

Strategies for Implementing Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Students' Character at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: January 28, 2026 Revised: March 29, 2026 Accepted: April 15, 2026 Available Online: May 10, 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; Character Development; Instructional Strategies; Islamic Values, Secondary School Students.</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze the strategies for implementing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in strengthening students' character at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants include IRE teachers, the school principal, and students. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the implementation strategies of IRE are carried out through the integration of Islamic values into classroom learning, habituation of religious activities, teacher role modeling, and the reinforcement of an Islamic school culture. These strategies have proven effective in improving students' character, including discipline, responsibility, honesty, and religiosity. However, several challenges were identified, such as differences in students' backgrounds and external environmental influences. Therefore, collaboration among schools, families, and communities is necessary to support the success of character development.</p>
<p>Please cite this article: Bukhari, M. (2026). <i>Strategies for implementing Islamic religious education in strengthening students' character at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan</i>. <i>Integrasi: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora</i>, 4(2), 45–55.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ABSTRAK</p> <p>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi implementasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam penguatan karakter siswa di SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari guru PAI, kepala sekolah, dan siswa. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi implementasi PAI dilakukan melalui integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam pembelajaran, pembiasaan kegiatan keagamaan, keteladanan guru, serta penguatan budaya sekolah Islami. Strategi tersebut terbukti mampu meningkatkan karakter siswa, seperti kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab, kejujuran, dan sikap religius. Namun demikian, terdapat beberapa kendala seperti perbedaan latar belakang siswa dan pengaruh lingkungan luar sekolah. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan sinergi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat dalam mendukung keberhasilan pembinaan karakter siswa.</p>
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A. Introduction

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' character and moral values, particularly in the context of Islamic education. In Indonesia, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is expected not only to transfer knowledge but also to instill ethical and spiritual values

in students' daily lives (Azra, 2012). This dual function highlights the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects in the learning process.

Character education has become a central issue in modern education systems due to increasing concerns about moral degradation among youth. Schools are expected to serve as institutions that cultivate positive values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and respect (Lickona, 1991). In this regard, Islamic education provides a comprehensive framework for character development based on religious teachings.

Islamic Religious Education emphasizes the formation of *akhlak* (moral character) as a core objective. The teachings of Islam encompass guidance for both individual and social behavior, making it highly relevant for character education (Al-Attas, 1991). Therefore, the implementation of IRE in schools is crucial in shaping students' personalities.

The concept of character in Islamic education is closely related to the development of *iman* (faith), *Islam* (practice), and *ihsan* (excellence). These elements form the foundation of a holistic educational approach that integrates spiritual and moral dimensions (Nasution, 2015). As such, character education cannot be separated from religious values.

In the Indonesian context, the government has emphasized the importance of character education through various educational policies. The integration of character values into the curriculum aims to produce students who are not only academically competent but also morally upright (Kemendikbud, 2017). Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in achieving this goal.

Despite its importance, the implementation of character education in schools often faces challenges. These include a lack of effective strategies, limited teacher competence, and the influence of external factors such as social media and peer groups (Suyanto, 2010). Therefore, innovative and effective strategies are needed to strengthen character education.

The role of teachers is particularly crucial in the implementation of character education. Teachers act as role models who demonstrate ethical behavior and guide students in internalizing values (Bandura, 1977). In Islamic education, the concept of *uswah hasanah* (good example) is central to the teaching process.

In addition to classroom instruction, character education requires a holistic approach that includes extracurricular activities and school culture. Activities such as religious practices, community service, and social interaction contribute to the development of

students' character (Lickona, 1991). This approach ensures that character values are practiced in real-life situations.

SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan represents an educational institution that integrates Islamic values into its learning system. As part of the Muhammadiyah educational network, the school emphasizes the importance of religious and moral education in shaping students' character. This makes it an appropriate setting for examining the implementation of IRE.

The Muhammadiyah education system is known for its commitment to integrating Islamic teachings with modern education. It promotes the development of students who are intellectually capable and morally grounded (Nakamura, 2012). This approach aligns with the goals of character education in Islamic contexts.

