

Instilling Student's Social Character Values in Learning Islamic Religious Education

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(Received: 27 February 2025; Accepted 7 April 2025)

Abstract

The decline in students' moral and social character has become a pressing concern in contemporary education. This study investigates the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in instilling social character values among students, both within the classroom and through extracurricular engagement. Employing a qualitative field research approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations to explore how educators promote values such as tolerance, honesty, discipline, and responsibility. The findings reveal that IRE teachers actively serve as role models and implement character education through contextual strategies—such as storytelling, modeling prophetic behavior, and organizing reflective and cooperative activities like scouting. While educator motivation and student enthusiasm serve as key enablers, challenges persist, particularly the influence of digital media and unsupportive home environments. The study underscores the importance of holistic and collaborative approaches that integrate school, family, and community efforts to ensure consistent moral development. Implications suggest the need for rebalancing academic priorities to include moral education and enhancing partnerships between schools and stakeholders to sustain character formation.

Keywords: Social Character Values, Islamic Religious Education, Character Education, Social Learning Theory

Abstrak

Penurunan karakter moral dan sosial siswa menjadi perhatian serius dalam dunia pendidikan saat ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai karakter sosial kepada siswa, baik melalui pembelajaran di dalam kelas maupun kegiatan ekstrakurikuler. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif lapangan, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi kelas untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana pendidik menanamkan nilai-nilai seperti toleransi, kejujuran, disiplin, dan tanggung jawab. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru PAI secara aktif berperan sebagai teladan dan menerapkan pendidikan karakter melalui strategi kontekstual—seperti bercerita, meneladani perilaku para nabi, serta mengadakan kegiatan reflektif dan kooperatif seperti kepramukaan. Motivasi guru dan antusiasme siswa menjadi faktor pendukung utama, namun tantangan tetap ada, terutama pengaruh media digital dan lingkungan keluarga yang kurang mendukung. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan holistik dan kolaboratif yang mengintegrasikan upaya sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat untuk memastikan perkembangan karakter yang konsisten. Implikasi dari temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya penyeimbangan kembali antara prioritas akademik dan pendidikan moral, serta penguatan kemitraan antara sekolah dan para pemangku kepentingan untuk mendukung pembentukan karakter yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Nilai Karakter Sosial, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Pendidikan Karakter, Social Learning Theory

INTRODUCTION

The issue of moral decline has increasingly become a central concern in the field of education, particularly in light of the diverse and complex societal and governmental environments that exist today. This concern is evidenced by the growing number of cases involving disrespectful behavior towards teachers and peers, bullying, and indifference toward the surrounding community (Syahtrida Kalsum, 2019; Sholihah & Maulida, 2020). These issues point to a broader identity and character crisis facing the Indonesian nation. The situation is further exacerbated by the increasing frequency of student misconduct, such as sophisticated forms of cheating, student brawls, and other behaviors that do not reflect a morally grounded student identity (Yeni Hartanti, 2021). Alarming, the way students communicate and behave towards teachers and parents has reached worrying levels. Traditional values such as politeness, religiosity, and mutual cooperation—which have long been core elements of Indonesian culture—are becoming increasingly rare in everyday life. Without

immediate and strategic intervention by the government, both in the form of short-term and long-term programs, this condition is likely to worsen and may result in long-term damage to the national identity and cohesiveness of Indonesian society.

In response to this crisis, character education has emerged as a vital and relevant solution, particularly in the effort to nurture moral awareness and social responsibility in students from an early age (Pandang & Anas, 2018).. In the modern educational paradigm, character formation is no longer merely a supplementary goal but a foundational objective that must be embedded within the entire learning process. It must not be limited to theoretical discussions or abstract values but translated into tangible behavior, habits, and attitudes that reflect noble character traits. According to Chrisantina (2021), character education involves more than knowledge acquisition; it requires consistent modeling, habitual practices, and direct experiences that help shape a child's moral compass. In this regard, the educational environment must support the holistic development of students, combining intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects. These components are integral in creating a generation that is intellectually capable and emotionally mature, one that is committed to shared values, respects differences, and contributes positively to national development.

