

SCHOOL CULTURE-BASED CHARACTER EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS CHARACTER IN ISLAMIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Character is an important part to be developed in educational practices at school. Elementary schools as the foundation for instilling values have a strategic role in strengthening the character of students. This research aims to reveal the practice of strengthening religious character based on school culture at MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang. Researchers used a descriptive qualitative approach, where data collection was carried out through interviews, observation and documentation. Researchers used a descriptive qualitative approach in this research, where data collection was carried out through various methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. This approach was chosen to dig deeper into the processes and experiences experienced by the research subjects, as well as the context in which the school culture-based religious character strengthening program was implemented. Based on the research results, it shows that all elements in the school are able to collaborate well to create a strong religious character in students. Various religious programs are designed and implemented regularly to achieve this goal. Schools understand the importance of forming students' religious character from an early age as a foundation for future life. The findings in this research are that the practice of strengthening religious character based on school culture is carried out through various programs including congregational Dhuha prayers, congregational Dhuhur prayers, reciting Juz Ama before learning, reading surah yaasiin and tahlil on Fridays, reciting Rotibul Hadad, and literacy activities.

Keywords: character education, religious character, Islamic elementary school

Abstrak

*Karakter merupakan bagian yang penting untuk dikembangkan dalam praktik pendidikan di sekolah. Sekolah dasar sebagai pondasi untuk penanaman nilai memiliki peran strategis dalam **penguatan** karakter*

peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap praktik penguatan karakter religius berbasis budaya sekolah di MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, dimana pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara, observasi serta dokumentasi. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dalam penelitian ini, dimana pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui berbagai metode untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang mendalam tentang fenomena yang diteliti. Pendekatan ini dipilih untuk menggali lebih dalam mengenai proses dan pengalaman yang dialami oleh subjek penelitian, serta konteks di mana program penguatan karakter religius berbasis budaya sekolah dilaksanakan. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa seluruh elemen di sekolah mampu berkolaborasi dengan baik untuk mewujudkan karakter religius peserta didik yang kuat. Berbagai program keagamaan dirancang dan diimplementasikan secara rutin untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut. Sekolah telah memahami pentingnya membentuk karakter religius peserta didik sejak dini sebagai landasan untuk kehidupan di masa depan. Adapun temuan dalam penelitian ini bahwa praktik penguatan karakter religius berbasis budaya sekolah dilakukan melalui berbagai program diantaranya sholat Dhuha berjamaah, sholat Dhuhur berjamaah, Pembacaan Juz Ama sebelum pembelajaran, pembacaan surat yaasiin dan tahlil pada hari Jumat, pembacaan Rotibul Hadad, dan kegiatan literasi.

Kata Kunci: *pendidikan karakter, karakter religius, sekolah dasar Islam*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the world of education in the 21st century, which is increasingly advanced and developing, has made strengthening character an essential part that cannot be separated from the lives of students at school. Globalization has brought significant changes in various aspects of human life, including educational practices. Rapid technological developments and the emergence of various social and cultural challenges require students to not only have academic intelligence but also strong character rooted in religious

values (Narimo & Muhtar, 2020). Strengthening religious character in educational practices in schools helps shape students to have strong morals and ethics. Religious values are an important foundation in building a strong personality. Education based on character and religious values helps students understand the importance of living life by paying attention to religious teachings (Al Atok et al., 2016; Arifin, 2019). Learning is not only directed at achieving high academic achievements, but also towards becoming moral and ethical individuals

in building good relationships with God and each other.

Strengthening religious character also plays an important role in shaping students' attitudes and behavior in everyday life. This is very important in building a harmonious school environment. When students apply religious values in their daily lives, they will become individuals who are more empathetic, tolerant, and able to work with other people, even though they have diverse backgrounds and thoughts (Ahsanulkhaq, 2019; Cahyanto et al., 2022). Apart from that, religious character can also prevent various negative behaviors among students. With a strong moral foundation, students will be better able to resist challenges and temptations to engage in deviant behavior. Character education based on religious values provides clear guidance about what is good and bad, making the right and responsible decisions. This not only creates a safe and conducive school environment, but also prepares students to become good and responsible citizens in the future.

