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Teacher's Learning Strategies in Islamic Religious Education for Instilling Students' Noble Character

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the learning strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in instilling students' noble character (*akhlakul karimah*) at SMA Riyadlul Ulum Sukoharjo, North Lampung. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a field study design. Data collection techniques include participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research subjects consisted of the school principal, PAI teachers, and students. Data analysis used the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, and data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The results indicate that PAI teachers implement five learning strategies: (1) direct instruction, (2) indirect instruction, (3) interactive instruction, (4) independent; (5) experiential learning. These five strategies proved effective in shaping students' religious, disciplined, honest, and responsible character. The main supporting factor is teacher role modeling and school culture, while inhibiting factors include social media influence and time constraints.

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Keywords:

learning strategies;
PAI teacher;
noble character

INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially not merely a process of knowledge transfer, but also a means of shaping holistic human character and personality. In the context of Indonesia, with its ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, education plays an important role in instilling national values, tolerance, and noble morals that align with the nation's identity (Erviana & Nugraheni, 2024). However, the challenges of character education are increasing in this modern era, particularly amidst the rapid currents of globalization and digital technology penetration that bring various influences to students' behavior and morals. The phenomenon of student moral degradation, such as declining politeness, weak discipline, and reduced spirit of togetherness, serves as a warning that value education has not been fully internalized within the formal education system. According to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2022) report, there has been an increase in cases of moral violations and juvenile delinquency involving secondary school students, indicating weak internalization of moral values in the educational process.

The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, places great emphasis on the development of human morals. Allah SWT affirms the importance of moral role modeling in human life as stated in QS. Al-Ahzab: 21, which declares that in the Messenger of Allah there is an excellent example for those who hope for Allah's mercy and the Last Day and remember Allah much. This verse shows that the formation of noble character (*akhlakul karimah*) in education must emulate the morals of Prophet Muhammad SAW as an ideal educational model. Furthermore, QS. Al-Qalam: 4 affirms that Prophet Muhammad SAW indeed possesses great moral character, making morals a fundamental aspect of a Muslim's life (Shihab, 2020). Therefore, Islamic religious education in schools bears significant responsibility in shaping students' character to possess noble character reflected in their attitudes, behaviors, and social lives.

In facing these challenges, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers hold a strategic role as character-shaping agents. PAI teachers are not only tasked with transferring religious knowledge but also function as moral developers and moral role models (Muhaimin, 2019). According to Muhaimin (2019), religious teachers must be able to guide students holistically, covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, so that religious values are truly internalized in daily behavior. The success of teachers in instilling morals greatly depends on the learning strategies they use. Good learning strategies must not only be theory-based

but also relevant to the context, applicable in real life, and touch students' emotional aspects (Sanjaya, 2016). PAI learning often faces various challenges, both in terms of student learning strategies, limitations in teaching methods, and the demands of the times that require more creative and innovative learning approaches (Nurjanah, 2020).

Preliminary observations conducted at SMA Riyadlul Ulum Sukoharjo, North Lampung, indicated that PAI teachers have been striving to instill noble character values through various classroom and extracurricular learning activities. Based on pre-survey results, teachers use several learning strategies such as direct instruction, indirect instruction, interactive instruction, independent study, and experiential learning. These strategies are implemented through religious discussions, worship practice, social activities, and positive behavior habituation in the school environment. However, the initial observations also revealed some problems related to the formation of students' noble character. Some students still showed a lack of discipline, such as arriving late to school, not paying attention during the learning process, and lacking etiquette in interactions with peers. This indicates that efforts to instill noble character still require more effective and sustainable learning strategies.

Furthermore, the social environment and the development of information technology also become factors influencing students' behavior. Access to increasingly widespread social media can have both positive and negative impacts on students' character formation (Zainuddin, 2020). Therefore, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers becomes very important in providing guidance, direction, and good role models so that students can distinguish behaviors that align with Islamic teachings. Based on these pre-survey results, it can be concluded that PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum have made various efforts to instill noble character, but a more in-depth study of the learning strategies used is still needed.

