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STRATEGIES AND INNOVATIONS OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN SHAPING THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF STUDENTS AT SMPN 22 SURABAYA

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Abstract

This The formation of religious character in schools faces increasingly complex challenges, particularly due to declining discipline in worship, behavioral changes resulting from the strong influence of social media, and a lack of consistent religious habits in students' daily lives. This condition is also evident at SMPN 22 Surabaya, so Islamic Education (PAI) teachers need to design learning strategies and innovations that not only focus on understanding the material but also accompany and guide students in building better religious habits. This study aims to describe how PAI teachers develop religious character through exemplary behavior, habit formation, learning innovation, and mutually supportive cooperation between school elements. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation techniques. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model through a process of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that PAI teachers became role models for students in terms of worship, discipline, and daily behavior. Religious habits were successfully instilled through activities such as tadarus, dhuha prayer, congregational zuhr prayer, kultum, and moral habits. Teachers also apply more lively and relevant learning through contextual, reflective, collaborative methods and the use of digital media. In addition, collaboration between teachers, principals, teachers on duty, homeroom teachers, and student council strengthens the entire religious program so that it is more focused and sustainable. However, obstacles were found, such as unstable student discipline, the influence of social media, and limited facilities and time available. The study concluded that the strategies and innovations of PAI teachers contribute significantly to the formation of students' religious character. The implication is that schools need to strengthen religious culture, develop technology-based learning, and expand cooperation among all school members so that character building can be more optimal and sustainable.

Keywords: Islamic Education Teacher, Learning Strategy, Learning Innovation, Religious Character, SMPN 22 Surabaya.

Abstrak

Pembentukan karakter religius di sekolah menghadapi tantangan yang semakin kompleks, terutama karena menurunnya kedisiplinan ibadah, perubahan perilaku akibat pengaruh kuat media sosial, serta kurangnya kebiasaan religius yang terbentuk secara konsisten dalam keseharian siswa. Kondisi ini juga terlihat jelas di SMPN 22 Surabaya, sehingga guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) perlu merancang strategi dan inovasi pembelajaran yang tidak hanya berfokus pada pemahaman materi, tetapi juga mendampingi dan membimbing siswa dalam membangun kebiasaan beragama yang lebih baik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menggambarkan bagaimana guru PAI mengembangkan karakter religius melalui keteladanan, pembiasaan, inovasi pembelajaran, serta kerja sama antarelemen sekolah yang saling mendukung. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman melalui proses reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru PAI menjadi figur teladan bagi siswa dalam hal ibadah, kedisiplinan, serta perilaku sehari-hari. Pembiasaan religius berjalan baik melalui kegiatan tadarus, shalat dhuha, shalat dzuhur berjamaah, kultum, dan pembiasaan akhlak. Guru juga menerapkan pembelajaran yang lebih hidup dan relevan melalui metode kontekstual, reflektif, kolaboratif, dan pemanfaatan media digital. Selain itu, kolaborasi antara guru, kepala sekolah, guru piket, wali kelas, dan OSIS memperkuat seluruh program religius sehingga lebih terarah dan berkelanjutan. Meskipun demikian, ditemukan hambatan seperti ketidakstabilan disiplin siswa, pengaruh media sosial, serta keterbatasan fasilitas dan waktu yang tersedia. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa strategi dan inovasi guru PAI berkontribusi signifikan terhadap pembentukan karakter religius siswa. Implikasinya, sekolah perlu memperkuat budaya religius, mengembangkan pembelajaran berbasis teknologi, serta memperluas kerja sama antar seluruh warga sekolah agar pembinaan karakter berjalan lebih optimal dan berkesinambungan.