The integration of strengthening religious character in the school curriculum must be carried out in various ways, including strengthening knowledge of religious values that are relevant to everyday life. Programs and customization in schools can also provide benefits to deepen students' understanding and experience in understanding and living religious

values themselves (Omeri, 2015). Overall, cultivating religious character in education is an important foundation in forming individuals who not only excel academically, but also have high morality and ethics (Akbar et al., 2014; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017b). In the current era, the challenges faced are increasingly diverse and complex, so a generation is needed that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has strong character and is rooted in religious values. With good religious character education, it is hoped that students can grow into individuals who are wise, have integrity, and are able to contribute positively to society.

Implementing character education in schools can be done in various ways, one of which is the integration of character values through school culture. School culture covers all aspects of life at school, starting from interactions between students and teachers, school rules and policies, to daily activities carried out in the school environment. When religious values are consistently integrated into school culture, this can support the comprehensive character development of students. The culture or habits that exist in this school will indirectly have a big impact on the formation of students' character (Narimo & Muhtar, 2020). Through consistent habituation, students will learn to apply these values in their lives.

One way to build a strong school culture is through establishing and enforcing rules that support character values, then these rules and routine activities are able to form a school culture that supports character education. Teachers and school staff must also be able to be role models in everyday life. Apart from that, routine programs in schools are also able to provide opportunities for students to learn and apply religious values consistently. These activities not only provide fun and useful experiences, but also help them develop strong character (Arifin, 2017). Integration of character values through school culture is an effective approach in character education. By creating a school environment that is consistent with character values, students will learn to apply these values in their lives. A strong school culture is also able to create a conducive and harmonious learning environment, which will ultimately support students' overall academic achievement and personal development.

Elementary school is a very strategic level of education for developing children's character, this is because at elementary school age they are still at a stage of development that requires strong intervention and will be very influential in the formation of their personality. At this age, children are very receptive to teaching from the surrounding environment, including from teachers and peers at school.

Therefore, elementary schools have a strategic role in instilling positive character values from an early age (Badeni et al., 2019; Narimo & Muhtar, 2020). At this stage of development, children are highly curious and are forming a basic understanding of morality and ethics. They learn about the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and begin to develop empathy and social skills. Character education at elementary school age can provide a strong foundation for the formation of a strong personality in later years (Akbar, 2010; Tharaba, 2020).

The importance of character education in elementary schools is also supported theoretically in that the values taught and applied at this stage tend to be more inherent and influential in the long term. Children who grow up in an environment that supports positive character development are more likely to carry these values into adulthood. Basic education also provides various opportunities for children to practice character values through daily interactions and school activities. Through a strong culture and consistent experience of doing good at school, it will help strengthen character and shape students into moral individuals. A strong school culture will also form a school community that cares and supports an environment that is conducive to the development of students' character. Thus, elementary schools have a very important and strategic role in forming children's

character. Through a positive learning environment, and support from teachers, parents and the community at school, students can grow into individuals with character (Arifin, 2018; Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). This is a very valuable long-term investment for the future of students and for society as a whole.

MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari is one of the Islamic elementary schools in Malang Regency. Based on the results of initial interviews with researchers at MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang, information was obtained that so far the school has had a good school culture to support the strengthening of students' religious character. In daily activities, the school community is able to collaborate well to realize the religious character of students. Based on the results of preliminary studies, various religious programs have been designed and implemented routinely in schools. The school develops habits that emphasize strengthening religious character as an Islamic elementary school. Teachers are also able to provide examples to students in everyday life. This also aims to realize the aim of the independent curriculum, namely to form students who have the Rahmatan Lil Alamin (PPRA) student profile. Based on the description above, it can be seen that MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang has a culture that is able to strengthen the religious character of students at school. MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang also has

strategic programs to support strengthening religious character. This is the background for researchers to explore further the practice of strengthening religious character based on school culture at MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang.