Relevant studies supporting this research include research by Pasariabu, Pohan, and Najari (2023) entitled "Strategi Interaksi Guru PAI dalam Membentuk Akhlakul Karimah Siswa" (PAI Teacher Interaction Strategies in Forming Students' Noble Character). This research revealed that social interaction strategies between teachers and students are key to success in forming noble morals, using direct approaches, worship habituation (such as congregational prayers), and emotional closeness with students. The results showed that two-way interaction is highly emphasized so that students feel valued and are more easily guided. Another study by Caesar, Abdullah, and Ulfah (2023) entitled "Strategi Guru

Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Pembentukan Akhlakul Karimah Siswa di Rumah Qur'an Al-Muslimun Surakarta" (Strategies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Forming Students' Noble Character at Rumah Qur'an Al-Muslimun Surakarta) explained that PAI teachers utilize various methods such as role modeling, habituation, inspirational storytelling, and reinforcement in routine activities to shape student character. These strategies are combined with religious extracurricular activities that support the application of Islamic values in real life.

The third study by Musadat and Khorimah (2024) entitled "Strategi Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Membina dan Membentuk Akhlakul Karimah Siswa (Studi Etnografi di SMP Negeri 2 Donomulyo)" (Strategies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Developing and Forming Students' Noble Character: An Ethnographic Study at SMP Negeri 2 Donomulyo) used an ethnographic approach that emphasized the importance of understanding students' social and cultural backgrounds. Moral development strategies were carried out using habituation, direction, reward and punishment, and consistent role modeling. This study also emphasized the importance of synergy between teachers and the school environment. From these three studies, it appears that role modeling, worship habituation, personal approaches, advice-giving, and religious activities are common methods used by PAI teachers. However, these studies have not specifically examined the integrated implementation of the five learning strategies (direct, indirect, interactive, independent, and experiential) in Islamic boarding school-based senior high schools.

The novelty of this research lies in examining PAI teachers' learning strategies in instilling noble character, classified based on the instructional approaches framework from Saskatchewan Education (1991), which includes direct instruction, indirect instruction, interactive instruction, independent study, and experiential learning. This research integrates these five strategies in the context of a pesantren-based school with a strong religious culture, thus providing a holistic picture of how PAI teachers not only explicitly teach moral values but also create an environment that supports value internalization through habituation, interaction, independence, and direct experience. Thus, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic education science and practically for PAI teachers and madrasah administrators in designing more effective and contextual moral learning strategies.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand in-depth phenomena about the learning strategies used by PAI teachers in instilling noble character, not to measure variable relationships statistically. According to Sugiyono (2017), qualitative research is a method used to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically and deeply in a natural context. The approach used is phenomenology, which, according to Creswell (2014), focuses on understanding a person's subjective experience of a phenomenon in a deep and comprehensive manner. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it aims to describe the meaning of PAI teachers' experiences in implementing moral learning strategies. The research location was SMA Riyadlul Ulum Sukoharjo, Abung Surakarta District, North Lampung Regency. This school was chosen because it is a pesantren-based educational institution with a strong commitment to moral development and has implemented various contextual PAI learning strategies.

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting informants based on relevance to the research focus and their ability to provide rich, comprehensive information about the phenomenon under study (Sugiyono, 2017; Creswell, 2014). The selection of informants was guided by specific criteria to ensure data quality and representativeness. The research informants included the school principal, selected due to their strategic position in overseeing the overall implementation of character education policies and programs at the macro level. Two PAI teachers were selected based on the following criteria: (a) having a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience at SMA Riyadlul Ulum to ensure understanding of the school's religious culture and student characteristics; (b) being directly involved in implementing daily moral learning strategies; (c) holding responsibility for curriculum development and character assessment; and (d) being recognized by the principal and peers as actively developing religious programs.