Previous studies have shown that the implementation of IRE can positively influence students' character development. For example, research indicates that integrating religious values into daily school activities enhances students' moral awareness and behavior (Rahman, 2018). However, the effectiveness of such implementation depends on the strategies used.

Strategic implementation is essential to ensure that character education is not merely theoretical but also practical. Effective strategies include value integration, habituation, role modeling, and reinforcement through school policies (Suyanto, 2010). These strategies must be adapted to the specific context of the school.

Moreover, the success of character education is influenced by the collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Students' character is shaped not only in school but also in their social environment (Epstein, 2011). Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required.

In the era of globalization, students are exposed to various influences that may conflict with moral values. The rapid development of technology and information can have both positive and negative impacts on students' character (Selwyn, 2016). This situation underscores the need for strong character education.

Islamic Religious Education can serve as a filter that helps students navigate these challenges. By internalizing Islamic values, students can develop a strong moral foundation that guides their behavior in different situations (Al-Attas, 1991). This highlights the relevance of IRE in contemporary education.

Despite its significance, there is still a need for empirical research on the strategies used in implementing IRE for character development. Many studies focus on theoretical aspects, while practical implementation remains underexplored (Creswell, 2014). This gap provides an opportunity for further investigation.

This study aims to analyze the strategies for implementing Islamic Religious Education in strengthening students' character at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan. It seeks to identify effective practices and challenges in the implementation process.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to improving educational practices. By identifying effective strategies, this study can provide insights for educators and policymakers in enhancing character education. It also contributes to the development of Islamic education as a field of study.

Furthermore, this study aligns with the broader goal of developing holistic education that integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. Such an approach is essential for preparing students to face the challenges of modern life while maintaining strong moral values (Nasution, 2015).

In conclusion, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education plays a vital role in strengthening students' character. Understanding the strategies used in this process is essential for improving the effectiveness of character education in schools. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of these strategies within the context of SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore in depth the strategies for implementing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in strengthening students' character. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand social phenomena from participants' perspectives and to capture the complexity of educational practices in their natural context (Creswell, 2014). The case study design is particularly appropriate for investigating a specific institution in detail.

The research was conducted at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan, which was selected purposively due to its strong emphasis on integrating Islamic values into its educational

practices. The school represents a relevant context for examining how IRE is implemented in real-life settings to foster students' character development.

The participants in this study consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers, the school principal, and selected students. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants had direct experience and involvement in the implementation of IRE programs. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain rich and relevant data (Patton, 2015).

Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine classroom activities, religious programs, and school culture related to character education. In-depth interviews were carried out with participants to gather detailed insights into their experiences, perceptions, and strategies used in implementing IRE (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Documentation analysis was also conducted to support the findings. Documents such as lesson plans, school policies, and records of religious activities were reviewed to understand how character education is formally integrated into the school system. This triangulation of data sources enhances the credibility of the research findings (Denzin, 2012).

The research instruments included observation guidelines, interview protocols, and document analysis sheets. These instruments were designed to capture key aspects of the study, including teaching strategies, student behavior, and the integration of Islamic values. The use of structured instruments helped ensure consistency and depth in data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This approach, proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), allows for systematic organization and interpretation of qualitative data. The researcher coded the data, identified themes, and interpreted patterns related to the implementation strategies and their impact on students' character.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied. Credibility was achieved through triangulation and member checking, while transferability was supported by detailed descriptions of the research context. Ethical considerations were also observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Orb et al., 2001).

C. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan plays a significant role in strengthening students' character. Based on observations and interviews, the school has systematically integrated Islamic values into both academic and non-academic activities. This integration forms the foundation of character development among students.

One of the primary strategies identified is the integration of Islamic values into classroom instruction. Teachers embed moral messages within lesson materials, ensuring that students not only understand theoretical concepts but also internalize ethical values. This approach aligns with the concept of value-based education, which emphasizes the integration of cognitive and affective domains (Lickona, 1991).

Furthermore, teachers adopt contextual teaching methods that relate Islamic teachings to students' daily lives. This strategy enhances students' understanding and makes learning more meaningful. When students can connect religious values with real-life situations, they are more likely to practice them consistently.