METHOD

This research was conducted with the aim of exploring the practice of strengthening religious character at MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang. The main focus of this research is to understand how schools implement strengthening religious character through various programs and practices in schools. This research approach uses a descriptive qualitative approach, this was done by researchers to dig deeper into the processes and experiences experienced by the research subjects, as well as the context in which the school culture-based religious character strengthening program was implemented (Creswell, 2007; Taylor et al., 2016). Apart from that, this research wants to explore and describe a natural condition that emphasizes processes, meaning and understanding in the form of words (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Kusumastuti & Mustamil, 2019). It is hoped that this research will provide in-depth insight into the strategies and approaches used by schools in comprehensively forming the religious character of students.

In an effort to dig up detailed information, researchers used a

descriptive qualitative approach where data collection was carried out through various methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Given, 2008; Saldana, 2011). The stages of this research are divided into three stages, namely the preparation, implementation and reporting stages. In the initial stage, researchers conducted a preliminary study at the school location where this research was conducted. After the researcher finds the focus he wants to research, he continues data collection. Data collection was carried out by interviews, observation and documentation. Data is presented according to code and in-depth analysis is carried out based on the findings. Researchers also added data to complement and confirm information originating from various informants. To ensure that the findings of this research are valid, researchers used analysis techniques which included stages of data reduction, presentation, verification and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014) and used triangulation techniques to obtain data validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results and discussion are presented according to research data in the field. This research reveals the strengthening of the religious character at MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang. Based on the focus of this research, the results and discussion

include the practice of strengthening religious character based on school culture. Overall the findings are as follows.

Duha Prayer at School

Dhuha prayer is one of the routine activities carried out by students at school every morning. This sunnah worship has been an inseparable part of school culture for a long time. Not only students carry it out, but teachers also take part in this activity. The teacher's presence in the Dhuha prayer aims to provide an example to students about the spirit of carrying out worship. Even though schools do not require all school members to perform Duha prayers, there is a strong recommendation for teachers to set a good example. This is in line with the views of (Narimo & Muhtar, 2020; Susilawati, 2012) who explain that good examples from teachers can increase motivation in carrying out worship and instill religious values in students' daily lives.

Apart from that, carrying out Duha prayers at school has many benefits both from a spiritual and psychological perspective. From a spiritual perspective, Duha prayer helps students get closer to God and strengthens their faith (Cahyanto et al., 2022). Meanwhile, from a psychological perspective, this worship can provide inner peace and better mental readiness to face learning and other activities at school (Nurhisam, 2017). The habit of Duha prayer also

contributes to creating a religious atmosphere at school. This religious climate can encourage students to be more disciplined and responsible in carrying out religious teachings. With this habit, school is not only a place to gain knowledge, but also a place to deepen faith and build good character. Implementing Duha prayers in schools is a positive step in forming a young generation who is not only academically intelligent but also has good morals (Abdi, 2018). The involvement of teachers as role models in this activity plays an important role in instilling these values in students.

Congregational Dhuhr Prayer

Students perform midday prayers together every day, except Fridays and Saturdays. The midday prayer activity in congregation is an important moment for the entire school community to gather and carry out worship together. Congregational noon prayers are not just a daily routine, but have become part of the religious character strengthening program implemented in schools. This is in accordance with the view of Hartono et al., (2018) who said that character education must be integrated into strategic programs in schools that are implemented consistently. By regularly attending congregational midday prayers, students are taught to always remember their obligations to God. It is hoped that this will form good habits that they will continue to carry into adulthood (Susilo et al., 2022).

Congregational midday prayers provide students with experience and understanding to always pay attention to obligatory worship. Apart from that, students also learn about the importance of fulfilling religious obligations on time and with full awareness (Indrayani et al., 2018).

This experience becomes important capital for students to develop discipline in carrying out worship in their future lives. Apart from that, it also has a positive impact on social interaction at school. When students gather to pray, they feel a strong sense of togetherness and solidarity. This helps build bonds of brotherhood among students. Students learn to respect each other, work together, and support each other in carrying out worship. This is in accordance with the views of Siswinarti (2017) & Tharaba (2020) who state that these values of togetherness are an important foundation in shaping the social character of students.

