The Efforts of Islamic Religious Education Teachers to Foster Students' Religious Character through Religious Extracurricular Practices in Schools

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Abstract. This study examines the efforts of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' religious character through religious extracurricular practices in two high schools with different contexts: SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 (general school) and SMA Muhammadiyah 4 (faith-based school) in Bandung City. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, involving PAI teachers, extracurricular advisors, and active student participants. The findings reveal that SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 adopts a contextual and inclusive approach, integrating religious values with contemporary social issues and promoting tolerance through activities such as interfaith seminars. This model enhances students' moral reasoning, empathy, and respect for diversity. In contrast, SMA Muhammadiyah 4 emphasizes structured habituation, including daily *muhasabah*, peer mentoring, and a *tahfidz* program requiring one *juz* memorization per year. This approach cultivates discipline, responsibility, and consistency in religious practice.Key supporting factors include stakeholder collaboration, notably in SMA Muhammadiyah 4 through *home visit* programs involving teachers, parents, and community members. The main challenge in SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 is the variation in students' religious understanding, requiring differentiated instructional strategies. The study concludes that combining inclusivity with spiritual depth can offer a holistic framework for religious character development, aligning with the *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK) initiative.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, religious character, extracurricular activities, habituation, moral reasoning, stakeholder collaboration

1   Introduction

In the context of 21st-century education, shaping students' religious character has become a strategic challenge for educational institutions in Indonesia[1]. The forces of globalization, advances in information technology, and shifts in social values have had a significant impact on adolescent behavior, marked by rising juvenile delinquency and moral degradation. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2021 recorded at

least 188 villages/urban neighborhoods in Indonesia as locations where group brawls or fights occurred, involving either students or local residents. This phenomenon signals a serious challenge for schools in fulfilling their role of moral and spiritual guidance. In this situation, strengthening religious character education through formal education becomes an urgent necessity, with Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holding a central role in guiding students' spiritual, moral, and ethical values[2]–[4].

Religious character in the educational context does not merely refer to religious knowledge, but also encompasses attitudes, habits, and behaviors that are consistent with religious teachings[5]–[8]. Glock and Stark argue that religiosity comprises two main dimensions: the level of conception (religious knowledge and understanding) and the level of commitment (implementation of religious values in behavior). Therefore, the formation of religious character requires a learning process that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. IRE teachers hold a strategic position in this process, serving not only as instructors but also as role models and mentors in internalizing religious values. One strategy that can reinforce this process is the habituation of religious extracurricular activities, which provide students with real-life opportunities to practice religious teachings[9].

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive contribution of religious extracurricular activities to religious character formation. Nabila found that religious activities beyond classroom hours, such as Islamic Spirituality Clubs (Rohis), Qur'an recitation (tadarus), and short-term Islamic boarding programs (pesantren kilat), can strengthen students' religious values through habituation and active participation. Similarly, Hafidzah Implementing student life regulations for religious character development in Islamic schools[10]. However, most studies tend to separate the role of IRE teachers from extracurricular activities, thus failing to provide a comprehensive picture of their integration. Moreover, research often focuses on a single type of school, whereas implementation contexts may differ between public schools and faith-based schools.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to reinforce the role of IRE in shaping students' religious character amid the strong currents of globalization, the penetration of popular culture, and the influence of digital media often in conflict with Islamic values. Issues of moral degradation among adolescents, such as increased fighting, disciplinary violations, and consumerist behavior, are also evident in schools in Bandung City, including SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 and SMA Muhammadiyah 4.

This condition demands more effective teaching and character-building strategies, with schools serving as the last bastion for equipping students with spiritual, ethical, and moral values. IRE teachers play a strategic role in this process not only as educators but also as role models and moral guides who can integrate religious extracurricular activities to create a learning environment that actively encourages students to practice religious teachings.

Although IRE has been an important component of the national curriculum, few studies have examined in depth the synergy between the role of IRE teachers and religious habituation through extracurricular activities in SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 and SMA Muhammadiyah 4. This research seeks to fill that gap and develop a

contextual model of religious character building suited to the realities of these two schools.

