



Islamic Religious Education Teacher's Strategies in Improving Student's Spirituality at SMP 2 Bendosari

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening students' spirituality is an important challenge for Islamic religious education in the digital age, when the influence of social media, cultural changes, and a lack of family guidance often weaken students' religious awareness. This condition requires learning strategies that are more adaptive and relevant to the developmental needs of adolescents. This study aims to describe the strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers to enhance student spirituality, the forms of implementation in schools, as well as the impacts and obstacles that arise in its implementation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that IRE teachers applied five main strategies, namely contextual learning, worship habits, role modeling, personal approaches, and collaboration with parents and schools. These strategies have been proven to increase student participation in religious activities, strengthen religious behavior, and encourage the internalization of Islamic values in daily life. However, the study also found obstacles such as differences in student motivation, the influence of digital media, and limited learning time.

1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a fundamental role in instilling the values of faith, piety, and good character in students. The goal of IRE is not only to develop intellectual intelligence, but also to shape religious personalities that are reflected in their daily thoughts, attitudes, and behavior. PAI education is a country's main asset in terms of closeness to God, especially in this era of disruption. In the context of modernization and the development of information technology, studies on the strategies of PAI teachers in strengthening students' spirituality are becoming increasingly important and relevant (Nur Azizah, 2025).

The lives of today's teenagers are greatly influenced by social media, popular culture, and materialistic lifestyles. Instant access to information through various digital platforms often shifts religious values to a less significant position compared to entertainment or social trends (Maharani et al., 2025). This situation creates a gap between the ideal goals of religious education and actual practice in the field, particularly in terms of internalizing spiritual values. The declining interest of students in religious activities and the weak awareness of practicing Islamic teachings, both at school and in the family, are clear indicators of this problem.

PAI teachers face a major challenge in integrating spiritual values into students' lives, especially given the relatively short amount of time allocated for religious education. On the other hand, families, which should play an important role in shaping religious character, often do not function optimally, so the responsibility for spiritual guidance is mostly placed on schools, especially PAI teachers. Without the right strategy, there is concern that religious education will only be cognitively oriented and will not touch on authentic spiritual awareness and behavior (Asrofi et al., 2025). Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of the role of PAI teachers in improving morality, character, and spiritual intelligence.

Research by Ginanjar et al., (2025) shows that the structured implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can shape students' Islamic character while developing their talents and interests through extracurricular activities based on Islamic values. On the other hand, research by Alimni et al., (2022) shows that PAI teachers' strategies in improving students' emotional intelligence, such as developing self-awareness, self-control, and motivation, are very important in shaping strong morals and spirituality as a basis for preventing juvenile delinquency. Additionally, research by Rahma & Sutarman, (2024) emphasizes the role of PAI teachers in nurturing students' spiritual and emotional intelligence through regular worship and an empathetic approach to the challenges of social media influence and lack of motivation. Meanwhile, according to Alfina Uyunin Nadhifah et al., (2025) the involvement of PAI teachers in instilling the habit of praying in congregation and implementing a reward and punishment system has proven effective in instilling discipline and religious values in students, which are important foundations in the development of spiritually-based character in schools.

Although these studies have shown the significant contribution of PAI teachers in fostering students' religiosity, the main focus is more on moral aspects, character, and critical thinking skills. This study is different because it specifically highlights PAI teachers' strategies in facing contemporary challenges, such as the dominance of social media, the flow of globalization, and the limited number of religious education hours in junior high schools. This focus provides a new perspective by placing student spirituality as the main aspect that must be strengthened through innovative, contextual, and applicable approaches in line with the realities of the digital generation (Kurniasih, dede et al., 2025).

This study offers solutions through learning strategies that support the internalization of spiritual values in students' daily lives. PAI teachers not only act as conveyors of material, but also as role models who inspire through habitual

worship, the integration of religious values into school activities, and a personal approach that strengthens emotional bonds with students. Additionally, the involvement of the school and the active role of parents are important factors in creating a conducive learning environment, so that the development of students' spirituality can be sustained (Iswanto et al., 2023).

2. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies used by Islamic Education (PAI) teachers to foster spirituality in junior high school students. Through this design, researchers can thoroughly examine the role of teachers, the dynamics of learning, and strategies tailored to the school context. In this investigation, the researcher acted as the main mechanism that actively carried out observations, interviews, and documentation in the data collection process. The main subjects of the study were IRE teachers and students, while the principal and homeroom teachers were used as supporting informants, selected using purposive sampling techniques, based on considerations of relevance and depth of information they could provide.