Character education, therefore, must be implemented through collaboration between various stakeholders, including schools, families, religious institutions, and the broader community. Schools play a particularly strategic role, as they serve as formal institutions where children spend a significant portion of their formative years. However, the family remains the primary source of moral and ethical foundation, and when both sectors work synergistically, the results are more likely to be sustainable. The responsibility of instilling values such as empathy, honesty, responsibility, and tolerance cannot rest solely on educators but must be distributed across all sectors of society. Sholihah and Maulida (2020) emphasize that character education is a strategic platform to develop young individuals who are not only academically excellent but also morally upright, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible. These outcomes align with the goals of national development that prioritize human resource quality as the core engine of progress.

The government of Indonesia has recognized the importance of moral education through various regulations and policies. The most notable among these is Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which explicitly states that education is a conscious and planned effort to develop students' full potential, enabling them to become human beings of faith and devotion to God Almighty, with noble character, knowledge, competence, creativity, independence, and a sense of social responsibility. The law outlines the philosophical and practical aims of education, which include the development of personality, intelligence, spiritual strength, and moral integrity. It is evident from this legal framework that character education must be a fundamental objective of the national education system and not an ancillary component. In this context, schools are expected to develop programs and curricula that not only fulfill cognitive objectives but also provide space for moral and character development (Ningthias, Listantia & Sakaroni, 2024).

Despite these legal frameworks and the growing awareness of the importance of character education, the reality in many educational institutions still reflects several fundamental challenges. Many schools continue to prioritize academic achievement, as measured by standardized tests and academic grades, at the expense of moral and character development. The overemphasis on cognitive outcomes has led to the marginalization of the affective and psychomotor domains in the educational process (Ritonga et al., 2020). Students are often evaluated based on their ability to memorize and regurgitate information, rather than their ability to demonstrate honesty, empathy, or cooperation. Moreover, the current implementation of character education in Indonesia often lacks cohesion and consistency. Programs are sometimes developed merely to comply with educational mandates, without a deep understanding of how values are actually internalized and sustained in students' daily behavior (Yoga Purandina & Astra Winaya, 2020).

In addition to these structural issues, external factors also hinder the success of character

education (Ahyani, 2024). The rapid advancement of information technology and the pervasive use of social media have introduced students to a wide range of values and lifestyles, not all of which align with local norms and religious teachings. Without proper guidance and media literacy, students may adopt behaviors and attitudes that are inconsistent with the values promoted by their families and schools. This exposure to unfiltered information poses a significant challenge to educators, who must now compete with digital media in influencing students' values and behaviors. In this era of globalization, where cultural exchange is inevitable, it is increasingly important to strengthen students' moral resilience so that they can navigate diverse environments without losing their ethical foundation (Syahrudin, 2019).

Amidst these challenges, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is uniquely positioned to play a significant role in fostering social and moral character. As part of the national curriculum, IRE has the potential to serve as a central platform for integrating spiritual, ethical, and social values in the education process. It aims not only to increase students' understanding of Islamic teachings but also to shape their behavior and attitudes in accordance with religious principles. Through IRE, students are introduced to core values such as honesty, compassion, respect for others, cooperation, and social responsibility—all of which are essential for harmonious living in a multicultural and pluralistic society. Ideally, IRE serves as a bridge between religious knowledge and real-life applications, thereby enabling students to embody Islamic values in their interactions with others.

Nevertheless, the implementation of IRE in schools is not without limitations. One of the primary challenges is the limited duration allocated to IRE in the school schedule. With only a few hours per week dedicated to religious instruction, it becomes difficult for educators to go beyond theoretical teaching and engage students in meaningful character development activities. Furthermore, the methods used in IRE instruction often emphasize rote learning and memorization of religious texts, which may not effectively encourage the internalization of values. Students may be able to recite verses or narrate religious stories without truly understanding or applying the values embedded in those teachings. As a result, there is a disconnect between knowledge and behavior, where students appear religious on the surface but do not demonstrate religious values in their daily conduct.

Given these gaps, there is an urgent need for innovation in the way IRE is delivered in schools. Educators must adopt more interactive and student-centered pedagogies that encourage critical thinking, reflection, and personal growth. Teaching methods such as role-playing, storytelling, group discussions, and community service projects can provide students with real-life contexts to practice and internalize the values taught in class. Moreover, the success of IRE depends significantly on the role of the teacher. IRE teachers must not only be knowledgeable in Islamic studies but also serve as moral exemplars and mentors. Their attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with students play a critical role in modeling the values they wish to instill.