Kata kunci: *Guru PAI, Strategi Pembelajaran, Inovasi Pembelajaran, Karakter Religius, SMPN 22 Surabaya.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the digital age and current social dynamics have given rise to various moral issues among students, such as declining discipline, a lack of empathy, and weak self-control. These phenomena are also evident in the school environment, particularly among students at SMPN 22 Surabaya; consequently, education is required to serve not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a vehicle for the development of religious character, specifically through Islamic Religious Education (PAI). such issues—including the decline in the quality of students' religious character, low discipline, lack of empathy, and deviant behavior—present significant challenges in the field of education (Setiawan, Aisyah, & Ma, 2025).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools plays a strategic role in shaping students' religious character, especially in the digital age, which is fraught with challenges. The tide of globalization, social media, and changes in students' lifestyles in major cities like Surabaya demand that PAI teachers not only deliver content but also adopt creative and innovative approaches to instill religious values. These challenges are increasingly evident at the junior high school level, where students are in a phase of identity formation and are vulnerable to the influence of digital and social environments. This aligns with

other research indicating that the decline in students' religious character can be seen in the prevalence of student violence, school brawls, and various other negative behaviors associated with today's generation of students (Farhan, Ayu Afita Sari, A.M. Shoviy Ajeng M, Galuh Ivani Istina P, Muhammad, Ikmal, 2022). This context indicates that schools, including SMPN 22 Surabaya, require Islamic Education (PAI) learning strategies that are not merely cognitive but emphasize habit formation, role modeling, and the internalization of character. Islamic Education in schools must be able to provide learning that emphasizes ethics, worship, and moral values, in line with students' religious character needs. Character education can be defined as a conscious and planned effort to instill moral values, ethics, and good manners in individuals, helping to shape a well-rounded and positive personality (Murdianto, 2024).

In response to various issues related to the formation of students' religious character, this study positions Islamic Religious Education teachers as the primary actors determining the success of this process. In the context of modern education, teachers are no longer viewed merely as conveyors of material but as figures who directly influence students' character development through exemplary behavior, guidance, and the learning strategies they implement. Therefore, the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers is highly strategic in guiding students to understand, internalize, and practice religious values in daily life. This is also supported by previous research indicating that teachers serve as role models and mentors in this process. They not only teach academic content but also demonstrate good character through their own behavior (Murdianto, 2024). This statement indicates that the role of PAI teachers cannot be replaced by technology or other learning resources, as the aspects of modeling and habit formation can only be achieved through direct interaction between teachers and students. In addition to modeling, teachers also need to apply learning strategies relevant to the needs of today's adolescents. In this context, strategies such as Discovery Learning and Inquiry-Based Learning have advantages because they actively engage students and require them to think critically. Learning strategies are a crucial component because they help students understand and absorb the material effectively, thereby making it easier to achieve learning objectives efficiently (Sri & Lestari, 2025). Therefore, this study focuses specifically on how PAI teachers design learning strategies and innovations capable of integrating religious values into every learning activity to comprehensively shape students' character.

Research on the formation of religious character has been widely conducted, particularly in educational institutions that implement a strong religious culture, such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and madrasahs. These studies generally indicate that students' religious character is formed not only through classroom learning processes but also through a school environment that comprehensively supports religious activities. Programs such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation activities, regular religious study sessions, and discipline grounded in Islamic values have proven to play a significant role in shaping students' religious behavior. Such a conducive school environment is one of the primary factors fostering the internalization of religious values within students (Lubis & Murniyetti, 2023). Additionally, several studies specifically highlight the role of modeling and habit formation as crucial components in religious character

development. This is reinforced by a research finding stating that efforts to develop religious character are carried out through habit formation, modeling, enforcement of rules, and motivation. This quote indicates that the formation of religious character does not merely require a cognitive process but demands a comprehensive approach through consistent actions and observable behaviors that students can witness. The exemplary conduct of teachers and other school staff plays a crucial role because religious character is built not merely through theory, but through real-life examples in daily life. (Maulidi & Badriyah, 2024) Previous research also revealed that religious character development typically requires structured and sustained programs. Religious activities conducted routinely can foster a religious school culture, thereby accustoming students to an environment that encourages positive behavior. However, most of these studies were conducted in the context of religious-based schools, where the learning environment inherently supports the intensive internalization of religious values (Diana & Sugiharto, 2024). This distinguishes them from public schools such as SMPN 22 Surabaya, which lack a religious culture as strong as that found in madrasahs or pesantren. Therefore, while previous research findings provide important insights into religious character-building practices, they do not fully capture the dynamics occurring in public schools within urban settings.