Data collection was carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, using guidelines that had been compiled in accordance with the focus of the research. The analysis process applied an interactive analysis model that included the stages of data reduction, information presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study utilized triangulation techniques covering sources, methods, and time. During the research process, the researchers upheld ethics, maintained objectivity, and obtained consent from the informants. This method is expected to produce a comprehensive description of PAI learning strategies, the challenges faced by teachers, and their impact on strengthening student spirituality in the digital age.

3. Results and Discussion

At the time of the study, class IX B of SMP Negeri 2 Bendosari consisted of 21 students, with a composition of 13 male students and 8 female students. The class was in a fairly conducive social condition, although some students showed passive tendencies when participating in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process. In general, students had diverse family backgrounds in terms of education, religious activities, and social environment. This influenced the variation in their level of understanding, interest, and daily worship practices. The PAI teacher said that some students come from families with strong religious involvement, but others lack guidance in worship at home. This variation affects the dynamics of the class, especially when the teacher applies personal approach strategies and worship habits. The classroom is also equipped with standard learning facilities such as an LCD projector, a blackboard, and a spacious classroom with good ventilation, which supports learning comfort.

Previously, PAI learning processes mostly used lecture methods, question and answer sessions, and routine activities such as morning prayers and reciting the Quran together. However, based on initial observations, these methods did not fully encourage students to understand deep spiritual values. This was evident from the fact that quite a number of students were still passive, lacked enthusiasm in participating in worship activities, or were inconsistent in carrying out their religious roles at school. In addition, the use of digital technology in learning is still limited to the delivery of material without strengthening spiritual reflection. Teachers then tried to develop more contextual and participatory learning strategies, such as case studies, group discussions, and worship simulations. These learning conditions provided space for teachers to observe students' affective readiness, while identifying obstacles that arose during the learning process.

During the study, the learning process was conducted naturally according to the official schedule of PAI subjects in class IX B. The researcher was present as a passive participatory observer and recorded teacher-student interactions, the use of learning strategies, and classroom dynamics in carrying out daily worship activities such as morning recitation and congregational prayers. At the same time, interview data collection was conducted after the learning process was completed, using a semi-structured approach so that informants could freely explain their experiences and views. Interviews were conducted with PAI teachers, students selected through purposive sampling, and homeroom teachers. Each interview was recorded (with the informants' permission), transcribed, and re-verified to maintain data validity. The documentation process included collecting photos of activities, observation notes, and school archives to support the discussion. The interview question guidelines are shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1. List of Research Interview Questions

Informant	Interview Questions
PAI Teacher	What strategies do you use to improve students' spirituality in class? What are the main obstacles you face in teaching PAI and guiding students in worship? What is the role of the school and parents in supporting spiritual guidance programs?
Student	What religious activities have been most helpful in understanding Islamic values? What is your opinion about the exemplary role of teachers in school religious activities? Do regular worship activities at school influence your worship habits at home?
Homeroom Teacher	How do you see changes in students' religious behavior after participating in guidance at school? What form of communication do PAI teachers use regarding students' worship development?
All Informant	What are your suggestions for improving the effectiveness of spiritual guidance at school?

Forms of PAI Teacher Strategies in Enhancing Student Spirituality

Based on the findings of the researcher's observations and interviews in the field,

there are a number of complementary strategies for fostering student spirituality. First, contextual learning. Contextual learning seeks to relate religious material to students' life experiences and daily lives. In addition, contextual learning also helps students understand the relevance of Islamic values in real situations so that there is a deeper internalization of values. This practice is in line with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning, which encourages the connection between theory and practical experience in the learning process (Khoiriyah et al., 2021). Findings by Sailirrohmah & Azani, (2025) also explain that contextual learning in PAI improves students' spiritual understanding and reflective abilities because they are able to relate religious values to the dynamics of modern life. Thus, this approach instills religious cognition while building applicable moral awareness.

Second, daily worship practices are implemented as part of the school routine. These routine activities include praying together before class, collective morning recitation of the Quran, congregational mid-morning prayer, and brief daily remembrance of God. These activities are carried out every day and are attended by students and teachers. This repetitive habit aims to form a habitual religious disposition (habituation), rather than merely episodic activities. Other studies have also reported the effectiveness of religious activity habituation in strengthening the religious character of students. (Faisal, 2023a). Third, a crucial component is the exemplary behavior of teachers. Students can easily emulate teachers who regularly demonstrate religious behavior, such as maintaining order, being polite, and actively participating in religious activities. The literature on religious education shows that one of the most important factors influencing students' religious behavior is the role models they receive from their teachers. (S Rusli et al., 2024a).