This study is therefore timely and significant, as it seeks to explore the strategies employed by IRE teachers in instilling social character values in students. The research focuses on how educators facilitate the development of key values such as empathy, mutual respect, cooperation, and responsibility, which are essential for building a cohesive society. It also aims to identify both supporting factors and obstacles in the implementation of character education within the IRE framework. Understanding these dynamics will enable schools and policymakers to design more effective character education programs that are contextually grounded and responsive to students' needs.

METHOD

Research Design

This research was conducted as a qualitative field study aimed at exploring how Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) contributes to the instillation of social character

values among students. The field research approach was selected because it allows the researcher to gather contextual, real-life data that reflects the complexities and dynamics of the educational environment. According to Adlini et al. (2022), field research using qualitative methods is suitable for exploring phenomena in depth, especially when the goal is to understand social interactions, cultural patterns, and educational practices from the perspective of those involved.

In this study, researchers engaged directly with the field environment—in this case, a school setting—to collect authentic and meaningful data based on first-hand experiences and observations. The qualitative approach emphasizes understanding human behavior, perspectives, and values in their natural context. This research design enabled the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of how character values are conveyed through PAI instruction, how students respond to those teachings, and what environmental and pedagogical factors support or hinder their internalization.

The qualitative strategy employed in this study draws from interpretivist paradigms that seek to understand human experiences and social realities through interaction and immersion. Rather than testing hypotheses or relying on numerical data, the study focuses on extracting deep, descriptive insights through direct observation, interviews, and thematic analysis. This approach allows researchers to move from general understandings to specific findings and interpret the meanings of behaviors, interactions, and events within their cultural and institutional context.

Furthermore, the study used a case study design within the qualitative framework. This enabled the researcher to focus intensively on one specific educational institution to explore the processes, practices, and perspectives that influence the implementation of character education through PAI. By narrowing the scope to a single school setting, the study was able to delve deeply into the nuances of teacher-student interaction, curriculum implementation, and institutional support mechanisms related to character education.

Data Collection

The data collection process in this study consisted of two primary techniques: observation and interviews. Both of these techniques are well-aligned with qualitative methodologies, as they allow researchers to explore social phenomena in a detailed, interpretive, and flexible manner.

Observation was employed to gain direct insight into students' behavior, participation, and interaction in both classroom and extracurricular settings. Observational data is valuable for capturing real-time actions and responses that may not always be articulated in interviews or surveys. Rizky Fadilla and Ayu Wulandari (2023) highlight that observation provides a way for researchers to witness the natural behavior of participants, making it a powerful tool in educational studies. In this research, observations were used to assess how students exhibit social character values such as empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and respect during learning activities, group work, and religious practices facilitated by the school.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Islamic Religion Education teachers to understand their strategies, experiences, and challenges in instilling social character values through PAI. According to Sugiyono (2016), interviews are essential for gathering in-depth insights and uncovering nuanced understandings that are not easily accessible through quantitative instruments. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in the dialogue while ensuring that core questions were addressed. This enabled researchers to delve deeper into specific themes such as teaching methods, student engagement, curriculum integration, and assessment of character development.

The selection of informants was purposive, focusing on teachers with substantial experience in teaching Islamic Religious Education at the junior high school level. This purposeful sampling ensured that the information collected would be rich, relevant, and grounded in real-world educational practice. Interview questions explored how teachers incorporated character values into their lessons, the role of religious texts and examples from the Prophet Muhammad's life (sirah), and the extent to which students were encouraged to reflect upon and apply Islamic social principles in their everyday lives.

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, data triangulation was employed.

Triangulation involves using multiple sources or methods to confirm the consistency and validity of research data. In this case, the researcher cross-verified observational findings with interview data by discussing initial conclusions with the same informants who were interviewed. Informants were invited to comment on the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and clarify any misunderstandings. This process not only ensured the alignment of interpretations with the participants' perspectives but also reinforced the authenticity of the research results.

Additionally, documentation from the school, such as lesson plans, character education guidelines, and student behavior reports, was used to complement the interview and observation data. These documents provided context and evidence of the school's official commitment to character education and the specific role that PAI played within the broader curriculum.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the widely accepted procedures for qualitative research, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, as cited in Fadli, 2021).

Data reduction involved organizing and simplifying the raw data collected during the observation and interview processes. This step included transcribing interview recordings, summarizing field notes, and identifying recurring patterns or significant statements. During this stage, the researcher categorized data according to themes such as "teacher strategies," "student behavior," "challenges in implementation," and "supporting factors." These thematic categories served as the basis for further analysis.

