



Challenges and Strategies of Islamic Education Teachers in Fostering Students' Moral Character

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the challenges and strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering students' character at SMP Al-Hidayah Medan. Using a qualitative approach with observation, interviews, and documentation techniques, it was found that PAI teachers face various internal challenges, such as declining student interest in religious subjects, limited teacher motivation and knowledge in utilizing educational technology, and a lack of variety in teaching methods. External challenges include the negative influence of social media, a global culture that promotes individualism and materialism, and minimal family support in shaping students' character. To address these challenges, PAI teachers at SMP Al-Hidayah Medan employ active learning strategies such as discussions, case studies, and involving students in religious activities like congregational prayers and Islamic studies. Teachers also collaborate with homeroom teachers and parents to monitor students' character development outside of school. This study emphasizes that the success of character building requires synergy between schools, families, and the community, as well as creativity and exemplary conduct from teachers to achieve optimal character education outcomes.

Keyword: PAI Teacher, Noble Morals, Development Strategy

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tantangan serta strategi yang diterapkan oleh guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam membina akhlak siswa di SMP Al-Hidayah Medan. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, ditemukan bahwa guru PAI menghadapi berbagai tantangan internal seperti menurunnya minat belajar siswa terhadap pelajaran agama, keterbatasan motivasi dan pengetahuan guru dalam memanfaatkan teknologi pembelajaran, serta metode pembelajaran yang kurang variatif. Tantangan eksternal meliputi pengaruh negatif media sosial, budaya global yang mendorong nilai individualisme dan materialisme, serta minimnya dukungan keluarga dalam pembentukan karakter siswa. Untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut, guru PAI di SMP Al-Hidayah Medan menerapkan strategi pembelajaran aktif seperti diskusi, studi kasus, serta melibatkan siswa dalam kegiatan keagamaan seperti shalat berjamaah dan kajian Islam. Guru juga membangun kerja sama dengan wali kelas dan orang tua guna memantau perkembangan akhlak siswa di luar sekolah. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan pembinaan akhlak siswa memerlukan sinergi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat, serta

kreativitas dan keteladanan guru agar tujuan pendidikan karakter dapat tercapai secara optimal

Kata kunci : Guru PAI, Akhlak Mulia, Strategi Pembinaan

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education normatively has the main mandate of forming students' faith, piety, and noble morals (Azyana Alda Sirait et al., 2024; Azizah & Usman, 2023; Hasan & Aziz, 2023). However, in practice, Islamic Education learning in schools often faces serious challenges when the values taught are not fully internalized in students' daily behavior (Basri & Rahman, 2025; (zizah et al., 2025; Azizah & Winanda, 2021). This condition shows that there is a gap between the ideal goals of Islamic religious education and the empirical reality in the field, especially in the aspect of moral development of adolescent students who are in the phase of searching for their identity and are vulnerable to the influence of the social environment (Basri, 2023).

The phenomenon of declining moral quality of students at the junior high school level is getting stronger, along with the complexity of adolescent life in the digital era and globalization (Hasan Basri & Hilman Rizki Hasibuan, 2024). Uncontrolled access to information, a permissive popular culture, and weak social control all influence students' attitudes and behavior. Behaviors such as bullying, low discipline, inappropriate language, and defiance toward teachers are no longer sporadic but are beginning to show systemic patterns across various educational institutions (Hasan Basri & Ahmad Syahri Mubarak, 2023). This indicates that moral issues cannot be resolved solely through a normative approach but require a contextual and adaptive development strategy.

In this context, schools as formal educational institutions have a moral and pedagogical responsibility to not only produce students who excel academically, but also those with good character and morals (Sya'roni, 2022). Islamic religious education teachers hold a strategic position because they are at the forefront of the process of internalizing Islamic values (Romdhoni et al., 2023). However, the role of Islamic religious education teachers is often faced with various obstacles, ranging from limited learning time, heterogeneous student characters, to the use of learning methods that tend to be monotonous and cognitively oriented. When Islamic religious education emphasizes memorization and transfer of material, moral development has the potential to be reduced to normative discourse that has little impact on behavioral change.