The selection of six student informants employed stratified purposive sampling based on the following categories: (1) grade level, with 2 students from each of grades X, XI, and XII to capture variations in moral development across different levels and ensure perspectives from both new and senior students; (2) academic performance, consisting of 1 student with above-average achievement and 1 student with average performance per grade

to obtain diverse perspectives on how different academic profiles experience moral learning; (3) behavioral records, including students with documented exemplary conduct and those with behavioral improvement needs to gain insights from both ends of the spectrum and understand strategy effectiveness for different student profiles; (4) teacher recommendations, where students were nominated by PAI teachers and homeroom teachers based on communication skills, willingness to share honest perspectives, active participation in religious activities, and varying involvement levels in moral programs; and (5) involvement in school activities, combining students active in formal organizations (Student Council, Rohis, Scouts) and less active students to obtain perspectives both through structured programs and informal school experiences. The student selection procedure involved the following steps: (a) the researcher obtained student lists and academic/behavioral records from the school administration; (b) PAI teachers and homeroom teachers collaboratively identified potential student informants meeting the specified criteria; (c) the researcher conducted initial discussions with recommended students to assess their willingness to participate and communication readiness; and (d) final selection was confirmed through discussion between the researcher, PAI teachers, and the school principal to ensure balanced representation across all categories.

Table 1. Research Informants

No	Informant Code	Position	Selection Criteria	Number
1	W.01/KS/02-2026	Principal	Strategic policy oversight, institutional knowledge	1
2	W.02/GP/02-2026	PAI Teachers	≥3 years teaching, involved in moral programs, recognized role	2
3	W.03/S/02-2026	Students	Stratified by grade, academic performance, behavior, teacher recommendations, activity involvement	6
Total				9

The total number of informants was adjusted to the principle of data saturation, where data collection is stopped when no new information is found (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The sample size of 9 informants (1 principal, 2 PAI teachers, 6 students) is consistent with qualitative research standards where depth of information takes precedence over quantity, and saturation is achieved through comprehensive exploration with strategically selected informants (Morse, 2000; Sandelowski, 1995).

Data collection techniques used three methods: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation study. Observation was conducted to directly observe the PAI learning process in the classroom, teacher-student interactions, and religious activities supporting the instillation of moral values. Observations were carried out participatively so that researchers could obtain natural and contextual data. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school principal, PAI teachers, and students to explore detailed information about the strategies implemented, their effectiveness, and their impact on students' attitudes and morals (Moleong, 2017). Documentation was used to complement data from observations and interviews, including syllabi, lesson plans (RPP), school rules, activity photographs, meeting minutes, and other documents showing character education practices at the school. The main research instrument was the researcher himself, supported by auxiliary instruments in the form of observation guides, interview guides, and documentation sheets. Data validity was tested using three techniques: source and technique triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULTS

PAI Teacher's Direct Learning Strategy

The results show that PAI teachers applied direct instruction as one of the main approaches in instilling noble character. Based on an interview with the School Principal, Mr. Ahmad Muhajir, S.Pd., Gr., he stated that PAI teachers use the interactive lecture method, which combines contextual explanations, dialogue, and giving real-life examples. This method emphasizes the delivery of material based on normative evidence (Qur'an and Hadith) so that students understand that praiseworthy behavior has a strong foundation in religious teachings. A PAI teacher, Mrs. Siti Zulaikha, S.Pd.I., Gr., explained that direct instruction is carried out through structured delivery of moral material in class, explaining the concept of noble character based on the Qur'an and Hadith, then providing concrete examples in daily life such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility. After that, students are asked to practice through assignments and habituation.

The implementation of direct instruction includes several forms of activities. First, explicit teaching of moral values where the teacher directly explains the concept of noble character based on the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as stories of the exemplary character of

Prophet Muhammad SAW. The material is not only theoretical but is explained in terms of meaning, purpose, and relevance to students' daily lives, such as honesty in learning, discipline in attending class, respect for teachers and parents, and responsibility for assignments. The goal is to form a cognitive understanding that morality is a religious command, not merely a school rule. Second, the teacher as a model (*uswah hasanah*) by demonstrating polite speech, arriving on time, treating all students fairly, and habituating greetings, smiles, greetings, and prayers before starting teaching and learning activities. Students learn through direct observation of the teacher's behavior because morals are easier to imitate than just heard. Third, programmed habituation through routine activities such as reading prayers before and after lessons, reciting the Qur'an (*tadarus*) before learning begins, a greeting and handshake program with teachers, and assignments to maintain classroom cleanliness as a form of responsibility.

