



## ***Analysis of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Learning in Strengthening Religious Character in Elementary Schools of Belitang Madang Raya Sub-District, East OKU Regency***

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### **Abstract**

The strengthening of students' religious character is a key objective of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in elementary schools. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of IRE learning in fostering religious values among elementary students in the Belitang Madang Raya Sub-District, East OKU Regency. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and students, and documentation analysis. The findings revealed that religious character values, such as honesty, responsibility, social awareness, and discipline, were effectively instilled through integrated learning strategies, religious routines, and teacher role modeling. Supporting factors included a religious school culture, cooperation with parents and communities, and the presence of Islamic-based programs. However, several obstacles were identified, such as limited awareness among some students and educators and the dominance of cognitive-oriented teaching methods. Overall, the study highlights the importance of holistic strategies and collaborative efforts in fostering religious character, offering insights for broader implementation in similar sociocultural contexts.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Education plays a crucial role in shaping a young generation with noble character (Nurhabibah et al., 2025; Yunizar & Karina, 2024) and in preparing them to face the challenges of the times (Manan, 2024). In this era of globalization, young people are confronted with a range of complex issues, such as moral degradation (Fauziyati, 2023), an uncontrollable flow of information (Laoli et al., 2024), and foreign cultures that often conflict with the nation's noble values (Siregar et al., 2024). These circumstances

highlight the need to strengthen character education (Agustina et al., 2024), particularly religious character, as a solid moral foundation for students in navigating their social and spiritual lives.

Religious character education is an integral part of shaping adolescents into individuals with strong moral character and integrity (Nawawi et al., 2024). This form of education emphasizes the inculcation of universal values derived from religious teachings, such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, compassion, tolerance, and justice. Religious character is reflected in attitudes and behaviors that

demonstrate obedience to one's religious teachings, tolerance in the practice of those teachings, respect for the worship practices of other religions, and harmonious coexistence with followers of different faiths (Siswanto et al., 2021). This process involves the transformation of religious values so that they become deeply rooted in the child's personality and are manifested in everyday life (Dewi et al., 2024; Fatmah, 2018).

Elementary school represents a strategic stage in developing students' religious character, as it coincides with the formative phase of a child's personality development. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the elementary level plays a vital role in instilling these values through various approaches, such as the introduction of religious teachings (Muhammad et al., 2021), narratives from the Qur'an (Husin et al., 2023), and the habitual practice of religious activities (Nurbaiti et al., 2020).

The current Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum has explicitly integrated character values, including religious values, into the learning process. The goal is not merely to provide religious knowledge, but also to integrate Islamic values with the development of positive character traits in students (Slamet et al., 2023). In practice, the implementation of religious character education in various schools shows that IRE learning strategies involve structured planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, and rely on teacher role-modeling and religious activities as key media for character formation.

The Belitang Madang Raya District in East OKU Regency possesses socio-cultural characteristics that support the strengthening of religious character, with a majority Muslim population and strong religious traditions. However, the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students' religious character in this region requires

further examination to understand the strategies employed, the dynamics of students' character development, as well as the challenges and supporting factors encountered in its implementation.

This study offers a significant contribution to the body of research on religious character education at the elementary school level, particularly within socio-cultural contexts with strong religious traditions, such as in Belitang Madang Raya District, East OKU Regency. Compared to previous studies, there remain several gaps that have not been thoroughly explored. For instance, the study by Nurdin & Nugroho (2020) focused solely on the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students' religious character and tolerance through habitual religious practices, without considering the surrounding socio-cultural context.