Fourth, a personalized approach strategy. Small group mentoring, introspective discussions, and individual counseling are examples of this individual strategy. This allows for effective intervention for students struggling with moral dilemmas or intrinsic motivation barriers. According to transformation theory, teachers can change students' value orientation by facilitating critical reflection through a personal approach (Chanifah et al., 2021a). Research by Bulkani et al., (2025) supports this by showing that a personal approach increases students' empathy, self-confidence, and moral responsibility because they feel valued individually by their teachers.

Fifth, collaboration between the school community and parents. This can be done through regular meetings, progress reports, and digital communication. This collaboration supports the maintenance of spiritual practices at home and at school. As part of the spiritual education approach, school records show that parents and Islamic Education teachers communicate regularly. Based on these five strategies, it can be said that the spiritual development of SMP Negeri 2 Bendosari uses an integrative approach that covers the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. The personal approach touches the hearts of students, and the example set by teachers inspires them. In addition, contextual learning gives meaning, involvement in worship forms habits, and cooperation with parents maintains the continuity of values. Small group mentoring activities are conducted by Islamic Education teachers as shown in the figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Small Group Discussion

In theory, this series of tactics shows how the holistic paradigm of Islamic education is truly practiced, where the principles of knowledge, faith, and righteous deeds are neatly integrated into the educational process and school life. The Islamic idea of *tarbiyah*, or education that develops students' personalities and spiritual awareness in addition to providing knowledge, is also reflected in this model. Therefore, rather than merely teaching religion, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Bendosari have effectively carried out their role as agents of moral and spiritual transformation. The tactics used demonstrate how well Islamic religious education is able to adapt to the demands of modernity while maintaining its religious core in the face of change.

Implementation of PAI Teacher Strategies in School Activities

The implementation of these strategies is carried out through several clear operational mechanisms. At the classroom level, teachers use case discussion methods, role-playing in worship simulations, and the screening of Islamic audiovisual materials relevant to the learning topic. All of these are intended to activate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of students. The use of selected digital media also helps reach a generation that is accustomed to screens, although its use needs to be curated so as not to reduce the wisdom aspect of learning (Muslim, 2024). Darniah's (2024) research supports this approach by finding that simulation-based learning and reflective discussion increase students' religious awareness and moral reasoning abilities. Through this method, teachers not only transfer religious knowledge but also encourage students to practice critical thinking about Islamic values in the context of contemporary life.

At the institutional level, schools implement routine religious activities such as morning recitation of the Quran, communal prayers, and congregational prayers. These activities are part of the school religious culture that shapes the spiritual atmosphere in the educational environment. Each activity is monitored by Islamic education teachers who record students' spiritual development and coordinate with

homeroom teachers and parents. These findings are consistent with research Aulia & Pasaribu, (2025) emphasize that the formation of a religious school culture plays an important role in instilling sustainable spiritual habits. This institutional approach demonstrates the practical implementation of the hidden curriculum concept, namely moral and spiritual values taught through school policies and routines (Fitriani, 2024). Thus, spiritual guidance is not only the responsibility of religious teachers but also part of the institutional identity. The implementation of religious activities as a form of teacher strategy in disciplining students is shown in the figure 2. below.



Figure 2. reading the Qur'an one day - one juz

In terms of personal development, teachers provide one-on-one counseling sessions for students who need moral or spiritual guidance. These sessions are informal counseling sessions that utilize reflective and consultative techniques, followed by documented follow-ups. This approach is effective in addressing affective barriers and strengthening students' intrinsic motivation toward religious practices (Chanifah et al., 2021b). A study by Dzikra et al., (2025) shows that spiritual-based personal guidance increases students' affective sensitivity and helps them overcome psychological pressures in practicing religion. By providing space for reflection, teachers help students not only understand Islamic values cognitively, but also internalize them as a way of life.

External collaboration is demonstrated by regular communication between teachers and parents through face-to-face meetings and digital platforms. Documentation shows that there are records of agreements on religious practices at home that have been agreed upon by both parties. These efforts reduce the gap between school guidance and family practices so that religious practices become consistent. This is in line with the research by Pranoto et al., (2025) which explains that collaboration between teachers and parents has a positive effect on the consistency of students'

religious behavior at home and at school. In addition Fadhillah et al., (2022) add that this kind of cooperation strengthens external moral control, which bridges formal education and family education. The synergy between the two ensures that spiritual habits do not stop at school but become a sustainable way of life.

These findings show that Islamic Education teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Bendosari have carried out the functions of Islamic education comprehensively: teaching (ta'lim), guiding (irsyad), nurturing (tarbiyah), and exemplifying (uswah). Through this combination of strategies, students' spiritual development is not only formed normatively, but also becomes a meaningful personal experience. Thus, practices in the field demonstrate the successful implementation of Islamic religious education that is not only cognitive-oriented, but also focused on transforming students' character and spirituality.