Fourth, direct reinforcement and correction, where the teacher gives immediate appreciation to students who show good behavior (praise, extra points, or recognition in class) as well as educative reprimands if violations occur, accompanied by an explanation of the religious value that was violated. This approach is educational, not punitive, aiming to form moral awareness through positive reinforcement and behavior improvement. Fifth, the use of directed lectures and question-and-answer sessions, where the teacher uses lectures not just to convey material but to connect material with the reality of adolescent life, give examples of moral cases at school, and invite students to reflect on their behavior. Sixth, direct attitude assessment (authentic assessment) through daily behavior observation, student discipline, ways of speaking and interacting, and responsibility for assignments. The teacher continuously monitors so that morals are not only displayed during lessons but become life habits.

Indirect Learning Strategy

The indirect instruction strategy was applied by PAI teachers through role modeling and habituation in shaping students' noble character. Based on an interview with the School Principal, indirect instruction is manifested in religious culture such as habituating greetings when meeting fellow Muslims, praying before and after learning, habituating congregational prayers, and emulating the good attitudes and speech of teachers. The PAI teacher added that this strategy is carried out through teacher role modeling, habituation of

school culture, and character reinforcement. Teachers must first be examples, such as arriving on time, speaking politely, and maintaining a good attitude.

The implementation of indirect instruction includes: (a) religious habituation in school culture through routine activities such as reciting the Qur'an before learning, praying together at the beginning and end of activities, a culture of greetings, smiles, greetings, politeness, congregational prayers, and other religious activities. These activities are not always explained as "lesson material," but are carried out continuously so that they become habits that naturally shape students' character. (b) Teacher role modeling in daily life, where attitudes such as patience in dealing with students, honesty and responsibility in duties, modest dress, and polite speech are observed and spontaneously imitated by students. (c) Creating a conducive educational environment by instilling a culture of mutual respect, habituating deliberation in problem-solving, directing students to help each other, and gently reprimanding if bad behavior occurs. (d) Assignments containing values of responsibility, such as group work tasks to train cooperation, responsibility for maintaining classroom cleanliness, social activities or caring for others, and self-reflection on daily behavior. (e) Guidance through a personal approach by giving informal advice outside of lesson hours, inviting dialogue when violations occur, and providing motivation without judgment. (f) Integration of moral values in non-learning activities such as school religious activities, commemoration of Islamic holidays, social and togetherness activities, and daily interactions among school members.

Table 2. Religious Habituation Activities at SMA Riyadlul Ulum

Time Frame	Program Activity	Character Values Developed
Daily	Qur'anic recitation (<i>tadarus</i>) before lessons	Love for the Qur'an, discipline
Daily	Collective prayers before and after lessons	Gratitude, reliance on Allah (<i>tawakal</i>)
Daily	Congregational Dhuha prayer	Discipline, spiritual balance
Daily	Congregational Dhuhur prayer	Brotherhood (<i>ukhuwah</i>), togetherness
Weekly	Friday religious programs (Istighosah, Khatmil Qur'an)	Moderation (<i>tawassuth</i>), <i>ukhuwah</i>
Monthly	Social service activities (charity, community service)	Social care, empathy
Yearly	Islamic Holiday Commemorations (PHBI)	Nationalism, <i>ukhuwah</i>

Interactive Learning Strategy

The use of interactive instruction in PAI is an effort to instill noble character through active student involvement in the learning process. Based on an interview with the School Principal, teachers apply group discussions and question-and-answer sessions as part of the active learning approach, so that students become more interactive and can cooperate in solving moral case studies. The PAI teacher explained that interactive strategies are carried out through group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and case studies. For example, students are asked to analyze adolescent moral problems, then find solutions based on Islamic values. This way, students actively think and understand the meaning of morals deeply.