The study by Soedjiwo (2023) menyoroti penguatan karakter siswa highlights the strengthening of Muslim students' character in public schools within predominantly non-Muslim environments; however, it does not delve deeply into the dynamics of character development or the supporting and inhibiting factors. Meanwhile, Khairani & Rosyidi (2022) place greater emphasis on teachers' strategies in instilling religious character, without thoroughly exploring the progressive development of students' character or the evaluation of its implementation. These studies indicate that few have addressed the implementation of IRE learning strategies in shaping religious character in a comprehensive and contextually grounded manner.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to analyzing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning strategies for shaping students' religious character, taking into account three key aspects: the instructional strategies implemented, the dynamics of students'

religious character development, and the supporting and inhibiting factors involved. This research also highlights a distinctive local context, the Muslim community in Belitang Madang Raya District, known for its strong religious traditions, as a strategic strength in the implementation of character education.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze 1) the learning strategies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in strengthening the religious character of elementary school students in Belitang Madang Raya District, East OKU Regency; 2) the dynamics of students' religious character development through IRE instruction at the elementary school level in Belitang Madang Raya District, East OKU Regency; and 3) the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in shaping the religious character of elementary school students in Belitang Madang Raya District, East OKU Regency.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of religious character education through the IRE subject at the elementary school level. The study is descriptive in nature, as it aims to provide a detailed and holistic description of instructional strategies, student character dynamics, and the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the process of strengthening religious character in schools. A case study approach was adopted as the main strategy to explore the phenomenon contextually and in depth within elementary school settings in Belitang Madang Raya District, East OKU Regency.

Data were collected using several techniques, including direct observation of the IRE learning process in the classroom, in-depth interviews with

Islamic Religious Education teachers, school principals, and selected students, as well as document analysis of lesson plans, school religious activities, and other supporting materials. This process aimed to obtain rich and valid data regarding the practices and perceptions of those involved in the implementation of religious character education.

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman (Pradana et al., 2024), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction involved simplifying and focusing raw data into a more organized form. Next, data display was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives or tables to help the researcher identify emerging patterns. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, was conducted continuously throughout the research process to ensure that the findings were valid and accountable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Implementation of Religious Character Education in the IRE Subject*

The implementation of religious character education in the IRE subject at the elementary school level goes beyond the mere delivery of religious content; it also involves the internalization of these values into the overall learning process and school life. The findings indicate that values such as honesty, responsibility, and social awareness have been successfully integrated into the IRE curriculum and applied through various school activities, such as congregational prayers, the practice of greeting and reciting prayers, as well as other regular religious programs.

These findings are in line with the study by Subasman & Nasiruddin (2024) which emphasizes the importance of a more holistic and inclusive approach to

character education, where religious instruction addresses not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and psychomotor dimensions (Ridha et al., 2025). In this context, IRE teachers serve not only as instructors but also as role models in shaping students' religious character through the cultivation of a positive school culture (Nisa, 2024).

Theoretically, this implementation can be linked to the theory of value education proposed by Lickona (1991), which states that effective character education occurs through three core components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The IRE curriculum, which integrates religious values and promotes the habitual practice of religious activities, serves as a concrete example of an instructional strategy that simultaneously fosters the development of all three components.

This study also reinforces previous research by Nuraini & Hikma (2025), which highlights that character formation is strongly influenced by the synergy between teachers, students, the school environment, and families. In the elementary schools where this study was conducted, the success of the implementation is evident in the creation of a conducive religious atmosphere, both in the classroom and in the students' daily activities at school.

### ***Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Religious Character Education***

Several factors support the implementation of religious character education, including the availability of school library resources, teacher role-modeling, and a supportive environment. A well-structured system, collaboration between the school and the community, as well as activities with Islamic nuances, also serve as enabling factors. However, there are also inhibiting factors, such as the lack of self-awareness among both

educators and students, and the suboptimal internalization of religious character values by the students themselves.

The research findings indicate that the implementation of religious character education at the elementary school level is influenced by several significant supporting factors. Teacher role-modeling serves as a key asset in the development of students' religious character (Abidin, 2024). This aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that social learning occurs through observation and imitation of influential models. In this context, teachers act as models of religious behavior, which students emulate in their daily lives.

In addition, the presence of adequate school library resources, Islamic-themed activities (such as religious study groups, congregational prayers, and the celebration of Islamic holidays), and cooperation between the school and the community serve as important instruments in strengthening the religious atmosphere within the school. A supportive social environment (Elmontadzery et al., 2024), both within the school and the surrounding community, contributes to the development of a school culture conducive to fostering religious character.

