



## IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS CHARACTER IN SMPN 2 ARALLE MAMASA DISTRICT

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe the teacher's strategy in strengthening the religious character of students at SMPN 2 Aralle, as well as identifying the form of religious character that develops and the factors supporting its success. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results showed that the strengthening of religious character is carried out through a holistic approach that includes habituation of religious activities, exemplary teachers, integration of religious values in learning, and extracurricular activities such as flash Pesantren and tadarrus Al-Qur'an. Learners show religious behaviours such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and empathy. The success of the programme is supported by the active role of the principal, teachers, parents, the availability of infrastructure and facilities, and a supportive school culture. The findings show that a collaborative and contextual approach can effectively shape learners' religious character in a sustainable manner. This research contributes to the development of a participatory school-based religious character education model.

**Keywords:** Religious Character, Character Education, Secondary School, Teacher Strategy

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<b>Article History</b>	Received 2025-07-14	Revised 2025-10-26	Accepted 2025-11-18	Published 2025-12-10

## INTRODUCTION | مقدمة

The growing influence of globalisation has caused some Indonesians to ignore the importance of character education based on religious values. The damage that occurs in the family, community, school, and country is increasingly striking. If this behaviour continues, the future of the nation will be threatened. Every individual needs to have good morals, morals, and character to maintain the continuity and progress of the nation (Zubaedi, 2012).

The problem of moral crisis occurs a lot among the younger generation. One of the problems facing society in educators is students who have little respect for their teachers. Juvenile delinquency is increasing. In newspapers and other media, cases of juvenile delinquency often occur, such as the use of methamphetamine, rape, pregnancy outside of marriage, and many other cases of juvenile delinquency. (Achoita & Ni'matulhoyyibah, 2024)

Juvenile delinquency is increasing day by day. This makes the purpose of education seem to lose its existence. Many students are unable to display commendable morals or good character in accordance with the expectations of their teachers and parents. (Sulistiani, 2021)

In this context, religious character education is one of the important components that must be instilled early and carried out systematically through the learning process at school. School is one of the main places to get education, known as formal education. As a specially designed

institution, schools provide a structured learning process for students, with supervision and guidance from the school, especially teachers. Teachers have a very vital role and have a major influence on the development of students, both in terms of academics and character. (Abdullah, 2011)

Teachers play a very important role in the world of education, especially in instilling religious character to students. This task is not only an obligation, but also a responsibility that must be carried out by teachers in schools and madrasah. Educators have a crucial role in providing various materials that contain useful knowledge for students. In addition to intellectual aspects, aspects of character and attitudes are no less important to develop in each individual. (Zubaedi, 2012)

Strategies that can be applied by Islamic religion teachers to improve the religiosity of students can be done through a series of learning activities and activities that involve students. These activities can be chosen by Islamic religion teachers based on the ability and educational facilities available at school. This effort is certainly not an easy thing, because students are social individuals who are influenced by the norms of life around them. Therefore, the selection of strategies to strengthen religiosity must be done carefully, through approaches that can be carried out effectively. (Astriana, 2023) With the right strategy, it is hoped that students will not only understand religious teachings theoretically, but also be able to internalise and practice them in everyday life.

Various previous studies have examined character education and the role of teachers in fostering student morals. including the teacher's strategy in instilling religious values to improve the quality of students' personalities researched by (Sholikhah et al., 2019) found that the presence of students in instilling religious values is very good. The teacher's strategy in instilling religious values to improve the quality of students' personalities includes aspects of aqidah, sharia, and morals. (Acetylena, 2013) found that the implementation of character education in SD Taman Peserta didik is quite good, but still faces challenges, such as the low professionalism of teachers, the influence of globalisation and the lack of support from parents and the community. The Cultivation of Religious Character Values and National Character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Falah Jatinangor Sumedang researched by (Marzuki & Haq, 2018) found that the research findings show that the cultivation of character values at MTs Al Falah is not optimal due to lack of parental support, the influence of the urban environment, and social media.

However, most of these studies are still general in nature and not many have specifically discussed the teacher's strategy in shaping religious character in a secondary school environment, especially in remote areas that have their own challenges, both in terms of social, cultural, and geographical aspects. In addition, the approach used in some studies tends to be normative, not enough to provide an implementative picture that can be replicated or developed further.

