



Strengthening The Religious Character Education Program For Students Through Islamic Values

Fitriyadi Purba¹, Indra Prasetya², Amini³

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Indonesia¹²³

fitriyadipurba41@gmail.com¹, indraprasetya@umsu.ac.id², amini@umsu.ac.id³

Abstract: This study examines the strengthening of students' religious character education through Islamic values at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan. The research is grounded in the growing concern over moral decline, low discipline, and weakening spiritual awareness among elementary students, and the limited empirical studies in public primary schools. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving the principal, teachers, and students. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings reveal that religious character education is implemented in a planned, structured, and sustainable manner through the integration of school culture, written policies, teacher role modeling, and religious habituation activities. These practices contribute to improvements in students' self-control, discipline, responsibility, worship orderliness, and social interactions. Supporting factors include a strong school culture, teacher exemplarity, and parental involvement, while constraints involve limited time and students' diverse backgrounds. This study contributes empirical evidence that Islamic values can effectively strengthen religious character education in public primary schools when implemented comprehensively and consistently.

Keywords: religious character education; Islamic values; school culture; teacher role modeling; elementary school

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji penguatan pendidikan karakter religius siswa melalui nilai-nilai Islam di SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan. Kajian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh meningkatnya persoalan penurunan moral, rendahnya kedisiplinan, serta melemahnya kesadaran religius siswa sekolah dasar, serta masih terbatasnya penelitian empiris dalam konteks sekolah dasar negeri. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus deskriptif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi dengan melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, dan siswa. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi pengumpulan data, kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan/verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penguatan pendidikan karakter religius dilaksanakan secara terencana, terstruktur, dan berkelanjutan melalui integrasi budaya sekolah, kebijakan tertulis, keteladanan guru, dan pembiasaan keagamaan. Implementasi ini berdampak pada peningkatan pengendalian diri, kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab, ketertiban beribadah, serta kualitas interaksi sosial

siswa. Faktor pendukung utama meliputi budaya sekolah yang kuat, keteladanan guru, dan keterlibatan orang tua, sedangkan kendala mencakup keterbatasan waktu dan heterogenitas latar belakang siswa. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya implementasi komprehensif dan konsisten nilai-nilai Islam dalam penguatan pendidikan karakter religius di sekolah dasar negeri.

Kata kunci: pendidikan karakter religius; nilai-nilai Islam; budaya sekolah; keteladanan guru; sekolah dasar.

Corresponding Author:

Fitriyadi Purba

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara; fitriyadipurba41@gmail.com

Introduction

Religious character education has become an increasingly important concern in elementary education amid growing indications of declining student discipline, weakening moral awareness, and reduced respect toward teachers and peers (Hasan, 2019; Hasan et al., 2025). Schools are no longer viewed solely as institutions for academic knowledge transfer but also as strategic environments for shaping students' character and ethical behaviour from an early age. At the elementary level, the internalization of religious values is considered essential because this developmental stage represents a critical period for forming behavioural habits and moral self-control. (Gunawan et al., 2020; Arifin & Pitriyanita, 2022). In line with this, Lickona states that religious values are the main foundation in character education because they serve as an internal source of control for students' moral behavior (Lickona, 2015).

In the context of Indonesia's national education policy, strengthening religious character education is positioned as a top priority that must be integrated into all learning activities and school culture. Religious values are not only interpreted as worship practices, but also include honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. The implementation of religious character education integrated into school activities can improve student discipline and social ethics (Esmael & Nafiah, 2022) (Harianto et al., 2023). Character education based on religious values is more effective than a purely cognitive approach to morality (McCauley, 2017) (Amini et al., 2018).

Islamic values are highly relevant to the goal of religious character education because they substantially emphasize the formation of noble character through the integration of aspects of faith, worship, and muamalah. Islamic education views character as a manifestation of faith that is realized in daily behavior. The internalization of Islamic values in basic education contributes significantly to the formation of students' religious character (Khairani & Rosyidi, 2022; Marlizayani et al., 2025). The integration of Islamic values into the basic education system can build

students' character holistically, covering spiritual, moral, and social dimensions (Ayu et al., 2024; Mukhlis et al., 2025).