This reality was also found at Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan. Based on initial observations conducted by researchers on May 8, 2025, a tendency towards a moral crisis was observed among students. These behaviors included the use of impolite language, verbal and nonverbal bullying between students, low discipline, cheating, lack of responsibility for assignments, being easily provoked, and rebellious behavior toward teachers. These findings were reinforced by statements from Islamic religious education teachers who stated that such behaviors still frequently occur both during the learning process and outside the classroom. This condition indicates that moral development at the school has not been running optimally and requires more effective and targeted strategies.

In addition to student behavior, pedagogical factors are also a crucial concern. Islamic Religious Education instruction at Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan still tends to use a conventional approach with limited methodological variety. This situation has the potential to lead to low student engagement in the learning process and weak internalization of moral values. When students are not engaged reflectively and contextually, the moral values taught risk being understood only at a cognitive level, without developing moral awareness and behavioral habits.

A number of previous studies have examined the strategies of Islamic religious education teachers in instilling and fostering students' morals. Research conducted by Deajeng Putri Devi dkk, (2020), shows that Islamic Education teachers use various learning strategies to instill moral values and address students' moral problems. Meanwhile, Nurhasanah (2020) emphasizes the role of motivation and habituation in developing students' morals in junior high schools. However, these studies generally focus on the strategies and outcomes of moral development, without deeply examining the real challenges faced by Islamic religious education teachers in specific school contexts and how these strategies are formulated in response to student characteristics and problems.

Thus, there remains a research gap related to studies that integrate analysis of Islamic Religious Education teachers' challenges and strategies in fostering students' morals contextually and based on the empirical conditions of the school. Research specifically examining the reality of moral development at Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan is limited, even though each educational unit has different characteristics and dynamics. Therefore, this study aims to explore in-depth the challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education teachers and the strategies implemented in fostering student morality at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan. The results are expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions to the development of more effective Islamic Religious Education teaching and learning in shaping students' morality.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, namely a research method that aims to understand and interpret the meaning of social

phenomena based on the views, experiences, and understanding of research subjects in a natural context (Sugiyono, 2019). This approach was chosen because it is relevant to explore in depth the challenges faced and the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering students' morals in the school environment.

This research was conducted at Al-Hidayah Junior High School, Medan, located on Jalan Letda Sujono, Gg. Perguruan No. 04, Bandar Selamat Village, Medan Tembung District, Medan City, North Sumatra Province. This location was chosen because Al-Hidayah Junior High School is one of the educational units that places moral development as an important part of the educational process, particularly through religious learning and activities guided by Islamic Religious Education teachers. The research subjects were determined purposively, namely parties who have experience and direct involvement in fostering students' morals, including school principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, namely the principal and Islamic Religious Education teachers, as well as supporting informants such as homeroom teachers and students, to obtain comprehensive information regarding the challenges and strategies for developing students' morals. Secondary data were obtained from school documents, such as the vision and mission, school regulations, religious development programs, student activity reports, and other documents relevant to the research focus.

The data collection techniques used in this study included interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of Islamic Religious Education teachers regarding the various challenges faced in fostering students' morals and the strategies implemented to overcome them. Observations were conducted to directly observe student behavior, teacher-student interactions, and the implementation of moral development activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the research data through a review of archives, activity records, photographs, and official school documents that supported the analysis process.

The data analysis technique in this study refers to the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Amirah Dwi Septiningrum et al., 2024). Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data obtained according to the main themes of the study, namely the forms of challenges and strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering students' morals. The data is presented narratively and systematically to fully understand the relationships between the data. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn through a verification process supported by triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the

research findings. The results of this study are expected to provide academic and practical contributions to the development of strategies for fostering student morality in junior high schools.