This study aims to describe in depth: (1) teachers' strategies in implementing the strengthening of students' religious character; (2) the form of religious character that appears in students' daily behaviour; and (3) factors that support the success of teachers in shaping religious character in the school environment. This research is expected to provide scientific and practical contributions in the development of religious character education strategies that are applicable, contextual, and relevant to the needs of education in areas that have special challenges.

## METHOD

## مетод

### Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The subjects in this study include: Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, homeroom

teachers, and students in grades VII, VIII, and IX who were selected based on their active involvement in school religious activities. The learners are in the age range of 12-15 years old (early adolescence) and come from a lower-middle socioeconomic background. They live in rural areas with a strong religious environment. Learner inclusion criteria included: (1) actively participating in religious activities at school, and (2) recommended by teachers or homeroom teachers. There were no significant exclusion criteria as the study was descriptive and did not limit participation based on a particular background.

### Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design that aims to describe teachers' strategies in strengthening students' religious character in the school environment. This research is observational, without manipulation of variables, and emphasises in-depth understanding of social phenomena that occur naturally. The researcher acts as the main instrument in the process of collecting and interpreting data. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Aralle, Mamasan Regency, West Sulawesi. The subject was taken using snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a sampling method in which the number of data sources that are initially limited will grow over time. (Sugiyono, 2014)

Data collection was conducted using three main methods: Observation (Mania, 2013): Researchers directly observed learning activities and religious activities such as congregational prayer, tadarus, and other religious activities at school, Interviews conducted with PAI teachers, homeroom teachers, and students to obtain data on strategies, practices, and challenges in fostering religious character and Documentation: Includes analysis of school documents, such as annual work programmes, religious activity schedules, as well as visual documentation of relevant extracurricular activities.

To analyse the data, the interactive analysis approach of the Miles and Huberman model was used, which consists of three stages: Data reduction, data display, data verification, and conclusion drawing. Then the validity of the data is guaranteed through source and method triangulation techniques, namely comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. (Usman & Akbar, 2017)

## RESULT | نتائج

This study found that the teacher's strategy in strengthening the religious character of students at SMPN 2 Aralle is carried out through an integrated approach between learning, habituation, exemplary, and religious activities supported by school culture.

### Implementation of Teachers' Strategies in Strengthening Students' Religious Characteristics

The school actively implements religious extracurricular activities as part of the learners' religious character strengthening programme. There are two main activities that are carried out, namely flash pesantren and Qur'anic tadarrus. The flash pesantren activity is held every year during Ramadan, which aims to instil religious values intensively through learning and worship practices. Meanwhile, the Qur'an tadarrus activity is carried out regularly by providing a special space for students to read the Qur'an. To support the continuity of this programme, the school forms a special team or coordinator who is responsible for the implementation of these activities so that they run in an orderly and effective manner. These two programmes show that SMPN 2 Aralle is committed to fostering and strengthening the religious character of students through structured, sustainable, and religious values-based activities.

To ensure the continuity and regularity of activities, the school forms a special team or religious coordinator. This team comes from SMPN 2 Aralle teachers who are responsible for planning and implementing these activities. The approach used in extracurricular activities includes habituation (through worship routines) and empowerment of students, such as through social religious activities (social services, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and management of Rohis). With these two strategies, extracurricular activities are not only a means of religious learning, but also an effective medium in shaping a strong religious character in students. Through these extracurricular activities, students not only increase their religious knowledge, but also develop consistent religious attitudes and behaviour in their daily lives. (Sari, 2023)

Not only in extracurricular activities, in the classroom teachers also integrate religious values into learning by using real examples and inspirational figures. By telling stories of freedom fighters with noble character and providing examples of daily behaviour that reflect religious values such as tolerance, empathy and honesty, teachers hope that students can be inspired and apply these values in their lives.

Strengthening religious character at SMPN 2 Aralle is done comprehensively through extracurricular activities, the active role of teachers, and the integration of religious values in learning. The school not only instils religious values as a discourse, but also builds a conducive school culture, forms good habits, and provides real role models for students. This strategy allows the formation of a strong and sustainable religious character, both in the context of school and the daily life of learners.

### **Learners' Religious Characteristics**

The results showed that the religious character of students at SMPN 2 Aralle was classified as very good. This can be seen from the consistency of students' daily behaviour in applying religious values in the school environment. Learners show honesty, responsibility, discipline, and compassion towards friends and teachers. The habit of saying greetings, reading prayers before and after learning, and actively participating in congregational prayers are forms of religious behaviour that have become part of their lives at school.