Although research on religious character formation has been extensive, most studies still focus on schools with a strong religious atmosphere, such as Islamic boarding schools or madrasahs. Such environments naturally foster the development of religious practices and behaviors, so the findings from these contexts do not fully reflect the conditions of public schools in general. This is why the results of previous research cannot necessarily be applied directly to schools like SMPN 22 Surabaya, where students' backgrounds are more diverse and the religious culture is not as intense as in Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, many earlier studies have emphasized habit-forming programs such as routine religious activities, school discipline, or teacher role modeling. However, another equally important aspect is how Islamic Religious Education teachers design and implement classroom learning strategies. Few studies have highlighted how PAI teachers select methods, innovate, or integrate religious values into learning processes relevant to the needs of today's students. Yet, the challenges of religious education today are far more complex, particularly because students live in the midst of a digital world and rapid cultural changes. Additionally, there is a lack of research specifically addressing the context of public schools in major cities like Surabaya. Students in urban areas have high exposure to social media, modern lifestyles, and various external influences that can affect their religious character. However, there has been little research describing how PAI teachers respond to this reality through creative learning strategies and innovations. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how PAI teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya strive to shape students' religious character amidst the challenges of modern times.

This study offers several novelties that distinguish it from previous research. One of the most notable aspects is the study's focus on a public school, specifically SMPN 22 Surabaya. Most research on religious character is typically conducted in Islamic boarding

schools (pesantren) or madrasahs, where the environment is already deeply rooted in religious culture. Meanwhile, public schools offer a significantly more diverse environment in terms of students' backgrounds, levels of religiosity, and social interactions. Consequently, this study provides a fresh perspective on how Islamic Education teachers strive to foster religious character in an environment where religious activities are not as intensive as in Islamic boarding schools. Another novelty lies in how this study integrates modern learning strategies—such as Discovery Learning and Inquiry-Based Learning—with the goal of character development. Until now, these strategies have been more frequently used to enhance students' academic understanding rather than to instill religious values. Through this study, modern learning strategies are viewed not merely as teaching methods but also as tools for building students' attitudes, habits, and character in a more profound way. This approach opens new possibilities that active, creative, and student-centered learning can indeed serve as an effective bridge for instilling Islamic values. Additionally, this study highlights the significant influence of the digital age on Islamic Education (PAI) learning. Today, students live in a world filled with gadgets, social media, and fast-paced information. This naturally demands that PAI teachers innovate to ensure learning remains relevant and capable of capturing students' attention. By examining how teachers adapt to these conditions—through methods, media, and interaction patterns—this study enriches our understanding of how religious education can remain effective amidst rapid technological advancements. Ultimately, the primary novelty of this study lies in its realistic portrayal of how PAI teachers strive to shape students' religious character within a diverse, modern, and challenging social environment. This approach provides a concrete, field-based perspective—not merely theoretical—and thus serves as a reference for other teachers facing similar situations in public schools.

This study is grounded in the Theory of Islamic Character Education, which positions Islamic values as the primary foundation for shaping students' personalities. From an Islamic educational perspective, character is not merely understood as a set of moral behaviors but also as a manifestation of faith and piety reflected in concrete actions. Islamic character education emphasizes that the entire process of moral development must be grounded in the values of the Qur'an and Sunnah to produce individuals who are balanced spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and socially (Khairani & Rosyidi, 2022). In the era of globalization, the challenges to the morality of the younger generation have become increasingly complex. The flow of information, social patterns, and new values that often conflict with Islamic principles demand the strengthening of religion-based character. Therefore, Islamic character education is viewed as a crucial strategy in shielding students from negative influences that can weaken personal integrity and undermine societal moral order. In this context, Islamic values function not only as ethical guidelines but also as a framework for thinking that guides students to make sound moral decisions. This aligns with the assertion that Islamic values offer relevant guidance in shaping individuals of integrity (Tandhi, 2025). This quote underscores that Islamic values possess strong adaptability in facing the changes of the times. Their relevance is not merely normative but also practical, as Islamic teachings provide universal principles

such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, discipline, social concern, and self-control. These values form the foundation for building a strong character oriented toward goodness.

In the context of formal education, the implementation of Islamic character education is realized through learning that integrates religious knowledge with real-life experiences within the school environment. The practice of worship, religious activities, civilized interactions, and the exemplary conduct of teachers are crucial elements that directly instill Islamic values in students. This strategy aligns with the orientation of Islamic education, which emphasizes the importance of moral character as the primary goal, ensuring that students are not only academically intelligent but also possess moral integrity. Thus, the theory of Islamic character education provides a conceptual framework for this study in understanding how Islamic values can comprehensively shape students' character. This perspective underscores the importance of continuous religious character development so that the younger generation can navigate global developments without losing their moral and spiritual identity.