Previous studies have shown that religious character education contributes positively to students' discipline, responsibility, and social attitudes. The integration of religious values into school activities, particularly through habituation and role modelling, has been found to support sustainable character formation. However, existing research predominantly focuses on madrasahs or Islamic-based schools where religious instruction is structurally embedded within institutional systems. As a consequence, the implementation of religious character education within public elementary schools remains insufficiently explored. (Akrim, 2022) (Amalia & Harfiani, 2024). This finding is in line with Day et al.'s study, which emphasizes that the success of character education is greatly influenced by program design and a consistent school culture (Day et al., 2016).

Public elementary schools possess distinct characteristics compared with religious-based institutions, including heterogeneous student backgrounds, limited instructional time for religious activities, and administrative structures that do not primarily emphasize religious programming. Several studies indicate that religious character education in public schools is often implemented incidentally rather than systematically integrated into school culture. Nevertheless, empirical explanations regarding how religious character education programs are strengthened, institutionalized, and sustained in daily school practices are still limited. Most prior research tends to examine educational outcomes rather than the processes through which values are internalized and transformed into observable student behaviour. (Herdiana et al., 2021). Effective character education must be oriented towards the process of internalizing values, not just the result (Nucci et al., 2014).

This study addresses this gap by examining the strengthening of religious character education through Islamic values in SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan, a public elementary school that actively integrates religious habituation, institutional policy, and teacher role modelling into everyday school activities. The school represents a significant case because it demonstrates efforts to develop a structured religious character program within a public-school setting characterized by diverse student backgrounds. Investigating this context provides practical insight into how religious character education can function effectively beyond religious-based schooling environments (Lestari et al., 2023). This is in line with Creswell's view that contextual research makes an important contribution to the development of evidence-based educational practices (Creswell, 2015).

Therefore, this study aims to provide a process-oriented understanding of religious character education implementation in public elementary schools. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How is

religious character education strengthened through the integration of Islamic values at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan? (2) What institutional strategies and school practices support the implementation of the program? (3) What behavioural changes are observed among students as a result of the program? (4) What challenges influence the sustainability of religious character education in the school?

Thus, this research is urgent to fill the gap in studies, while providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of religious character education in public elementary schools. This research is expected to produce a deep understanding of how Islamic values are integrated and strengthened in religious character education programs on an ongoing basis. Strong character education must be based on values, school culture, and role models (Handoko et al., 2024). This view is reinforced by Lickona, who emphasizes that the success of character education depends on the consistency of the program and the commitment of the entire school community (Prasetia et al., n.d.) (Lickona, 2015).

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the process of strengthening religious character education through the integration of Islamic values within the natural school context. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan over four months, involving 19 participants consisting of the principal, Islamic Education teachers, classroom teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the implementation of religious character education programs. The selection of this approach and participants enabled the researcher to comprehensively explore practices, experiences, and the dynamics of implementing religious character education in everyday school life. (Creswell, 2015) (Lexy. J. Moleong, 2000).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to obtain rich and complementary information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore program planning, strategies for implementing Islamic values, teachers' roles in character development, students' behavioral changes, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in program implementation. Observations were carried out regularly to examine religious habituation activities and social interactions within the school environment, while document analysis focused on institutional records related to school policies and student character assessment. The combination of these data collection techniques aimed to enhance data validity through source and method triangulation. (Creswell, 2015) (Lexy. J. Moleong, 2000).

Data analysis was conducted cyclically using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving stages of initial coding, thematic categorization,

data display, and continuous conclusion drawing. The analytical process emphasized identifying thematic patterns that consistently emerged across multiple data sources, while also considering differing perspectives among participants to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. Research trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, prolonged researcher engagement in the field, and adherence to ethical research principles to maintain the credibility and reliability of the findings (Milles, 2014).