Information from teachers and principals supports these observations. They said that students not only understand the teachings of Islam cognitively, but also have internalised and practised these values consistently in their daily lives. In other words, the religious character development process implemented by the school has succeeded in forming an integration between students' knowledge, attitudes and actions.

The assessment of the religious character of students at SMPN 2 Aralle is carried out holistically, namely by paying attention to the cognitive and psychomotor aspects. Not only through written evaluation, but also through observation of students' daily religious practices. The principal asserts that the most important aspect of the assessment is the students' ability to apply religious understanding in real behaviour, not just the mastery of theory.

Nevertheless, the school admits that there are still a small number of students who have not fully demonstrated religious behaviour consistently. Therefore, efforts to strengthen religious character continue to be carried out by teachers through guidance, exemplary, and sustainable habituation activities. This finding confirms that the internalisation of religious values is not instantaneous, but the result of a long process that is structured, consistent, and based on exemplary and active involvement of students in a supportive environment.

### **Supporting Factors in Strengthening Learners**

The success of strengthening the religious character of students at SMPN 2 Aralle is supported by a number of factors that are interrelated and form a religious and conducive educational ecosystem. The first factor is the principal's strong leadership commitment. The principal plays an active role in developing the school's vision and mission, which emphasise the importance of religious values as the foundation of character building. This commitment is manifested through support for the implementation of religious activities, ranging from worship habituation, routine recitation, to religious social activities, as well as allocating adequate resources to support these activities. In addition, the principal also supervises and motivates teachers to be directly involved in every character strengthening programme.

The next factor is the active support from the teachers. Teachers not only teach religious education materials cognitively, but also serve as role models for students in terms of religious behaviour and attitudes. They are actively involved in school religious activities, guiding students in worship practices and incorporating religious values in daily learning. In addition to teachers, parents of learners are also actively involved in the character building process. The school builds good communication and cooperation with parents to ensure continuity between character education at school and at home. Parents are encouraged to support their children's positive behaviour, especially in religious aspects.

The physical facilities and infrastructure available at school are also an important factor. The school provides prayer rooms, worship tools, and spaces that support the implementation of religious activities and religious learning. These facilities support students in internalising and practising religious teachings in their daily activities. In addition, a supportive school culture is also a major strength. The majority of students at SMPN 2 Aralle are Muslim, so Islamic values are embedded in the social interactions and daily habits of the school community. This religious environment facilitates the effective implementation of religious programmes and provides space for students to grow in a culture that supports their religious character.

Thus, it can be concluded that the synergy between the principal's leadership, teachers' involvement, parents' participation, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and a religious school culture are the main pillars in the success of strengthening religious character at SMPN 2 Aralle. All these elements work continuously in creating an educational environment that allows students not only to understand religious teachings theoretically, but also to practice them in real life.

## DISCUSSION | مناقشة

### Implementation of Teachers' Strategies in Strengthening Students' Religious Characteristics

The results showed that strengthening religious character at SMPN 2 Aralle is carried out through a holistic and contextual strategy, including extracurricular activities, habituation, exemplary teachers, and integration of religious values in learning. The implementation of flash pesantren and tadarrus Al-Qur'an is evidence of the school's commitment to instil religious values in a structured and sustainable manner. This is in line with the view (Suwardi & Daryanto, 2017) that extracurricular activities play a role in developing spiritual potential and shaping students' independence and positive attitudes.

Teachers have a central role in this strategy, not only as material deliverers, but also as role models and character mentors. Teachers' behaviours that reflect religious values such as honesty, responsibility and social care become real models for learners. This finding supports the idea that all teachers are character educators and that moral development is the collective

responsibility of all school members.

Religious character strengthening is also integrated into the learning of all subjects through an integrated curriculum approach. For example, in science lessons, teachers link scientific concepts with faith and the greatness of God, so that students gain a complete learning experience, touching cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects. This approach is in line with John Dewey's view, which emphasises the importance of meaningful experiences in value formation.

Thus, the strategy applied at SMPN 2 Aralle shows the success of the integrative and collaborative approach in shaping students' religious character. A religious school environment, leadership support, and teacher involvement are important factors that make character building effective and sustainable.

### **Learners' Religious Characteristics**

The results show that the strengthening of religious character at SMPN 2 Aralle has been implemented in a structured manner and shows significant results in shaping students' religious behaviour. This finding is in line with the theory (Lickona, 1991) which states that character education must include three main components, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behaviour.