Results And Discussion

Result

Challenges Encountered by Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Developing Students' Moral Character at SMP Al-Hidayah Medan

Challenges are something that has a very big influence and this becomes an obstacle for Islamic Education teachers in their efforts to instill morals in students.

"Based on the results of the interview with Mr. Sapala as a PAI teacher, the obstacles are various. Sometimes, we tell parents to study harder, but the parents of the students are less responsive. But as a teacher, I feel it's not that they don't want to respond, maybe some parents who work all day are already tired and so they can't focus on fostering their children at home. If we as teachers at school don't mean we can fully foster students' morals, so sometimes what they get in the family environment can be brought to school."

Likewise, teachers face significant challenges in addressing these obstacles and preventing students from engaging in inappropriate behavior. It is crucial for teachers to continually adapt to environmental and technological changes, improve their skills, and effectively teach moral values to help students cope with the pressures and temptations of their environment.

"The results of an interview with Mr. Sapala, a PAI teacher at Al-Hidayah Middle School, revealed challenges often faced in fostering students' morals, such as students often saying inappropriate things in class, and being rude in class, such as their friends being nosy and their way of speaking to each other being unpleasant. For example, their conversation with teachers is also lacking in etiquette."

Given the challenges facing education today, fostering students' morals is crucial, especially for those entering adolescence, who are highly vulnerable to the complexities of life throughout their development. There are numerous examples of student brawls, criminal behavior, students lying to teachers and parents, and various immoral acts committed by students.

Strategies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Developing Students' Morals at SMP Al-Hidayah Medan

Based on the results of observations and interviews that show the active learning strategies used by Islamic religious education teachers in fostering student morals at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan, several strategies are implemented, namely:

1. Exemplary behavior

Modeling is one strategy implemented in fostering student morals at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan. Exemplary behavior is demonstrated through

teachers' daily attitudes and behavior, particularly in their use of polite language, courteous behavior, and interactions with students and the school environment.

The principal of Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan stated that teacher attitudes are a primary concern in fostering student morals. He stated:

"We always remind teachers to be mindful of how they speak and behave in front of students, because what teachers do will be imitated by students, both inside and outside the classroom."

In line with this, the Islamic Education teacher explained that exemplary behavior is demonstrated through behavioral control, especially in challenging situations. The Islamic Education teacher said:

"When dealing with difficult students, I try to remain calm and avoid using hurtful words, so that students can see an example of how to behave."

Based on the results of the interview, it can be seen that the teacher's exemplary behavior is manifested through a patient attitude in dealing with various student characters, the use of polite language in every form of communication, and efforts to maintain behavior and speech so that it continues to reflect an attitude of respect, both when interacting with students, fellow teachers, and in certain situations that require emotional control in the school environment.

2. Habituation and Deep Learning

Interviews and observations at Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan revealed that Islamic Religious Education teachers implement certain behavioral habits in daily learning and school activities. These habits include greeting students and classmates, using polite language, reciting prayers before starting lessons, and expressing gratitude in interactions within the school environment. Furthermore, a short religious lecture is held regularly every Friday, accompanied by a religious teacher.

The Islamic Education teacher said:

"Every day, we teach our students to greet each other, pray before class, and speak politely, so that it becomes a habit for them at school."

The principal also confirmed the existence of these habits, stating:

"Habits such as greetings, prayers, and religious activities every Friday have become routine activities carried out at school."

The results of observations and interviews show that these habits are carried out repeatedly in learning activities and school activities, both in class and outside class, in accordance with the schedule and rules in effect at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan.

3. Providing Reprimands or Advice

Based on interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers, it was discovered that teachers reprimand students who speak impolitely or use harsh words by encouraging students to reflect on their words and whether they would

hurt others if directed at themselves. Following the reprimand, teachers typically provide personal or general advice, incorporating moral messages and Islamic values, so that students recognize their mistakes and avoid repeating them. This strategy is effective because it touches students' affective domains, namely attitudes, awareness, and values. Reprimands delivered wisely can foster self-reflection and build students' moral awareness.