Following data reduction, data presentation was conducted by compiling the findings into narrative descriptions supported by direct quotes from the participants. The use of narrative text allowed the researcher to convey the richness and complexity of the field data. It also helped illustrate the lived experiences of teachers and students as they engaged in the process of character formation through PAI. Tables and figures were used where necessary to organize supporting information and enhance clarity.

The final stage of the analysis was drawing conclusions or verification. This involved interpreting the themes that emerged from the data to answer the research questions and assess how Islamic Religious Education contributes to the cultivation of students' social character. The conclusions were drawn with careful attention to the context of the school, the cultural background of the students, and the pedagogical approaches of the teachers. Verification of these conclusions was done through member checking, where participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations.

The population of this research included all students in the selected school. However, for practicality and focus, the study specifically examined Grade 9 students, as they represent a level of maturity where character traits are more visible and evaluable. This sampling decision was also based on the availability of data and the teachers' assessments of character development over time.

In summary, the research employed a robust qualitative design supported by comprehensive data collection techniques and systematic analysis procedures. The combination of observation, interviews, and documentation enabled the researcher to capture the multifaceted ways in which social character values are cultivated through Islamic Religious Education. These methodological choices contribute to the depth, reliability, and practical significance of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Educators in Modeling Social Character Values

Educators play a central role not only as conveyors of knowledge but also as primary role models in instilling social character in students. This is especially true for Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers, who bear the dual responsibility of guiding students both morally and spiritually. One IRE teacher affirmed this role: "*The teacher is always the main target in teaching social character to*

students, so especially the Islamic religious teacher has several actions such as in the learning class and outside the learning class” (Interview, 27 February 2025).

This statement underscores that religious educators are expected to model ideal behavior consistently, both during instruction and in everyday interactions. Observations support this, revealing that IRE teachers regularly supervise, guide, and discipline students to promote responsibility and moral awareness. One notable example was the emphasis on punctuality—student behavior was monitored from their arrival in the morning (Observation, 20 February 2025), illustrating that even routine school activities can serve as platforms for character building.

These findings are strongly aligned with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behavior of role models. In this context, educators act as living examples of the values they teach. Bandura (1977) argued that observational learning is most effective when the model is seen as credible and respected—criteria that IRE teachers typically fulfill. This aligns with Mubin et al. (2023), who found that classroom environments where teachers explicitly model respect, cooperation, and empathy are more effective in cultivating social values in students. The teacher's role extends beyond content delivery; they become a second parent, a guide whose influence often surpasses that of other figures in a student's life. In line with this, an IRE teacher explained:

“The strategy used by educators is to provide a little material about social character values, then educators provide simple examples so that students get used to acting in accordance with these values” (Interview, 27 February 2025).

This practical approach emphasizes habituation through modeling, which is consistent with social constructivist learning theories that value context-based, relational teaching. Additionally, religious teachers sometimes integrate visual media, such as films about prophets and apostles, to give students concrete representations of moral behaviors. These films help students internalize complex values like honesty, empathy, and cooperation in a more relatable manner.

Beyond the Classroom: Extracurricular and Reflective Practices

The formation of social character is not limited to the formal curriculum. Teachers also reported using extracurricular activities, particularly scouting, to instill teamwork and a sense of mutual assistance. *“Extracurricular activities are also very helpful in developing the instillation of students' social character values” (Interview, 27 February 2025).*

Such experiences allow students to practice social virtues in real-life contexts, enhancing their ability to transfer values from theory to practice. This aligns with Buhari (2023), who emphasized that cooperative learning environments—where students engage in group projects and discussions—significantly improve social character and interpersonal skills. Through these activities, students are given opportunities to reflect, evaluate their behavior, and build stronger moral awareness.

Furthermore, IRE teachers organize group discussions and spiritual reflections in school mosques. These sessions allow students to connect ethical principles with daily experiences, promoting both self-awareness and internalization of Islamic values. This reflective dimension is consistent with Briliantara and Salim (2024), who argue that Islamic education must not be limited to doctrinal understanding but should actively encourage students to live out values such as compassion, tolerance, and justice.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the implementation of various strategies to instill social character values, teachers continue to face numerous barriers that hinder consistent and effective implementation across all educational contexts. One Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teacher highlighted this challenge by stating: *“There are still some educators who face obstacles, such as being consistent in instilling character values in all classes” (Interview, 26 February 2025).* This statement reflects a common issue among educators—the struggle to maintain consistency in character education amidst the practical constraints of the school environment. One major obstacle is the limited instructional time

available during the school day. Teachers are often expected to deliver a comprehensive academic curriculum within tight schedules, which leaves little room for meaningful moral instruction, reflection, or character-based discussions. This issue is compounded by the increasingly large class sizes in many schools, which make individualized attention and behavioral guidance difficult to achieve.