From the aspect of moral behaviour, students show religious habits that are reflected in the discipline of worship, honesty, courtesy, and routines such as reading prayers and saying greetings. This behaviour is the result of a habituation process that is carried out consistently in the school environment. On the other hand, the moral knowing aspect is reflected in students' understanding of religious teachings that are evaluated not only cognitively, but also through real practices in daily life. Teachers actively equip students with knowledge of values, ethical reasoning, and the ability to make moral decisions through stories, discussions, and cross-subject learning.

The moral feeling aspect is instilled through activities that touch the emotional and spiritual side, such as tadarrus, congregational prayers, and religious social activities. This forms empathy, respect and internal motivation to love and practice religious values. Teachers not only act as teachers, but also as role models and mentors who present real moral experiences for students.

Although most students show good religious behaviour, there are still a small number who are not consistent. Therefore, the process of strengthening character continues to be carried out on an ongoing basis through personal approaches, guidance and exemplification. This finding confirms that character education is a long-term process that requires the involvement of all school components in a synergistic and sustainable manner.

Thus, the strategy implemented by SMPN 2 Aralle has reflected the comprehensive implementation of the three aspects of character education according to Lickona. The school not only transfers religious knowledge, but also creates an environment that supports the growth of moral habits in learners as a whole.

### **Supporting Factors in Strengthening Learners**

Based on the results of interviews with principals and teachers at SMPN 2 Aralle, strengthening the religious character of students runs in a structured, systematic and sustainable manner. The school's commitment in shaping religious character is not only declarative, but is realised through a collaborative strategy involving the principal, teachers, parents, and the support of the school environment. This finding corroborates Slameto's theory which emphasises

that the success of the learning process and character building depends on the availability of adequate facilities and support from all parties involved in education.

Firstly, the school's cooperation with parents is a major strength in maintaining the continuity of character building between home and school. Effective communication between teachers and guardians shows the implementation of teachers' social competence in building positive educational synergy. Second, the habituation of religious activities such as congregational prayer, tadarrus, and religious extracurricular activities is a concrete form of internalising religious values consistently. This approach reflects the use of teachers' pedagogical competence in designing value-based learning that is relevant to students' lives.

Third, the support of the principal and teachers is the main foundation. The principal acts as a visionary leader who directs the school's religious culture, while teachers act as role models in word and deed. This role integrates the teacher's personality and professional competence, making character education part of the whole learning process. Fourth, the availability of facilities and infrastructure such as places of worship and adequate learning spaces also support the functional formation of religious character. This is in line with Slameto's view that sufficient learning facilities will increase the effectiveness of the learning process.

Fifth, a religious school culture becomes a very influential medium of indirect education. The collective habits and spiritual atmosphere formed at school provide real experience to students in living religious values naturally. Thus, religious character building is not only instilled, but experienced and lived by students in their daily lives.

Overall, the success of strengthening religious character at SMPN 2 Aralle is the result of strong school leadership, competent teachers, active role of parents, and adequate support from the school environment. This strategy supports the view (Slameto, 2015) that the success of character education requires synergy between educational components and the availability of supporting facilities. This finding shows that a conducive educational atmosphere can be an important foundation in fostering a strong and sustainable religious character in students.

## CONCLUSION | خاتمة

This research reveals that the teacher's strategy in strengthening the religious character of students at SMPN 2 Aralle, Mamasa Regency, is carried out through an integrative and contextual approach. The strategies include the integration of religious values in learning, habituation of worship, exemplary teachers, and religious activities outside the classroom. The findings suggest that strengthening religious character can be successful if religious values are internalised sustainably in educational practices, and supported by a conducive school ecosystem.

The main contribution of this research lies in presenting a strategic model of religious character development in the context of secondary schools in remote areas. This research goes beyond previous normative studies by providing an empirical and applicative picture of how teachers' strategies can shape religious character in real terms. The findings enrich the discourse on character education in Indonesia by including contextual variables such as cultural setting, social proximity, and local community participation.

Practically, the results of this study provide implications for the development of character education policies based on local and religious values. Schools in areas with similar characteristics can adopt this approach with adjustments to the culture and structure of their respective communities.

For future development, further research is needed that explores the effectiveness of similar strategies in different environments, such as urban or multicultural schools. In addition, educational experiments based on strengthening religious values combined with digital approaches or learning technology can be an interesting research direction to answer the challenges of character education in the modern era.

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