The implementation of interactive strategies includes: (a) group discussions to understand moral values, where the teacher divides students into small groups to discuss themes such as the importance of honesty in student life, respect for parents and teachers, how to maintain *ukhuwah* with friends, and the impact of undisciplined behavior. Students are asked to analyze cases, express opinions, and find solutions based on Islamic teachings. (b) Reflective question-and-answer to foster moral awareness, with questions such as "Why must we speak honestly even when it's difficult?", "What should our attitude be if we see a friend making a mistake?", "What are the consequences of not respecting teachers?" These questions encourage students to think critically and connect religious values with their own experiences. (c) Collaboration in assignments and religious activities, such as making presentations about examples of noble character in adolescent life, carrying out social service activities, practicing deliberation in solving group problems. (d) Case studies and joint problem-solving, where the teacher presents situations close to students' lives such as cheating during exams, conflicts between friends, lack of discipline during teaching and learning activities. Students are asked to discuss solutions based on Qur'anic and Hadith values. (e) Presentations and mutual feedback, where each group presents their discussion results, then other groups provide responses politely, training speaking etiquette, respectful listening skills, and respect for differing opinions.

Independent Learning Strategy

PAI teachers guide students to engage in independent study as part of forming noble character by emphasizing the process of value internalization through personal awareness, not only through teacher supervision. Based on an interview with the School Principal, teachers give self-reflection assignments, daily moral journals, and assignments to read

religious evidence and stories of the prophets and messengers. These activities aim to foster students' awareness to understand moral values based on Islamic sources, while encouraging them to evaluate themselves and emulate the noble behavior of the prophets. The PAI teacher added that students are asked to evaluate their own attitudes, for example whether they have been honest, disciplined, or respectful of parents and teachers.

The implementation of independent strategies includes: (a) self-reflection (*muhasabah*) after learning with questions such as "What good behavior have I done today?", "What attitudes still need improvement?", "How do I apply moral material at home and school?" This reflection helps students realize that moral learning is directly related to personal life, so that awareness grows to improve themselves without always being reminded. (b) Writing a daily moral journal containing records of good behavior done, experiences of facing conflicts or temptations to do bad deeds, and plans for future attitude improvement. The teacher does not judge right or wrong rigidly but provides feedback in the form of motivation and direction. (c) Assignments to read and understand religious evidence, where the teacher gives assignments to read Qur'anic verses or Hadith about morals, then students are asked to explain the meaning of the evidence in their own words, connect the evidence with real experiences, and provide examples of its application in student life. (d) Assignments for independent moral practice, such as helping parents at home and then writing about their experiences, practicing disciplined or honest attitudes for one week, doing good deeds for friends without being asked. (e) Guidance with a motivational rather than instructional approach, where the teacher acts as a guide providing direction and role models, motivating students to improve themselves, and not always controlling but fostering internal awareness.

Table 3. Example of Self-Reflection Assignment (Daily Moral Journal)

No.	Day	Positive Behaviour Demonstrated	Behaviour Requiring Improvement	Planned Improvement Strategy
1	Monday	Assisted a peer experiencing learning difficulties	Tardiness to school	Depart earlier from home
2	Tuesday	Demonstrated politeness toward the teacher	Failure to complete homework	Maintain a structured assignment log
3	Wednesday	Returned a misplaced belonging to its owner	Use of inappropriate language during play	Develop emotional regulation skills

Experiential Learning Strategy

The implementation of experiential learning by PAI teachers emphasizes the learning process through direct experience, so that students not only know the concept of noble character but also feel and practice it in real life. Based on an interview with the School Principal, experiential learning is carried out through social activities, community service, direct worship practice, and school organization activities to instill a sense of responsibility and leadership. The PAI teacher added that students are involved in real activities such as community service, worship practice, school organization activities, and community service, so that students learn responsibility, caring, and leadership directly.

The implementation of experiential strategies includes: (a) direct practice of moral values in school activities, such as habituating punctuality as a form of responsibility, maintaining classroom cleanliness as a form of trustworthiness (*amanah*) and environmental care, helping friends who have difficulty learning as an implementation of mutual help (*ta'awun*). (b) Religious activities as a medium for spiritual experience, such as congregational prayers at school, joint Qur'an recitation, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and religious social activities. (c) Learning through role modeling and real interaction, where teachers demonstrate noble character in daily life, such as speaking politely, being fair and patient, showing responsibility in duties. (d) Assignments for moral practice at home and in the community, for example helping parents at home and then reporting their experiences, maintaining politeness in social interactions, carrying out simple social activities. (e) Reflection on experience to strengthen value internalization, where after carrying out activities, the teacher invites students to tell about the experiences they felt, conclude the moral lessons learned, and assess the attitude changes that occurred in themselves.