Results And Discussion

Results

The results of the study show that SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan has a structured and integrated pattern of strengthening religious character education in everyday school life. Based on the results of observations, religious activities are not placed as additional activities, but are part of the school's routine that runs consistently. Every day, students are accustomed to starting and ending their learning activities with communal prayers, practising religious rituals, and maintaining polite behaviour in their interactions with teachers and peers. This pattern shows that the school strives to instil religious values through repeated and continuous practice, so that these values are not only understood conceptually but also practised in real behaviour.

From interviews with the headmaster and teachers, it was revealed that religious character building is designed as part of school policy as outlined in various official documents. These documents include school regulations, religious activity programmes, and guidelines for assessing student attitudes and character. The existence of these documents shows that religious character education is not carried out incidentally, but is planned, implemented and evaluated systematically. The school uses these documents as a reference in guiding the entire school community to have the same perception and commitment to the importance of religious character building.

The results of the documentation study also show that religious values such as piety, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect have been clearly formulated as indicators of student behaviour. These indicators are not only listed in written rules, but also translated into concrete activities and observable assessment criteria. Thus, schools have clear standards for assessing student character development, so that character building does not stop at the normative level, but is directed towards measurable behavioural change.

Based on observations in the classroom and school environment, it appears that a religious school culture is the main foundation for strengthening student character. The school atmosphere reflects a climate conducive to the cultivation of religious values, whether through worship practices, the use of polite language, or

the application of discipline in learning activities. Teachers and educational staff demonstrate consistency in maintaining rules and setting examples of behaviour in line with religious values. These conditions create an environment that encourages students to adjust their behaviour to the norms that apply at school.

Interviews with teachers revealed that habit formation is the primary strategy for instilling religious character. Activities such as communal prayer, recitation of short verses, and reinforcement of etiquette in interactions are carried out routinely and on a scheduled basis. Teachers believe that repetition of positive habits will form lasting patterns of behaviour in students. Therefore, character building is not only carried out through the delivery of material, but is emphasised more in direct practice in everyday school life.

The role of teachers is very prominent in the process of strengthening religious character. Observations show that teachers not only function as educators, but also as role models for students. Their discipline, responsibility, and consistency in performing religious duties and maintaining good manners serve as examples that are observed and emulated by students. Through such role modelling, religious values are not only conveyed verbally, but also manifested in real behaviour that can be directly observed by students.

From the interviews, teachers said that role modelling was more effective in shaping students' attitudes than just giving advice. Students tend to imitate the behaviour they see every day more easily than just listening to explanations. This was evident in the change in students' attitudes, as they began to show discipline in participating in school activities, were more orderly in their worship, and were more polite in their interactions with teachers and peers.

Observations of student behaviour show an improvement in self-control and responsibility. Students appear to be more compliant with school rules, arrive on time, and participate in learning activities in a more orderly manner. During communal worship activities, students display a more solemn and orderly attitude than before. These changes indicate that consistent religious practices contribute to the development of discipline and responsibility in students.

In addition, social interactions among students also showed positive developments. Based on observations in the school environment, students appeared to have more respect for their friends, reduced conflict behaviour, and were better able to control their emotions in certain situations. Attitudes of mutual respect and cooperation began to appear in group learning activities and activities outside the classroom. This shows that strengthening religious character not only has an impact on spiritual aspects, but also on the social and moral aspects of students.

A study of character report cards shows that schools monitor student attitude development on a regular basis. Each semester, teachers assess predetermined

aspects of character, allowing for more systematic monitoring of student development. These character report cards serve as both an evaluation tool and a means of reflection for schools in assessing the effectiveness of their religious character-building programmes.

The interview results also showed that parental involvement was one of the supporting factors in the programme's success. The school communicated with parents through various forums to convey student progress and harmonise character building at home and at school. With this communication, the values instilled at school could be reinforced in the family environment, so that the character-building process was more consistent.