Furthermore, holding midday prayers in congregation at school is also a means for teachers to set a good example. Teachers who take part in this mentoring show the example that teachers show to students at school, this also provides a real example for students and encourages them to follow in their teacher's footsteps. Thus, teachers not only act as teachers, but also as educators in religious matters (Mussafa, 2018; Zubaedi, 2011). Overall, midday prayers in

congregation at school have a positive impact. Apart from forming students' religious character, this activity also strengthens the values of discipline, togetherness and respect. By regularly carrying out midday prayers in congregation, it is hoped that students will grow into individuals who are not only academically intelligent, but also have good morals and are strong in carrying out their worship. On the other hand, this habit also cultivates students to have discipline and respect their time as Muslims.

Reading Juz Amma before Learning

Before learning begins, in each class students read Juz Amma. This activity aims to familiarize students with starting all activities by reading the Al-Qur'an. By starting learning by reading verses from the holy Qur'an, students are expected to be able to carry out learning activities with a calm mind and a clean heart. This habit also instills spiritual values in students, so that they better appreciate the importance of starting everything with good intentions. Apart from that, reading Juz Amma regularly helps students increase their memorization of short letters. This memorization is very useful in everyday life, especially in carrying out prayers. With strong memorization, students can perform prayers more solemnly and smoothly (Firdaus et al., 2022; Rahmawati, 2020). Apart from that, this activity also trains students' memory and concentration,

which of course is expected to have a positive impact on their academic abilities. Reading Juz Amma in class also equips students with religious knowledge from an early age as well as understanding the content and meaning of the letters they read. This is important in forming religious character, because a strong understanding of religion can become the basis for everyday behavior (Ahsanulkhaq, 2019; Fadilah, 2019).

Furthermore, this activity creates a religious atmosphere in the school environment. When all students simultaneously read Juz Amma, the class atmosphere becomes calmer and in turn this will increase enthusiasm for learning and build a sense of togetherness among students. They feel part of a community that supports each other in carrying out religious values. With assistance and guidance from the teacher when reading Juz Amma, indirectly the teacher has also become an example for students in studying the Koran. The presence of teachers who are active in this activity shows the school's commitment to educating and providing an environment that supports the cultivation of good habits through a positive culture.

Reading of Surah Yasin and Tahlil

Every Friday, the school carries out the reading of the Yasin letter and tahlil together. This activity has become a routine that is followed by all school members, including students, teachers and staff. By carrying out the reading of

the Yasin letter and tahlil, the school seeks to create a religious atmosphere which in turn is expected to improve students' attitudes and behavior. Reading the Yasin letter and tahlil together has several important goals, including strengthening the religious climate in the school environment (Cahyanto et al., 2021; Kemdikbud, 2017). Carrying out religious activities makes the school atmosphere conducive to the daily learning process and further motivates students to behave well.

Apart from that, this activity also aims to teach students about the importance of spirituality and a strong relationship with God as well as recognizing important times in religious life such as Friday which is a day full of blessings in Islam. They are also taught to respect religious traditions that have been passed down from their ancestors. Reading the Yasin letter and tahlil together also has a specific aim to strengthen students' ideology as Nahdliyin citizens. By carrying out this activity, the school instills Aswaja values (Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah) which are the basis of NU ideology (Mussaafa, 2018). Students are taught to understand and practice moderate and tolerant Islamic teachings and develop a sense of pride as part of the Nahdliyin community. This activity is also a means of strengthening students' ideological identity.

Routine Recitation of Rotibul Haddad

Rotibul Hadad reading is held at school every Saturday. This activity has become a tradition that is carried out solemnly by all school members, including students, teachers and staff. Rotibul Hadad is a collection of prayers and dhikr compiled by Al-Habib Abdullah bin Alwi Al-Haddad, a great scholar from Yemen. By carrying out this reading, the school is trying to create a religious atmosphere and is part of an effort to ask Allah to make all activities at school easier and smoother. The routine recitation of Rotibul Hadad is not only a form of worship, but also as part of a spiritual endeavor. The school understands that success in education does not only depend on external efforts, such as the teaching and learning process and adequate facilities, but also requires inner support through prayer and dhikr. By regularly reciting Rotibul Hadad, it is hoped that all activities at school can run smoothly and receive Allah's blessing.