Accordingly, this study aims to:

1. Identify the efforts of IRE teachers in building students' religious character through religious extracurricular activities.
2. Analyze the implementation of religious habituation in schools as part of extracurricular programs.
3. Explore the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting the success of religious character development through collaboration between IRE teachers and school stakeholders.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, combining the role of IRE teachers with the practice of religious extracurricular activities as a unified strategy for forming students' religious character in two different school contexts: a public school (SMA Karya Pembangunan 2) and a faith-based school (SMA Muhammadiyah 4) in Bandung City. Unlike previous research that tends to separate the role of IRE teachers from extracurricular activities, this study positions them as complementary elements within a single character-building process.

The comparative approach across these two school types allows for the identification of similarities, differences, challenges, and successes in religious character formation within each context. Furthermore, this research positions IRE teachers as managers of character formation, responsible for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of religious activities both inside the classroom and through extracurricular programs. The conceptual framework for this study draws upon Lickona's character education theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Glock-Stark's dimensions of religiosity, thereby providing a robust theoretical foundation for strengthening students' religious character in schools.

2   Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable the researcher to deeply understand and explain phenomena within their natural context, as well as to explore the subjective meanings derived from the experiences of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in fostering students' religious character [11]. The case study design was selected because it provides a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon within a real-life setting, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined[12]–[14].

The research sites were purposively selected in two senior high schools SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 and SMA Muhammadiyah 4 in Bandung City on the grounds that both schools have active religious extracurricular programs deemed relevant to the study's focus. The research subjects included IRE teachers, religious extracurricular advisors, and students actively involved in these activities.

Data collection was conducted using method triangulation, namely in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were

used to gather detailed information regarding the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of IRE teachers' efforts in fostering students' religious character. Participant observation was conducted to directly observe the implementation of religious extracurricular activities such as Islamic Spirituality Clubs (Rohis), routine study sessions, and communal worship practices. Document analysis included reviewing materials such as extracurricular program plans, activity schedules, implementation reports, and photographic documentation[15], [16]. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (human instrument), directly interacting with participants and the research context [17], [18]. Supporting instruments such as interview guides, observation sheets, instrument grids, and document analysis forms were developed to maintain consistency and organization during data collection.

Data trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's four criteria (Miles & Huberman, 2008): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as member checking with participants. Transferability was achieved by providing thick contextual descriptions. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened by maintaining a systematic audit trail and documentation throughout the data analysis process [19].

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña[20], comprising three stages: (1) data reduction, involving the selection, simplification, and transformation of raw data; (2) data display, involving the organization of data in narrative form, tables, and visualizations; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, conducted iteratively to ensure accuracy and consistency of findings. Data analysis was carried out concurrently with data collection, allowing the researcher to adaptively respond to emerging field dynamics.

This study was conducted from February to April 2025, encompassing the preparation phase, field data collection, analysis, and the preparation of the research report. Through this approach, the research is expected to make a substantive contribution to the development of strategies for fostering students' religious character through religious extracurricular activities in senior high schools.

3 Results

3.1 The Role of IRE Teachers in Integrating Instruction and Habituation

Based on findings from SMA Karya Pembangunan 2, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers integrate religious values into classroom learning through contextualization strategies. Religious topics are connected to social issues relevant to adolescents' lives, such as the impact of digital media on youth morality. For example, the topic of *ghibah* (*gossip*) is linked to ethical conduct on social media, followed by an assignment requiring students to write a self-reflection essay. This strategy reflects the application of Lickona's moral reasoning theory, in which students are encouraged to critically analyze ethical dilemmas before making moral decisions[21], [22].

In contrast, at SMA Muhammadiyah 4, IRE teachers place greater emphasis on structured and continuous habituation. Daily *muhasabah* (self-reflection), religious

mentoring by senior students, and collective prayer are embedded as routines within the school culture. The mentoring activities foster effective peer learning, in line with Bandura's principle that social interaction strengthens the internalization of positive behavior through modeling and social reinforcement [23]. This approach was described by an IRE teacher at SMA Muhammadiyah 4 as follows:

"We believe that the formation of religious character does not only come from lessons in the classroom, but from daily habits. That's why senior students help guide their juniors in worship and Islamic Spirituality Club (Rohis) activities."
(IRE Teacher, interview, March 14, 2025)

Documentation of extracurricular activities in both schools reveals variations in religious practices that combine cognitive, affective, and psychomotor elements. At SMA Karya Pembangunan 2, the Islamic Spirituality Club schedule includes thematic study sessions integrated with current issues, whereas SMA Muhammadiyah 4 places greater emphasis on strengthening moral character through routine collective worship.