However, the study also found several obstacles in implementing the programme. One obstacle was time constraints due to the busy learning schedule, which meant that not all habit-forming activities could be carried out optimally. In addition, differences in students' backgrounds also affected the speed and level of success in internalising religious values in each individual. This situation required schools to continuously adjust their strategies to ensure that the programme remained effective.

From the observations, it was evident that the school was attempting to overcome these obstacles by integrating character values into classroom learning activities. Teachers not only delivered academic material, but also incorporated religious values into the teaching and learning process. In this way, character building did not depend solely on special activities but became part of the overall educational process.

In general, the results of the study indicate that the strengthening of religious character education at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan was carried out in a planned, structured, and sustainable manner. The integration of school policy, school culture, teacher role models, and religious habits formed a unified character-building system that supported each other. This system created an environment conducive to the growth of religious values in students.

Thus, it can be concluded that the practice of strengthening religious character in this school is not only symbolic, but has been realised in changes in student behaviour that can be observed in everyday life. The results of observations, interviews, and documentation consistently show improvements in the aspects of discipline, responsibility, religious attitudes, and social relationships among students. These findings confirm that comprehensive and consistent religious character education can have a real impact on the formation of students' personalities.

Table 1 Research Findings

Aspects	Key Findings
School Culture	Daily religious practices and Islamic values-based school policies
The Role of Teachers	Role models (Uswah Hasanah) in learning and school culture
Student Attitude	Improved self-control, discipline, and responsibility
Parental Involvement	Synergy between schools and families in religious character building
Program Challenges	Time constraints and heterogeneity of student backgrounds

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the strengthening of religious character education through Islamic values at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan has been ongoing and effective, resulting in positive changes in students' moral behaviour and self-control. A strong school culture, teacher role modelling, and parental involvement are the main factors supporting the success of this programme. However, operational issues such as time constraints and student background variations need to be addressed for future implementation improvements.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that the school culture at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan serves as the main foundation in strengthening students' religious character education through Islamic values. Habitual practices such as communal prayers, morning recitations, reading the Qur'an, and regular worship activities found in the field show that religious values are not only taught but also brought to life in school routines. These findings are in line with the view that school culture is a strategic medium for the internalisation of character values, as the school environment shapes students' habits and behaviour patterns on an ongoing basis (Lestari et al., 2023) (Purwandari et al., 2021). Thus, the results of this study confirm that strengthening religious character will be more effective if it is attached to a consistent and structured school culture.

The results of the study also show that schools have written policies and supporting documents, such as school regulations and character reports, which integrate religious values as indicators of student behaviour. These findings reinforce the view that character education cannot be implemented in a normative manner, but needs to be supported by a clear management and documentation system so that it can be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. This is in line with the opinion that the success of character education is greatly influenced by the

clarity of regulations, programme planning, and measurable evaluation mechanisms (Handoko et al., 2024; Azizah et al., 2025). With the character report card, schools not only instill values but also build a system of accountability in shaping students' attitudes.

The findings regarding the powerful role of teacher role modelling in this study indicate that teachers function not only as educators, but also as models of religious behaviour for students. The discipline, responsibility, and consistency of teachers in performing religious duties, as observed in the field, serve as real-life references for students in shaping their behaviour. This is in line with social learning theory, which emphasises that students learn a great deal through observation of significant figures around them, especially teachers (Wasehudin et al., 2024). Thus, teachers' exemplary behaviour becomes an important bridge between the values taught conceptually and their practical application in students' daily lives (Azizah et al., 2023; Kholik et al., 2024).