This study focuses on understanding how Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya fulfill their role in shaping their students' religious character. This study examines various teaching strategies used by teachers, ranging from traditional approaches to more innovative and contemporary methods aligned with current trends. It also explores how teachers leverage technological advancements and digital culture in the learning process, given that students today live in an environment heavily influenced by social media and instant information. This study not only examines the strategies and innovations employed but also explores their impact on the development of students' religious character, particularly regarding attitudes, behavior, and religious practices. Additionally, the study identifies supporting and hindering factors influencing teachers' efforts to build religious character, including factors from the school environment, family, and students' daily social conditions. The objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of strategies and innovations in enhancing students' religious character. This analysis is crucial to determine whether the teaching methods employed by teachers genuinely influence students' behavior and attitudes, such as discipline in worship, etiquette, and the ability to apply Islamic values in daily life. This study also aims to explore the challenges and obstacles faced by Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, as well as how they strive to find solutions or alternative strategies to ensure that religious values are effectively communicated to students. With these objectives, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of Islamic Education (PAI) learning in shaping religious character in public schools.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' religious character at SMPN 22 Surabaya. The study was conducted in a natural setting without any special interventions and also involved a literature review, meaning the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection (Sugiyono, 2023). The

research design is descriptive qualitative, employing data collection techniques such as observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which involves the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to clearly and thoroughly describe the phenomena under study. The informants for this study consist of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers and the principal of SMPN 22 Surabaya as the primary data sources. Informants were selected purposively to obtain relevant and in-depth information regarding learning strategies and innovations as well as the development of religious character. The primary instrument is the researcher themselves, who uses interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation tools as supporting instruments. Data were collected through observations of learning activities and religious culture at the school, in-depth interviews with informants, and the collection of supporting documents such as school records and relevant literature (Nasution, 2023). Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which comprises three main stages: first, data reduction to sort and summarize information; second, systematic presentation of data in the form of narratives or tables; and third, drawing conclusions or verifying results. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive and meaningful picture of the process of shaping students' religious character. The research process was conducted over approximately one consecutive month, beginning with instrument preparation, field data collection, and concluding with analysis and reporting of the research results. The research timeline was adjusted to align with the school's activity schedule and the availability of informants to ensure optimal and comprehensive results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMPN 22 Surabaya dengan fokus pada strategi dan inovasi guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam membentuk karakter religius peserta didik. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi selama satu bulan penelitian. Hasil penelitian disajikan dalam tiga bagian, yakni Temuan Utama, Data Pendukung, dan Data Negatif, serta dilengkapi tabel dan visualisasi. Berdasarkan analisis data menggunakan model Miles & Huberman, diperoleh empat temuan utama sebagai berikut. Guru PAI di SMPN 22 Surabaya berperan signifikan sebagai teladan moral bagi siswa. Keteladanan ini tercermin melalui sikap disiplin, kesopanan, dan konsistensi dalam menjalankan ibadah. Pembiasaan religius seperti tadarus, shalat dhuha, doa bersama, dan shalat dzuhur berjamaah menciptakan lingkungan yang kondusif bagi internalisasi nilai-nilai keagamaan. Guru juga menerapkan inovasi pembelajaran, termasuk metode kontekstual, reflektif, kolaboratif, serta penggunaan media digital. Selain itu, kolaborasi antara guru, kepala sekolah, dan warga sekolah turut memperkuat implementasi budaya religius. Adapun di bawah ini adalah tabel temuan utama hasil penelitian di SMPN 22 Surabaya.

Table 1. Key Findings

NO	KEY FINDINGS	DESCRIPTION
1	Teacher Example	Teachers become role models in worship and morals.

2	Religious Culture of the School	Tadarus program, Kultum ba'da congregational dhuha prayer, congregational Friday prayer (only for men on Fridays), princess program (for women who are unable to pray in congregation), dhuha prayer, dhuhr prayer, and joint prayer.
3	Learning Innovation	Contextual, reflective, collaborative, and digital methods.
4	School Collaboration	Support from the principal, other teachers, and the student council.