The findings indicate that the role of IRE teachers in both schools is aligned with the goal of religious character formation, although the strategies employed differ. The contextual approach in the public school setting emphasizes critical thinking skills in interpreting religious values, while the habituation approach in the faith-based school reinforces worship practices and religiously oriented social interactions.

Both models make a significant contribution to students' religious character development. The contextual strategy enables students to relate religious values to real-life challenges in their environment, while the habituation strategy creates an environment that supports consistency in religious behavior. These findings are consistent with Nucci and Narvaez's view on the importance of combining value education based on moral analysis with habituation in order to build a holistic character[24].

The integrative approach adopted by IRE teachers also fosters a school climate that is more conducive to the natural internalization of religious values. With documented and scheduled programs in place, both instructional and habituation activities are carried out systematically. This strengthens the school culture in supporting students' spiritual and moral development, which in turn has a positive impact on their behavior both inside and outside the school.

3.2 Implications of Religious Extracurricular Activities for Religious Character

Based on the study's findings, religious extracurricular activities in the two schools have different forms and orientations, yet both contribute to the formation of students' religious character. At SMA Karya Pembangunan 2, extracurricular activities are designed with an inclusive approach, involving students from diverse religious backgrounds. One such activity is tolerance seminars and interfaith dialogue, aimed at fostering mutual respect amid diversity. Interview data indicate that 78% of students reported that these activities helped them increase their respect for differences in belief and culture. This approach aligns with Banks' (2008) concept of *multicultural*

education, which emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural learning to build a tolerant society.

In contrast, at SMA Muhammadiyah 4, religious extracurricular activities are more intensive and focus on strengthening internal religious competence. The *tahfidz* (Qur'anic memorization) program is one of the main activities, with a target of memorizing at least one *juz* per year. Observations reveal that students with greater memorization achievements tend to demonstrate better time discipline, responsibility, and consistency in worship. This finding is consistent with Hattie's view on the role of deliberate practice in shaping positive, internalized habits[25]. An IRE teacher at SMA Muhammadiyah 4 described the benefits of the *tahfidz* program as follows:

> "Tahfidz is not just about memorization. The students learn discipline, time management, and responsibility. They get used to organizing their daily schedules to maintain their memorization." *(IRE Teacher, interview, March 18, 2025)*

Program documentation highlights the difference in emphasis: SMA Karya Pembangunan 2's activity calendar features thematic events based on values of tolerance and social awareness, while SMA Muhammadiyah 4's routine schedule focuses on worship habituation and strengthening Qur'anic memorization.

These findings indicate that religious extracurricular activities have varied implications for religious character formation, depending on the approach taken. The inclusive approach in public schools contributes to strengthening values of tolerance and openness, whereas the intensive approach in faith-based schools reinforces discipline, responsibility, and perseverance in worship.

Both models complement each other within the framework of religious character education. The inclusive approach is relevant for shaping a generation capable of living harmoniously in diversity, while the intensive approach is effective in fostering spiritual depth and consistency in religious practice. These findings support Lickona's view that effective character education combines the dimensions of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action* within an environment that suits students' contexts[21].

3.3   Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The findings indicate that the success of religious character development through extracurricular activities in both schools is influenced by a combination of context-specific supporting and inhibiting factors. The primary supporting factor in both schools is the presence of strong collaboration among stakeholders. At SMA Muhammadiyah 4, synergy between IRE teachers, parents, and the surrounding community is clearly evident through the *home visit* program. This initiative enables teachers to monitor students' religious practices and behavior at home, while providing direct feedback to parents. This approach is consistent with Epstein's perspective on the importance of school–family–community partnerships in strengthening character education[26]. An IRE teacher at SMA Muhammadiyah 4 explained:

> "Through home visits, we can see how students practice religious teachings at home. Parents also feel supported because we provide practical suggestions for guiding their children." *(IRE Teacher, interview, March 19, 2025)*

In contrast, at SMA Karya Pembangunan 2, the main challenge arises from diverse religious understandings among students. These varying backgrounds influence how students interpret and apply religious teachings, requiring teachers to adopt differentiated instruction strategies to ensure the material is accessible and meaningful to all learners. This condition aligns with Tomlinson's [27] finding that differentiation becomes essential in highly diverse classrooms, particularly when dealing with values and beliefs.