Research results showing an increase in self-control, discipline, and responsibility among students reinforce previous findings that religious character education integrated into school culture has a direct impact on the moral behaviour of students. This improvement is not only evident in terms of obedience to school rules, but also in orderliness during worship activities and readiness to participate in learning. These findings are in line with research stating that religious habits in primary school contribute to the continuous development of students' self-control and morality (Harianto et al., 2023); (Septiyana Solekhah & Muhroji, 2025). In addition, the results of the study also show that strengthening religious character has an impact on the quality of students' social interactions, such as an increase in mutual respect and a decrease in the tendency for conflict. This reinforces the view that religious character education not only shapes individual piety, but also social piety. These findings are in line with studies that emphasise that the internalisation of religious values in primary education contributes to the formation of social morality, empathy, and cooperation among students (Lestari et al., 2023) (Salsabila & Priatmoko, 2023).

Findings on the role of religious habituation as a key strategy for strengthening religious character are also in line with various studies that emphasise the importance of habituation in character education. Routine activities such as communal prayer, recitation of Asmaul Husna, and congregational prayer have proven to be effective means of instilling religious values gradually and continuously. This reinforces the view that religious character education must be holistic and integrated into daily school activities, not just through classroom learning (Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023) (Nurizah & Amrullah, 2024).

The involvement of parents found in this study also reinforces the argument that religious character education requires synergy between schools and families. Communication between teachers and parents helps to align the values instilled at school with those practised at home, so that the process of internalising values becomes more consistent. This is in line with the view that collaboration between schools and families is an important factor in maintaining the sustainability of character education outside the school environment (Purwandari et al., 2021) (Lestari et al., 2023).

However, the findings of this study also reveal obstacles, such as time constraints due to a busy curriculum and differences in student backgrounds. These conditions show that the implementation of religious character education is not free from structural and contextual challenges. These findings are in line with various studies that mention that time constraints and student heterogeneity are often obstacles in the implementation of character building programmes in primary schools (Handoko et al., 2024) (Octavina, Mely Tri, Sugeng Harianto, 2024). Therefore, an adaptive strategy is needed so that character values can still be integrated into learning without disrupting academic achievement.

Overall, this discussion confirms that the research findings reinforce previous theories and research results regarding the importance of school culture, teacher role models, and religious habits in strengthening religious character education. The main difference in this study lies in the context of public primary schools, which shows that strengthening religious character through Islamic values is not only relevant in madrasas or religious schools, but can also be implemented effectively in public schools. Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that religious character education can be developed contextually in accordance with the characteristics of the educational unit.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that the strengthening of the religious character education programme for students at SD Negeri 106232 Penggalangan was carried out in a planned, structured, and sustainable manner through the integration of school culture, written policies, teacher role models, and religious habits in everyday life. Religious school culture has proven to be the main foundation for instilling Islamic values, such as piety, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect, which are brought to life through school routines and daily interactions. The existence of policy documents, such as school regulations and character reports, shows that religious character education is not carried out normatively, but is managed systematically, measurably, and evaluably. This documentation system enables schools to periodically monitor students' attitude development while strengthening the

accountability of character-building programmes. Thus, the strengthening of religious character does not stop at the level of discourse, but is manifested in clear and sustainable management mechanisms.

The role of teachers emerges as a key factor in the success of the programme, particularly through their exemplary behaviour (Uswah Hasanah) in terms of worship, discipline, responsibility, and manners of interaction. This exemplary behaviour bridges the gap between the values taught and actual practice at school, making it easier for students to imitate and internalise religious behaviour in their daily lives. Consistent religious habits have also proven to be an effective strategy in shaping permanent patterns of behaviour in students.

The impact of the programme's implementation can be seen in the improvement of self-control, discipline, responsibility, orderliness in worship, and the quality of social interactions among students, who now show greater mutual respect. These findings confirm that strengthening religious character education not only shapes individual piety but also social piety. Although obstacles such as time constraints and student background heterogeneity still exist, schools are able to overcome them by integrating character values into learning. Overall, this study confirms that strengthening religious character education will be effective if it is implemented comprehensively, consistently, and integrated into all aspects of school life, and supported by synergy between policy, school culture, teacher role models, and continuous habit formation.

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