Moreover, the diversity of student personalities, backgrounds, and behavioral tendencies adds another layer of complexity. Students come to school with varying levels of moral development, family support, and cultural values. As a result, some may respond positively to character education, while others may show resistance or apathy. This variation requires teachers to adapt their approaches continuously, which can be mentally and emotionally taxing—especially for those who already feel overwhelmed by the dual burden of achieving both cognitive learning outcomes and moral character development.

In response to behavioral issues, many schools adopt a point-based disciplinary system managed by guidance counselors (Bimbingan Konseling, or BK). This system assigns "violation points" to students who break school rules, with the intention of creating a deterrent effect and encouraging students to behave appropriately. *"The sanctions are imposed on students in the form of violation points... to ensure that students will not repeat the same mistakes"* (Interview, 26 February 2025). While this punitive approach may offer immediate behavioral correction, it raises concerns regarding its long-term effectiveness in shaping students' intrinsic moral values. Relying solely on punishment may lead to compliance without internalization, meaning that students may follow rules only to avoid penalties rather than because they genuinely understand and embrace ethical behavior.

Therefore, teachers emphasize the need to balance punitive measures with positive reinforcement and supportive counseling. This approach aligns with developmental psychology research, which shows that positive behavioral supports (PBS)—such as praise, encouragement, and moral reasoning—are more effective in cultivating lasting character traits than fear-based discipline alone. Students benefit when they are guided through reflection, encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, and supported in developing empathy and self-discipline. This holistic perspective is supported by Sukmawati et al. (2023), who argue that true character formation must extend beyond disciplinary mechanisms and the school setting. They emphasize the need for continuous nurturing through collaborative efforts involving not just educators but also families and the broader community. Without reinforcement at home and in students' social environments, the values taught at school may remain superficial or easily eroded by external influences such as peer pressure or media exposure.

Collaboration with Families and Other Stakeholders

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers recognize that the responsibility of character education extends far beyond the classroom. One teacher emphasized this point clearly: *"Students study in the school environment for only a few hours... the rest of the time the students are in their family environment"* (Interview, 26 February 2025). This statement underlines the crucial role of the family in reinforcing and sustaining the character values introduced at school. As students spend the majority of their time outside formal education settings, home and community environments become primary spaces where values are either strengthened or weakened. Consequently, character formation must be approached as a shared responsibility among educators, parents, and other community stakeholders.

The importance of this collaborative model is supported by Birhan et al. (2021), who argue that character development is most effective when there is consistency in value transmission across multiple domains of a student's life. When schools, families, and communities promote the same moral values—such as respect, responsibility, empathy, and discipline—students are more likely to internalize and live out these principles in their daily behavior. Without such synergy, the efforts of any one institution may be diluted or undermined by conflicting influences.

In practice, supporting factors that aid character education efforts include student enthusiasm and peer-led reinforcement mechanisms, such as involvement in student organizations like OSIS (Intra-School Student Organization). These organizations play an active role in maintaining school norms, fostering leadership skills, and encouraging positive peer interactions. When students are empowered to take on leadership roles and participate in shaping school culture, they are more likely to adopt and promote the values being taught. Peer modeling, a key concept in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, further underscores the impact of student organizations in normalizing pro-social behaviors.

However, IRE teachers also report several inhibiting factors that complicate these efforts. A major challenge is the influence of technology, particularly students' excessive use of gadgets such as smartphones. Teachers observed that many students stay up late using devices, leading to poor sleep habits, reduced concentration, and disengagement in the classroom. Overexposure to social media and unfiltered digital content may also introduce conflicting values, such as materialism, individualism, or aggression, which can run counter to the moral teachings emphasized at school.

In addition to digital distractions, instability in the home environment can significantly affect a student's receptiveness to character education. Teachers pointed to issues such as economic hardship, lack of parental supervision, or family breakdowns (e.g., divorce) as critical barriers. These conditions can lead to emotional stress, behavioral issues, and inconsistent moral guidance, making it difficult for students to fully absorb and practice the values promoted in the classroom.