4. Collaboration with Other Teachers and Parents

Based on the interviews, Islamic Religious Education teachers communicate with homeroom teachers, guidance counselors, and parents to monitor students' communication behavior, both at school and at home. Teachers from various subject areas are also encouraged to collaborate to provide reinforcement when students demonstrate poor communication, such as impolite speech or disrespect for others' opinions. Meanwhile, several parents provide support and are involved through parent-teacher meetings and WhatsApp groups to provide information and advice in line with Islamic Religious Education values.

5. Motivating students

Motivation is a positive encouragement given by a teacher to a student, so that he or she can do something that is valuable for them. Based on an interview with Mr. Sapala, a PAI teacher at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan

"Providing an example that's easy for students to understand is crucial. If we, as teachers, don't set a good example, students won't be able to practice bad morals. Therefore, without good examples from teachers or parents, it's impossible, especially in this day and age, as the generation is evolving."

Motivation is the encouragement given by one person to another to act or behave to achieve a specific goal. Motivation can stem from various factors, including a person's needs, values, or personal goals. Motivation plays a crucial role in guiding human behavior, whether to achieve, fulfill, or achieve happiness.

Discussion

Developing students' morals is one of the fundamental goals of Islamic education (Basri & Hasibuan, 2024). From the perspective of Islamic education, morals are not only understood as external behavior, but as a manifestation of faith that is internalized within students (Basri, 2023). Al-Ghazali emphasized that morals are traits that are deeply embedded in the soul from which actions emerge easily without requiring long thought (Sya'roni, 2022). Therefore, moral development requires a continuous, planned educational process implemented through various appropriate strategies. In this context, Islamic Religious Education teachers hold a strategic position as key actors in the internalization of moral and Islamic values in schools.

Research results at Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan show that the success of developing students' morals is largely determined by the Islamic Religious Education

(PAI) teachers' mastery of active learning strategies. This finding aligns with the view Devi dkk (2020), which states that teachers serve not only as instructors but also as character educators capable of creating a valuable learning environment. Appropriate learning strategies will facilitate teachers in guiding students toward positive changes in attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets. Therefore, strategies for fostering moral development cannot be implemented spontaneously but require thorough pedagogical planning grounded in character education theory.

One of the main strategies identified in this study is role modeling. Islamic Religious Education teachers at Al-Hidayah Middle School in Medan act as role models in their speech, polite behavior, and upholding the value of mutual respect. This aligns with the concept of *uswatun hasanah*, a fundamental principle of Islamic education. According to Bandura's social learning theory, students learn greatly through imitation (modeling). When teachers consistently demonstrate good behavior, students are more likely to imitate it and adopt it as a standard of behavior in their daily lives (Pramudiantoro dkk., 2025).

The teacher's role model is very effective because students not only receive verbal advice, but also directly witness the practice of moral values in the reality of school life (Amirah Dwi Septiningrum et al., 2024). Relevant research conducted by Lickona also confirms that character education will be effective if moral values are taught, exemplified, and practiced in real life (Darwanti dkk., 2025). In this case, the teacher's patient attitude in dealing with students, including when facing negative behavior, becomes a meaningful moral lesson for students.

The next strategy is habituation and a deep learning approach. Habituation is a classic method in Islamic education that aims to instill moral values through repeated practice until they become character. Ibn Miskawaih stated that morality can be formed through continuous practice (Basri & Hasibuan, 2024). The research results show that Islamic Religious Education teachers encourage students to greet each other, pray before class, speak politely, and participate in routine religious activities such as Friday sermons. These practices are implemented consistently so that moral values are not only understood cognitively but also internalized in students' lives (Azizah et al., 2023; Mirrota et al., 2023).