Another key finding is the implementation of habituation programs. Daily religious activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, and morning dhikr are routinely conducted. These practices aim to build students' discipline and spiritual awareness through repetition and consistency.

The role of teachers as role models is also highly significant. Teachers demonstrate exemplary behavior, such as punctuality, honesty, and respect. Students tend to imitate these behaviors, which supports the concept of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). This finding highlights the importance of teacher integrity in character education.

In addition, the school promotes an Islamic school culture that reinforces positive values. The use of Islamic greetings, modest dress codes, and respectful communication creates an environment conducive to character development. This cultural reinforcement ensures that values are consistently practiced.

The study also found that extracurricular activities contribute to character building. Programs such as Islamic mentoring, charity events, and student organizations provide

opportunities for students to practice leadership, responsibility, and social care. These activities complement formal learning.

Collaboration between teachers and parents emerged as another important factor. The school maintains communication with parents to ensure that character education continues at home. This partnership strengthens the consistency of value implementation across different environments (Epstein, 2011).

Despite these strengths, several challenges were identified. One major challenge is the diverse background of students. Differences in family upbringing and prior religious knowledge affect students' responsiveness to character education programs.

Another challenge is the influence of external environments, particularly social media and peer groups. Students are exposed to various values that may contradict Islamic teachings. This external influence can weaken the effectiveness of school-based character education (Selwyn, 2016).

Time constraints within the curriculum also pose a limitation. Teachers often struggle to balance academic content with character education objectives. As a result, the integration of values may not always be optimal.

To address these challenges, the school implements reinforcement strategies such as mentoring and counseling. These programs provide personalized guidance for students who need additional support in developing their character.

The findings also indicate that consistent evaluation is essential. The school conducts regular assessments of students' behavior through observation and feedback. This helps identify areas that need improvement and ensures continuous development.

From an analytical perspective, the strategies implemented at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan reflect a holistic approach to character education. The combination of instruction, habituation, and cultural reinforcement creates a comprehensive system that supports students' moral development.

The effectiveness of these strategies can be seen in students' behavior. Many students demonstrate improved discipline, responsibility, and respect. These changes indicate that the implementation of IRE has a positive impact on character formation.

The findings also support the theoretical framework of Islamic education, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge and values. According to Al-Attas (1991),

education should aim to produce individuals with balanced intellectual and moral development.

Moreover, the study confirms that character education is most effective when it is embedded in daily practices rather than taught as a separate subject. This aligns with the concept of hidden curriculum, where values are transmitted through everyday interactions and experiences.

However, the sustainability of these strategies depends on continuous commitment from all stakeholders. Without consistent support from teachers, parents, and the community, the impact of character education may diminish.

The study also highlights the need for innovation in implementing IRE. Incorporating technology and interactive methods could enhance student engagement and make character education more relevant to contemporary contexts.

In conclusion, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan has proven effective in strengthening students' character through a combination of strategic approaches. While challenges exist, the overall impact is positive, demonstrating the importance of a comprehensive and collaborative approach to character education.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Medan plays a crucial role in strengthening students' character through a comprehensive and integrated approach. The findings demonstrate that strategies such as the integration of Islamic values in classroom learning, habituation of religious practices, teacher role modeling, and the establishment of an Islamic school culture significantly contribute to the development of students' moral and spiritual qualities. These approaches collectively create a learning environment that supports the internalization of values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and religiosity.

From an analytical perspective, the success of character development is influenced not only by instructional strategies but also by the consistency of implementation across various aspects of school life. The study highlights that character education becomes more effective when it is embedded in daily practices and supported by a strong institutional culture.

However, challenges such as diverse student backgrounds, external social influences, and limited instructional time indicate that character education requires continuous adaptation and reinforcement. These challenges emphasize the need for a holistic and flexible approach in implementing IRE.

Therefore, this study underscores the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities in ensuring the sustainability of character education programs. Educators are encouraged to innovate in their teaching methods and to utilize various approaches that are relevant to students' needs and contexts. Future research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of IRE implementation and to develop more adaptive models of character education. Overall, the findings affirm that Islamic Religious Education remains a vital instrument in shaping students' character in the modern educational landscape.

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