To support the main findings, this study collected various supporting data through observation and documentation. This data demonstrates the consistency of the ongoing religious programs and the participation of students in these activities. The table below presents the program data.

Table 2. School Program

NO	SCHOOL PROGRAMS	DESCRIPTION
1	Tadarus	It was held after congregational prayers. (MUSLIM ONLY)
2	Cult of Dharma.	Held after the congregational dhuha prayer, scheduled by the teacher, each class must have a representative to advance the cult. (MUSLIM ONLY)
3	Friday Prayers in Congregation	It was carried out by all male students and teachers at school. (MUSLIM ONLY)
4	Dhuha prayer, dhuhr prayer and congregational ashar prayer	The implementation has a schedule for each class, alternately. It was carried out by students, sons and daughters as well as staff teachers and teachers who picketed to become imams for their prayers. (MUSLIM ONLY)
5	Program Keputrian	It is specifically for students who are unable to attend congregational prayers, and is carried out on Fridays.
6	Prayer Together	It is carried out before starting learning. (MUSLIM ONLY)
7	Habituation of Morals	Students get used to greetings, manners, and discipline.

This study also identified several obstacles that affect the effectiveness of students' religious character development. Internally, some students demonstrated inconsistent discipline in attending Quran recitation sessions and other religious activities. The influence of social media also contributed to some students imitating behaviors inconsistent with religious values, thereby reducing their motivation to engage in religious activities. Furthermore, students' understanding of the meaning and purpose of religious practices is not yet uniform, so these activities are often viewed merely as a routine. The table below outlines these barriers.

Table 3. Challenges

NO	BARRIERS	DESCRIPTION
1	Student Discipline	Some students have not been consistent in religious programs.
2	Social Media Influence	Bad behavior is often imitated from digital content.
3	Low Motivation	Students do not understand the meaning of religious activities.
4	Time Limitations	The school schedule is tight so the program is not always optimal.

Overall, the results of the study at SMPN 22 Surabaya indicate that the development of students' religious character is inextricably linked to the strategic role of Islamic Education teachers, the school's religious culture, and consistent institutional support. Teachers' exemplary conduct is the most dominant factor in fostering students' religious behavior, reinforced by various habit-forming programs such as Quran recitation (tadarus), Dhuha prayer, Zuhr prayer, congregational Asr prayer, communal supplication, and other religious programs. Learning innovations implemented by teachers—whether through contextual, reflective, collaborative, or digital-based approaches—also contribute to enhancing students' understanding and internalization of Islamic values. The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of strategies and innovations by Islamic Education teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya has yielded positive impacts and serves as a crucial foundation for strengthening the religious culture within the school environment.

This discussion, based on research findings at SMPN 22 Surabaya, indicates that the process of shaping students' religious character proceeds through four primary methods: teacher role modeling, the regular practice of religious activities, innovations in teaching, and collaboration among all school stakeholders. Islamic Education teachers are the figures closest to the students; consequently, their religious behavior, discipline, and the manner in which they perform their religious duties are frequently emulated by the students. This finding aligns with the view of Ramli (2018), who states that exemplary behavior is the primary foundation of moral education. Routine activities such as Quran recitation (tadarus), Dhuha prayer, Zuhr prayer, religious talks (kultum), and collective prayer also play a crucial role in fostering positive habits. Theoretically, this is supported by (Lubis & Murniyetti, 2023), who emphasize that consistent religious practice can accelerate the internalization of spiritual values among students. The instructional innovations implemented by teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya—ranging from reflective methods, discussions, to the use of digital technology—make Islamic Education (PAI) content more relevant to students' lives. This aligns with (Sri & Lestari, 2025), who assert that modern learning can enhance religious awareness through active and contextual approaches.