The deep learning approach in moral habituation aims to ensure that students do not simply carry out meaningless routines but understand the reasons and values behind every good behavior (Khairuddin, 2017). This aligns with the modern educational perspective, which emphasizes meaningful learning. When students understand the spiritual and social value of a habit, the behavior becomes more enduring and less temporary. Strategies for providing reprimands and advice are also crucial in fostering students' moral development (Hasan et al., 2023; Hasan & Azizah, 2022; Rofiq et al., 2025; Umam & Hasan, 2025). Based on research findings, Islamic Religious Education teachers deliver reprimands wisely and reflectively, encouraging

students to reflect on the impact of impolite speech or behavior. This approach aligns with affective education theory, which emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and moral reflection. Reprimands that are educational, rather than repressive, will help students understand their mistakes without feeling humiliated.

The advice given by Islamic education teachers is generally infused with Islamic values and delivered both personally and in a class setting. According to Al-Abrasyi, good advice is delivered with wisdom and gentleness, because the primary goal of education is to improve morals, not to punish (Nurchayani dkk., 2024). Relevant research also shows that advice delivered with an emotional and spiritual approach is more effective in shaping students' moral awareness than harsh physical or verbal punishment. Furthermore, collaboration between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, other teachers, and parents is a crucial supporting strategy (Hasan et al., 2025; Hasanah et al., 2022). The study results demonstrate communication between PAI teachers, homeroom teachers, guidance counselors, and parents in monitoring student behavior (Harahap dkk., 2025). This aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's three-center concept of education, which emphasizes that education is a shared responsibility between schools, families, and communities. Moral development will be difficult to achieve if it falls solely on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This collaboration is also relevant to previous studies, which state that parental involvement in character education has a significant influence on student behavior (Bimas Ritonga et al., 2023). However, this study also found that parents' roles are limited due to work commitments, resulting in the values students receive at home not always being aligned with those taught at school. This presents a challenge for teachers in maintaining consistency in student moral development.

Motivational strategies are Islamic Education teachers' efforts to encourage students to develop an internal awareness of good behavior. The motivation provided by teachers takes the form of concrete examples and explanations that are easy for students to understand. This aligns with motivational theory, which states that intrinsic motivation is more effective in shaping long-term behavior than extrinsic motivation alone. Teachers, as motivators, play a crucial role in inspiring students' enthusiasm for good behavior, not out of fear of punishment, but out of a sense of value.

Despite the implementation of various strategies, this study shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers still face various challenges in developing students' morals, particularly related to the influence of family and social environments. Students' behavior of using impolite language, disrespecting teachers, and excessive joking in class reflects the complexity of adolescent moral issues. This aligns with the phenomenon of moral degradation widely discussed in contemporary educational literature, particularly amidst globalization and technological developments. Overall, this discussion demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategies for fostering students' morals at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan, align with Islamic

education theory, character education, and relevant research findings. However, the effectiveness of moral development requires ongoing adaptation, strengthened cross-stakeholder collaboration, and improved teacher competency in addressing the dynamics of student development. Therefore, moral development should not be merely a school program, but a holistic and ongoing educational process.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a strategic role in developing the morals of students at Al-Hidayah Middle School, Medan, not only as a deliverer of learning materials, but also as a guide, educator, and role model in everyday life. The success of moral development is largely determined by the teacher's ability to integrate moral values into the learning process and the consistency of attitudes and behaviors that reflect noble character. With a wise and humanistic approach, Islamic Religious Education teachers are able to instill moral values sustainably, thus shaping students' character with a balance between knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

On the other hand, this study also shows that there are various challenges faced by Islamic Education teachers, including low motivation of some students, limited mastery of moral values that are contextual to current developments, and demands for adaptation to the use of technology in learning. Therefore, strong synergy between schools, families, and communities is needed to support the process of developing students' morals. This support is a crucial factor in strengthening the internalization of moral values, so that students can grow into a generation that is not only intellectually superior but also possesses moral integrity, social responsibility, and sensitivity to their surroundings.

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