The Impact and Challenges of Strategies on Student Spiritual Development

The implementation of student spirituality development strategies at SMP Negeri 2 Bendosari has shown positive results in terms of behavior, motivation, and religious participation. Based on observations and interviews, there has been a significant increase in student participation in school religious activities, such as morning recitation of the Quran, congregational prayers, and incidental religious activities such as commemorating important Islamic holidays. Students have also shown improvement in their daily religious behavior, including orderliness, politeness, and respect for teachers and peers. In addition, several students began to take an active initiative in religious activities, such as becoming prayer leaders, muezzins, or administrators of Islamic spiritual activities (ROHIS). This demonstrates the success of the affective and social aspects of Islamic religious education, which is not only oriented towards knowledge but also towards the internalization of values.

The results of interviews with students show that contextual learning helps them see the relevance of Islamic values in their daily lives. Values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy become easier to understand because they are linked to personal experiences and real-life situations. Some students also admitted to experiencing an increase in personal worship practices, such as an increase in the frequency of obligatory prayers at home and involvement in sunnah practices. These findings are in line with Fadli's (2023) research, which found that the contextual learning model increases students' emotional involvement and religious motivation because religious values are presented in the context of their lives. In addition, Nurhakim et al., (2023) emphasized that teacher role models play a major role in strengthening the internalization of religious values through the mechanisms of observation and social imitation as stated in Bandura's social learning theory. These findings reinforce this study that teachers who apply contextual learning result in an increase in students' understanding of learning materials as well as practical application in students' daily lives.

However, significant challenges and obstacles were also identified in the implementation of the program. First, there were differences in intrinsic motivation among students. Not all students showed the same enthusiasm for religious

activities, especially those who came from families or social circles that were not supportive. Some students grew up in secular families where religion was not taught. In addition, differences in religious affiliations also had an impact. Some grew up in Nahdliyin environments. Others grew up in Muhammadiyah environments, resulting in preferences among students in carrying out religious activities. This reinforces the findings of Faisal, (2023b) in the STAI Hub Bulwathan Journal, which revealed that resistance to religious habituation often arises from external factors such as peer influence and inconsistency in religious practices at home.

Second, the influence of digital media and popular culture poses new challenges. Although digital media can be used as a creative tool for Islamic education, exposure to content that contradicts Islamic values has the potential to weaken the effects of spiritual guidance. Study by Muslim, (2024b) shows that without strengthening religious digital literacy, students are vulnerable to value dissonance and moral crises due to an imbalance in digital content consumption. Therefore, an integrative strategy in the form of Islamic digital literacy is needed to guide students in sorting information according to Islamic moral values and manners.

Third, limited resources and time are technical obstacles that affect the consistency of religious activities. The busy academic curriculum often leaves limited space for intensive spiritual activities, such as moral mentoring or weekly spiritual guidance. This condition is exacerbated by limited worship facilities and teaching staff, which are unevenly distributed across classes. S Rusli et al., (2024b) in the P4I Journal emphasize that the effectiveness of religious character programs is greatly influenced by institutional support and flexible time management in the school curriculum. Fourth, differences in the pedagogical and spiritual competencies of PAI teachers also determine the success of implementation. Teachers who have reflective skills, empathy, and the ability to build personal relationships are more effective in instilling Islamic values. However, not all teachers have these skills equally. This results in religious activities being carried out by the same accompanying teacher every time. Primandini & Sunarso, (2025) show that the success of religious character education is highly dependent on teacher agency, namely the ability of teachers to personalize their approach and build affective communication with students.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, Islamic Education teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Bendosari have made sincere efforts to help students become closer to Islamic teachings and develop good attitudes in their daily lives. Teachers not only explain the material, but also set direct examples, encourage students to practice worship, connect lessons with life experiences, and assist students who need special attention. These methods make it easier for students to understand the importance of worship and good behavior. The results can be seen in the changes in students' attitudes, who have become more orderly, polite, and willing to participate in

religious activities such as morning recitation and congregational prayers. Some students have even begun to take on roles in worship activities at school. However, teachers still face several difficulties, such as differences in enthusiasm for worship among students, the strong influence of social media, and limited learning time. From all these processes, it can be concluded that the teachers' patient and continuous efforts have helped students develop spiritually and morally. The guidance provided not only teaches students about religion but also encourages them to practice it in real life, both at school and at home. With the support of parents and the school, this habit can continue and become a good habit for students.

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