The most notable aspect of this study is the school's collaboration. The role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya is crucial in shaping students' religious character through the implementation of religious culture within the school. In this regard, teachers are at the forefront of educational implementation; they are the ones

who interact directly with students to transfer knowledge and educate them with positive values through guidance and exemplary behavior (Nasrul, 2018). PAI teachers do not merely convey religious material cognitively but also serve as role models and mentors in shaping students' religious attitudes and behaviors. Another reference explains that the process of religious character formation will not be successful if educators merely issue commands to students to practice religious teachings; rather, educators must be able to set an example so that they can serve as role models for students (Awaliyani & Mulyadi, 2021). In implementing instruction, the Islamic Education teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya employ strategies and innovations by organizing activities such as Quran recitation (tadarus), Dhuha prayer, Zuhr prayer, collective prayer before lessons, and the practice of greetings and etiquette. These practices foster a religious and conducive school environment for internalizing Islamic values in students' daily lives. These activities align with the findings of a previous study conducted at SMPN 3 Pakem, where the school held daily Quran recitation sessions, Dhuha prayers at 9:30 AM, and Dhuhr prayers when the time arrived (Wirandhika A, 2022). Islamic Education teachers do not work alone but receive support from the principal, duty teachers, homeroom teachers, and the Student Council. This collaboration ensures that religious activities run smoothly. Research (Sa, Suyatno, & Sukirman, 2025) also emphasizes that the success of religious character development depends heavily on the cooperation of all school stakeholders, not solely on Islamic Education teachers.

At SMPN 22 Surabaya, the concept that the school's religious culture is a vital instrument in shaping students' character is reinforced. This aligns with perspectives in other references stating that character education in Islam is embodied in the personal character of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); within his person lie noble and exalted moral values (Tabroni, Marlina, Maesaroh, & Purwakarta, 2022). Therefore, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at SMPN 22 Surabaya strive to make the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) a role model for character education through exemplary conduct and the instillation of noble moral values within the school. The findings of this study have several important implications. First, schools need to maintain a culture of teacher exemplary behavior and strengthen religious programs as they have proven effective in shaping students' habits. Second, digital-based learning innovations need to be continuously developed given that students' lives are now deeply intertwined with technology. Third, collaboration among teachers must be maintained as it serves as the primary driver for implementing religious programs at school. However, this study has several limitations. The study was conducted at only one school, so it does not yet represent other public schools. The research period was also relatively short, so it was unable to capture long-term character changes. Additionally, the data relies heavily on observations and interviews, which are inevitably influenced by the informants' perspectives. Family factors and students' digital literacy have also not been examined in depth, even though both significantly influence character development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the development of students' religious character at SMPN 22 Surabaya occurs through four main components: teachers serving as role models, the

cultivation of religious practices, innovative teaching methods, and school collaboration. Islamic Education teachers do not merely act as instructors but also as role models who provide concrete examples in worship, discipline, and daily conduct. Religious practices such as Quran recitation (tadarus), Dhuha prayer, congregational Zuhr and Asr prayers, religious talks (kultum), group prayers, and the girls' program serve to foster positive habits that directly influence students' religious behavior. The implemented learning innovations—including contextual, reflective, collaborative, and digital methods—make Islamic Education (PAI) content more relevant to students' lives. Furthermore, collaboration among teachers, the principal, duty teachers, homeroom teachers, and the Student Council strengthens the religious culture, ensuring that Islamic values are fully internalized. Challenges such as fluctuating student discipline, the influence of social media, low motivation, and limitations in facilities and time still exist; however, these do not diminish the effectiveness of the strategies and innovations implemented by Islamic Education teachers.

This study makes an important contribution to the development of Islamic education, particularly regarding the formation of religious character in public schools. First, this study expands the discourse on Islamic Religious Education within the context of public schools, which has historically received less attention compared to madrasahs or Islamic boarding schools. Second, this study presents a new perspective on how modern learning strategies such as Discovery Learning, Inquiry, contextual methods, and digital approaches can be used not only for academic purposes but also to foster religious character. Third, the findings regarding the importance of school collaboration enrich character education theory by demonstrating that religious development does not rely solely on Islamic Education teachers but involves the entire school ecosystem. Thus, this study provides a practical and theoretical model for integrating Islamic values into learning and school culture relevant to the digital era. Based on the research results, several recommendations can serve as a reference for future studies. First, future research could expand the scope to include other public schools to obtain a more comprehensive picture of religious character development in urban settings. Second, long-term research is needed to examine changes in student character in a more in-depth and sustainable manner. Third, the aspects of the family environment and students' digital competencies can be further examined because both have a significant influence on religious behavior, yet have not been explored in depth in this study. Additionally, further research can develop technology-based Islamic Education (PAI) learning models specifically designed to enhance religious character in the ever-evolving digital era..

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