Active Learning and Holistic Approaches

In response to the growing challenges of character formation in schools, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers strongly advocate for the use of active learning methods as a central pedagogical approach. Unlike traditional didactic teaching, active learning places students at the center of the educational process, encouraging them to think critically, reflect morally, and engage emotionally with the material. Strategies such as storytelling, role-playing, and the integration of multimedia tools (e.g., videos, short films, digital storytelling platforms) are particularly effective in this context. These methods do more than simply deliver content—they immerse students in moral dilemmas, social situations, and cultural narratives that require them to exercise empathy, judgment, and ethical reasoning. For example, using stories from the lives of prophets or historical Islamic figures enables students to connect religious values with real-life contexts, making the moral lessons more relatable and memorable.

This approach aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the importance of learners constructing meaning through experience and reflection. Bandura's Social Learning Theory also reinforces the idea that observing and imitating behaviors—especially in emotionally charged or meaningful situations—can significantly impact moral development. Therefore, when students see moral values demonstrated in a compelling story or enact them through a role-play scenario, they are more likely to internalize and practice those values in real life. IRE educators also suggest a strategic reallocation of classroom time, advocating for more deliberate space within lessons to foster discussion, reflection, and value-based dialogue. In many classrooms today, the pressure to cover academic material dominates instructional time, leaving limited opportunity for students to engage in conversations about morality, ethics, and social responsibility. However, as the findings of this study indicate, there is a growing need to rebalance educational priorities—not by neglecting academic learning, but by integrating character education into the core of everyday teaching.

One practical approach is for teachers to encourage students to engage with certain academic materials independently, such as through flipped classroom models or digital resources. This would free up valuable class time for educators to facilitate guided moral discussions, structured group reflections, or thematic explorations of values related to students' daily lives. For instance, a short animated film on honesty or compassion—widely available online—can serve as a prompt for a reflective discussion on real-world applications of those values. When accompanied by questions like

“What would you do in this situation?” or “How would you feel if this happened to you?”, students are challenged to personalize the moral message and relate it to their own experiences.

Moreover, adopting a holistic approach means that character education should not be limited to standalone lessons or isolated moral topics. Instead, moral and ethical considerations should be woven across subjects and school activities. Mathematics lessons can highlight fairness and accuracy, science can engage students in discussions about environmental responsibility, and language arts can explore themes of justice and empathy through literature. This cross-curricular integration reinforces the idea that moral character is not an add-on to learning—it is foundational to being a thoughtful, responsible, and ethical learner and citizen.

Comparative Perspective and Concluding Thoughts

In comparison to similar studies, this research supports the findings of Sukmawati et al. (2023), which emphasized the extension of character education into the home and community environment. Similarly, Briliantara and Salim (2024) argued that integration of moral values in IRE fosters greater student awareness and ethical responsibility.

Ultimately, the role of IRE teachers is multifaceted. They are not only academic instructors but also moral exemplars, disciplinary figures, and collaborators with families and community institutions. Their contribution to shaping socially responsible, ethical individuals is invaluable, particularly in a culturally and religiously diverse society like Indonesia.

This study, however, is not without limitations. First, the research was limited to a relatively small number of Islamic Religious Education teachers within specific schools, which may not fully represent the diverse contexts and teaching experiences across Indonesia. Second, the data collection relied heavily on interviews and observations, which, while rich in qualitative insight, may introduce researcher subjectivity and participant bias. Third, the study did not incorporate student perspectives directly, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of character education strategies from the learners' point of view. These limitations suggest the need for broader and more inclusive future research, incorporating multiple stakeholders and diverse educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers serve as pivotal role models in cultivating students' social character, both during classroom instruction and through extracurricular activities. Within the classroom, teachers embed moral values through stories of prophets and apostles, fostering empathy and ethical understanding. Outside the classroom, activities such as scouting and self-reflection allow students to practice these values in real-life contexts. Supporting factors include teacher enthusiasm, student motivation, and collaboration with student organizations. However, challenges remain, particularly the negative impact of excessive gadget use and unsupportive home environments, which can undermine school-based efforts. These findings highlight the need for holistic and collaborative approaches to character education. Schools must work closely with families and communities, promote active learning strategies, and ensure that moral development is prioritized alongside academic goals. Ultimately, consistent character formation requires alignment across educational, familial, and societal contexts.

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