On the other hand, several inhibiting factors were also identified and deserve attention. One of the main obstacles is the lack of self-awareness among both educators and students in internalizing religious values as an integral part of their personal identity. This indicates that the internalization of religious character values has not been fully effective among some students, which may be attributed to learning approaches that remain predominantly cognitive, without sufficiently addressing the affective and practical dimensions.

The success of religious character education is determined not only by

curriculum and teaching methods, but also by the consistency of role-modeling and the reinforcement of values through a supportive environment (Judrah et al., 2024). According to Lickona (1991), effective character education must involve three essential components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. If the focus is placed solely on knowledge without fostering moral emotions and actions, the process of character formation will remain incomplete.

Thus, the successful implementation of religious character education requires synergy between the educational system, the active role of teachers as role models, and the involvement of parents and the wider community. There is a need for systematic and continuous programs to reinforce religious values, so that these values are not merely conceptual, but become an integral part of students' attitudes and daily behavior.

### ***Perceptions of Students, Teachers, and Principals on the Implementation of Religious Character Education***

In general, the internalization of character education within the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) subject is perceived positively, based on observations and interviews. IRE teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character through role modeling, religious activities, and habituation practices. Teachers' perceptions of the importance of character education also influence how the IRE curriculum is implemented. School principals likewise play a key role in supporting the implementation of religious character education in schools. School stakeholders strive to instill religious character with discipline, as seen in daily practices such as greeting others with peace (salam) and students kissing the hands of their teachers.

These findings indicate that the perceptions of all school stakeholders, particularly IRE teachers and school

principals, toward religious character education are generally positive and supportive of its sustainable implementation. The role modeling of IRE teachers lies at the heart of students' internalization of religious values, especially through consistent habituation and religious activities. This reflects the crucial role of teachers in creating a religious atmosphere within the school, and underscores that the success of character education depends not only on the curriculum but also on the attitudes and commitment of those who implement it.

Theoretically, this is closely related to the humanistic approach in education, particularly the perspective of Rogers (1969), who emphasized that education should prioritize positive and empathetic relationships between educators and learners to support personality development. In this context, teachers who demonstrate religious attitudes, discipline, and compassion create a learning climate that naturally facilitates the internalization of religious values within students.

School principals also play a strategic role in shaping a religious school culture. Internal policy support, supervision of religious activities, and facilitation of character education programs are concrete forms of principal involvement in strengthening the implementation of religious character education. In addition, habituations such as greeting others with peace, kissing teachers' hands, and maintaining respectful behavior within the school environment serve as early indicators of the successful implementation of religious character values.

These findings reinforce the statement by Mulyasa (2022), yang which asserts that the success of character education in elementary schools is highly influenced by the effectiveness of school leadership, the quality of teachers, and the



collective perception and awareness of the school community regarding the importance of character formation.

Therefore, it is essential to ensure that these positive perceptions are continuously maintained and developed through teacher training, the reinforcement of school culture, and the active involvement of school principals and the wider community. Without collective support from all school stakeholders, the implementation of religious character education risks becoming a mere formality rather than a meaningful process of value formation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of religious character education within the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) subject at the elementary school level demonstrates effectiveness when supported by teacher role-modeling, a religious school culture, and the involvement of school principals. The success of this program depends on the synergy between cognitive, affective, and moral action aspects within the learning process. Supporting factors and the positive perceptions of school stakeholders further strengthen the internalization of religious values, although greater emphasis on individual awareness is still needed to ensure the sustainability of religious character in students' daily lives.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that IRE teachers continue to strengthen their role as role models in instilling religious values through habituation and exemplary behavior. School principals should also support the development of a religious school culture through consistent policies and the facilitation of religious activities. Greater synergy among schools, parents, and the community is needed to ensure that character values are deeply and comprehensively embedded in students.

For future research, it is recommended to examine the role of family and social environment in shaping students' religious character, as well as to conduct comparative studies across different schools or regions to obtain a broader and more in-depth understanding of the implementation. In addition, the use of a mixed-methods approach is encouraged to provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of strategies and programs for religious character education at the elementary school level.

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