Table 4. Forms of Experiential Learning Activities at SMA Riyadlul Ulum

No.	Category	Illustrative Activities	Character Values Developed
1	Worship-Based Practice	Congregational Dhuha prayer, structured Qur'anic recitation	Discipline, spiritual awareness
2	Social Engagement	Community service, blood donation, orphan support programs	Empathy, social responsibility
3	Student Organizations	Student council, Scouting, Rohis, PMR, Paskibra	Leadership, responsibility
4	Daily Life Habituation	Punctuality, classroom duties, proper waste management	Discipline, integrity (<i>amanah</i>)
5	Public Speaking	MC training, Friday sermon	Confidence,

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Direct Learning Strategy in Instilling Morals

The results show that the direct instruction strategy applied by PAI teachers includes interactive lectures, explanation of religious evidence, giving concrete examples, and structured assignments. This strategy proves to provide a strong cognitive foundation for students about the values of noble character. This finding aligns with Kemp's theory (2015) stating that direct instruction is effective for teaching declarative and procedural knowledge in a gradual manner. In the context of PAI, direct instruction serves as a means of value internalization because it not only transfers knowledge but also shapes students' character and religious habits (Huda, 2021). This is also in line with national education policy emphasizing that character education must be integrated into the learning process in schools (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 20 of 2018). PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum have made the classroom a space for value internalization, not merely knowledge transfer. This approach is effective because character formation is not sufficient through theory alone but requires an environment that supports the habituation of moral values (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 3).

Effectiveness of Indirect Strategy through Role Modeling and Habituation

The indirect instruction strategy implemented through teacher role modeling and religious culture habituation proved highly effective. Teachers not only deliver material but also create a religious environment that encourages students to discover the meaning of morals through learning experiences. This finding reinforces the theory that role modeling is the most fundamental method in Islamic education, as moral values are more easily absorbed through real examples than verbal instruction (Ministry of Religious Affairs of RI, 2020). Habituation of greetings, praying together, congregational prayers, and punctuality become media for internalizing values that occur naturally. Research by Pasariabu et al. (2023) also revealed that social interaction between teachers and students is key to successfully forming noble morals. At SMA Riyadlul Ulum, a conducive school culture becomes a medium for value internalization because students learn through repeated experiences (habituation). This approach aligns with the national education concept that places schools as strategic environments in building dignified national character and

civilization (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). Furthermore, research by Caesar et al. (2023) shows that role modeling and habituation methods combined with inspirational storytelling effectively shape student character.

The Role of Interactive Strategy in Developing Social Awareness

The interactive instruction strategy through group discussions, reflective question-and-answer, and religious problem-solving proves to play a role in fostering students' social awareness and moral responsibility. Group discussions train students to respect others' opinions, cooperate, and develop tolerance and empathy. This finding aligns with the interactive learning theory proposed by Saskatchewan Education (1991) that this strategy aims to develop social skills, critical thinking, and conceptual understanding through the exchange of ideas. In the context of PAI, interactive learning makes students not only hear but also experience, discuss, and practice moral values. Research by Musadat and Khorimah (2024) using an ethnographic approach also emphasized the importance of understanding students' socio-cultural backgrounds to make interactive strategies more effective. PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum successfully created reflective dialogues that awaken students' moral awareness, for example with critical questions about honesty, discipline, and responsibility. This encourages students not only to know moral concepts but also to understand the reasons and importance of applying these values in daily life.

Contribution of Independent Strategy in Forming Internal Awareness

The application of independent study strategies through self-reflection, daily moral journals, and assignments to read religious evidence encourages the formation of students' internal awareness in behaving morally. This strategy shows that moral education is not sufficient only through teacher supervision but must develop into students' personal needs. This finding aligns with the independent study theory from Saskatchewan Education (1991) stating that this strategy encourages students to learn independently by managing their own time, resources, and learning goals. In the PAI context, self-reflection tasks (*muhasabah*) help students realize that moral learning is directly related to personal life. Research by Zaini, Muda, and Khoiri (2018) emphasizes that active learning strategies emphasizing student independence are effective in value internalization. PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum provide feedback in the form of motivation and direction, not rigid assessment, so that students feel appreciated and encouraged to improve themselves. Learning independence makes noble character part of their personality, not merely a school

obligation. This is also supported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2020), which emphasizes that PAI teachers must be able to implement learning that develops soft skills and character through a flexible and contextual curriculum.

