader behavioral patterns across student







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populations. Future research may involve participants from diverse academic disciplines, employ comparative or mixed-method approaches, and integrate Islamic psychology frameworks more explicitly to deepen the analysis of psychospiritual practices in higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and analysis, this study concludes that the Dhuha prayer plays a significant role in the lives of PAI FISH UNJ students, particularly in supporting emotional stability, spiritual awareness, and character development. The Dhuha prayer is not merely perceived as a sunnah religious practice, but as a meaningful psychospiritual activity that fosters inner calmness, emotional balance, and reflective self-awareness amid academic pressures and the dynamic nature of campus life. Students who consistently perform the Dhuha prayer report experiencing clearer thinking, emotional relief, and improved self-control.

Furthermore, the habit of performing the Dhuha prayer contributes to the development of positive character traits such as discipline, responsibility, patience, optimism, and trust in God (tawakkul). This sustained spiritual practice strengthens students' moral and spiritual values while supporting their ability to manage time effectively and respond more maturely to academic and social challenges. The findings also reveal that students' consistency in performing the Dhuha prayer is influenced by both internal and external factors, including personal motivation, spiritual experiences, family environment, peer influence, and religious habits formed during earlier educational

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to psycho-spiritual and Islamic educational scholarship by conceptualizing the Dhuha prayer as a form of psychospiritual self-regulation grounded in students' lived experiences. Through a phenomenological approach, the study demonstrates that sunnah worship functions not only as a ritual act, but also as a mechanism for emotional regulation, character formation, and inner transformation. This contribution enriches discussions within Islamic psychology and phenomenological studies of religious practice in higher education contexts

Practically, the findings suggest that universities and Islamic education institutions can integrate spiritual practices such as the Dhuha prayer into student development programs in more humanistic and contextually responsive ways. Providing supportive worship environments and designing spiritually oriented initiatives that address students' emotional and character needs may contribute to students' mental well-being and holistic development.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations related to its phenomenological scope and specific institutional context. Future research may involve more diverse student populations, adopt comparative or mixed-method approaches, and integrate Islamic psychology frameworks more explicitly to deepen understanding of psychospiritual practices in higher education. Such







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efforts can further strengthen the theoretical and empirical foundations of spiritually informed approaches to student well-being and character education.

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