Another supporting factor identified at SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 is the school management's openness to tolerance-based and interfaith dialogue programs. This creates a safe learning space for students to explore religious values inclusively, without neglecting their own religious identity.

Overall, cross-stakeholder collaboration emerges as the primary strength supporting program success, while differences in religious understanding constitute the main challenge, requiring adaptive and culturally sensitive instructional approaches. A strategy that combines stakeholder cooperation with differentiated learning is considered the most effective way to optimize religious character development in both school contexts.

4 Discussion

The findings indicate that the efforts of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' religious character through extracurricular activities are shaped by different strategic orientations between SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 and SMA Muhammadiyah 4. In SMA Karya Pembangunan 2, the integration of religious values into classroom learning is complemented by inclusive extracurricular programs, such as interfaith tolerance seminars, which encourage critical engagement with moral issues in a plural environment. This aligns with Lickona's *moral reasoning* framework, which emphasizes engaging students in ethical analysis to strengthen moral judgment [21], [24]. In contrast, SMA Muhammadiyah 4 adopts a more intensive habituation approach through structured programs like daily *muhasabah*, peer mentoring, and *tahfidz*, resonating with Bandura's social learning theory that behavior is reinforced through consistent modeling and social interaction[23].

In the context of character education theory, both approaches address the *moral knowing–moral feeling–moral action* continuum[21], albeit with different emphases. The inclusive model fosters openness, empathy, and respect for diversity qualities crucial in pluralistic societies while the intensive model strengthens spiritual discipline, time management, and religious practice consistency. These complementary outcomes suggest that combining contextualized value integration with habitual practice may produce a more holistic religious character formation.

In terms of supporting factors, strong stakeholder collaboration emerged as a key enabler in both schools. In SMA Muhammadiyah 4, the synergy between PAI teachers, parents, and local communities is evident in *home visit* programs, enabling monitoring of students' religious practices at home and aligning school–family expectations. This reflects Epstein's theory of school–family–community partnership, which highlights

the importance of cohesive networks in character development[26]. Conversely, in SMA Karya Pembangunan 2, the school's openness to dialogue-based and tolerance-oriented programs serves as a cultural asset that supports inclusive religious education.

However, constraints differ across contexts. SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 faces the challenge of varying levels of religious understanding among students, requiring differentiated instructional strategies to ensure accessibility and relevance of moral lessons. This reflects Tomlinson's argument that differentiated instruction is essential in culturally and religiously diverse classrooms. While SMA Muhammadiyah 4 demonstrates strong program consistency, the intensity of its religious routines may limit cross-cultural exposure, which could be addressed through selective integration of inclusive activities without compromising religious depth.

The gap between these models highlights the need for adaptive program design that contextualizes religious extracurricular activities to school demographics. As argued by Banks[28], character education in diverse settings must balance the reinforcement of internal group identity with the cultivation of intergroup respect. Policy-wise, such adaptive designs align with the Ministry of Education's emphasis on *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK), which advocates for integrating religious values into both curricular and extracurricular domains through context-sensitive strategies.

5   Conclusion

This study concludes that the efforts of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' religious character through extracurricular practices in SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 and SMA Muhammadiyah 4 are shaped by distinct but complementary approaches. SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 applies a contextualized and inclusive model, integrating religious values with contemporary social issues and promoting tolerance through interfaith-oriented extracurricular programs. This approach effectively develops students' moral reasoning, empathy, and respect for diversity.

Conversely, SMA Muhammadiyah 4 implements an intensive habituation model, emphasizing structured routines such as daily *muhasabah*, peer mentoring, and *tahfidz*. This strategy strengthens discipline, responsibility, and consistency in religious practice, fostering deep spiritual engagement among students.

The research also identifies strong stakeholder collaboration as a key supporting factor, particularly the synergy between teachers, parents, and the community in SMA Muhammadiyah 4 through home visit programs. Meanwhile, the main challenge in SMA Karya Pembangunan 2 lies in the variation of students' religious understanding, which requires differentiated instructional strategies to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

Overall, both approaches demonstrate that religious character education is most effective when integrating moral knowledge with habitual practice, adapted to the sociocultural context of the school. Combining inclusivity with spiritual depth may offer a holistic framework for character development, aligning with the principles of

Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) and responsive to the needs of diverse educational environments.

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