Apart from that, regular recitation of Rotibul Hadad is expected to strengthen students' monotheism. Monotheism is the core of Islamic teachings, through this activity students are invited to always remember and glorify Allah in every aspect of their lives. Regularly reciting prayers and dhikr helps instill awareness of God's presence in every step they take, so that students become more obedient and try

to stay away from actions that are prohibited by religion. Students are also trained to have a balance between outer and inner efforts. In everyday life, they are taught that if they have a desire, it is not enough just to try physically, but they also need to pray and increase their worship of Allah. In this way, students learn that every effort must be accompanied by trust and prayer. This is in line with the view of (Rahmawati, 2020) who explains that strengthening religious character in schools also needs to instill confidence in students to balance physical and mental efforts in everyday life.

Teachers and staff at the school also played a role in this activity, this shows the school's commitment to guiding and educating students. When the activity took place, the entire school community gathered to recite prayers and dhikr, showing strong togetherness and unity. Students feel support from the school community in carrying out their worship, so they feel more comfortable and motivated to continue to increase their faith and devotion. Reading Rotibul Hadad every Saturday brings many benefits to the entire school community, both in efforts to strengthen students' monotheism, creating a balance between external and internal efforts, as well as in efforts to create an environment that supports strengthening students' character (Lickona et al., 2007).

Routine Literacy Program

Literacy activities are held every Tuesday after Duha prayers. This program is part of the school's efforts to increase students' interest and literacy skills, which include reading and listening. Every week, these literacy activities are carried out alternately between focusing on reading skills and listening skills. This approach aims to make students not only good readers, but also active and critical listeners. In weeks focused on reading skills, students are given the opportunity to read various types of texts, be they short stories, novels or historical articles. Students are invited to understand the contents of the text, find the meaning contained in it, and discuss the values that can be learned. Through this literacy activity, students' reading ability and understanding are expected to increase in addition to the main aim of internalizing good values in the reading provided (Cahyanto et al., 2021; Fadliyah et al., 2021; Kemendikbud, 2017a). Apart from that, students also learn to express opinions and share views with other friends.

In weeks that focus on listening skills, teachers or storytellers usually provide several historical stories or tales that contain good values. These stories often highlight the stories of heroes or Islamic warrior figures who have the values of struggle, courage and wisdom. Through this listening activity, students are trained to listen carefully, understand the plot of the story, and

capture the moral messages conveyed. One of the main objectives of this literacy activity is to increase students' knowledge of the history of Islamic heroes or warriors. By getting to know these exemplary figures more closely, it is hoped that students will be able to draw inspiration from their struggles and sacrifices. These heroic stories not only provide historical insight, but also instill important virtues in everyday life.

Apart from that, this program also aims to strengthen students' abilities to emulate the struggles of heroes. Through inspirational stories, teachers can internalize positive values such as religious values, courage, honesty and the spirit of never giving up. They learn that every individual has the potential to do good and make a positive contribution to society. This program as a whole has brought many benefits to instilling religious values and virtues in students. This is supported by the view of Ahsanulhaq (2019) & Arifin (2018) that programs developed by schools should ideally have an impact on forming a young generation who is not only intellectually intelligent, but also rich in strong moral and ethical values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research carried out at MI Al Ma'arif 07 Singosari Malang, it can be concluded that efforts to strengthen the school's culture-based religious character are carried

out through various well-structured and planned programs. Schools also understand the importance of forming students' religious character from an early age as a foundation for their future lives. Therefore, various religious programs have been designed and implemented regularly to achieve this goal. All elements in the school have been able to collaborate well to create a strong religious character in students. The findings in this research are that the practice of strengthening religious character based on school culture is carried out through various programs including congregational Dhuha prayers, congregational Dhuhur prayers, reciting Juz Amma before learning, reading surah yaasiin and tahlil on Fridays, reciting Rotibul Hadad, and literacy activities.

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