Impact of Experiential Strategy on Behavior Formation

The experiential learning strategy proved to have the most significant impact on shaping student behavior. Through activities such as worship practice, community service, school organization activities, and involvement in religious activities, students gain direct experience of the meaning of Islamic values. This finding reinforces the experiential learning theory proposed by Saskatchewan Education (1991) that this strategy focuses on learning through direct experience such as simulations, role-playing, case studies, and field activities. In this approach, students not only receive values normatively but also experience firsthand the processes of empathy, responsibility, honesty, and social care. Research by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2021) in the Implementation Guide for the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes experiential learning and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum successfully integrated moral values into students' daily activities, such as congregational prayers, recitation, public speaking, and community service. These concrete experiences proved more effective in shaping moral awareness compared to lecture methods alone because students are emotionally and socially involved in the learning process.

Synergy of the Five Strategies in Forming Holistic Character

This research found that the five learning strategies (direct, indirect, interactive, independent, and experiential) do not stand alone but complement each other in shaping students' character holistically. Direct strategy provides a cognitive foundation, indirect strategy instills values through role modeling and school culture, interactive strategy develops social awareness, independent strategy builds internal awareness, and experiential strategy strengthens values through real practice. This synergy aligns with the character education concept that demands harmonization of heart, feeling, thought, and body (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). The PAI learning implemented by teachers reflects the function of religious education as a means of fostering faith, piety, and noble character in students (Ministry of Religious Affairs of RI Number 183 of 2020). This is evident from the integration of moral material with real practice in the school environment. Research by Huda (2021) also emphasized that strengthening character education based on PAI in Islamic senior high schools requires an integrated approach between classroom

learning, habituation, and role modeling. Thus, the success of instilling noble character is not determined by a single method but by the synergy of learning strategies, teacher role modeling, school culture, and active student involvement in the learning process.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Strategy Implementation

This research identified several supporting factors for implementing moral learning strategies. The main factor is consistent teacher role modeling and a strong religious school culture. The pesantren environment that forms the basis of SMA Riyadlul Ulum provides significant support because all academic and non-academic activities are directed toward shaping Islamic character. Habituation programs such as congregational prayers, morning recitation, greeting culture, and politeness toward teachers become effective media for value internalization. Additionally, the principal's support in the form of policies and character evaluation of students through teacher council meetings, daily attitude observations, homeroom teacher reports, and coordination with dormitory supervisors serves as reinforcing factors. The main inhibiting factor is external influence, especially social media, which has a negative impact on student behavior. The PAI teacher acknowledged that obstacles usually come from external influences, such as social media, but with consistent habituation, students can gradually be directed. Time constraints are also a challenge because character formation requires a long and continuous process. Research by Zainuddin (2020) on information technology in Islamic education also highlighted that access to social media can have both positive and negative impacts, so the teacher's role in providing guidance and digital literacy becomes very important.

Relevance to National Education Policy and the Merdeka Curriculum

The results showed that the learning strategies of PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum align with the direction of government policy in strengthening character education and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 20 of 2018 emphasizes that strengthening character education aims to improve the quality of the educational process through the application of moral values in learning activities. Instilling noble character is not only directed at understanding the concepts of right and wrong but also at forming inner attitudes and real habits in daily behavior. The Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes experiential learning and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (faith, noble character, independence, mutual cooperation, global diversity, critical reasoning, and creativity), is highly relevant to the learning strategies

applied by PAI teachers. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (2020) also emphasizes that PAI teachers must be able to implement learning that develops soft skills and character through a flexible and contextual curriculum. Integrating character values with a contextual approach, for example connecting moral material with social media use, digital ethics, and responsibility as citizens, becomes important so that religious education does not seem normative but is able to address the realities of the times. Thus, noble character education serves as a moral fortress as well as an ethical guide in facing rapid social change.

Implications for PAI Teacher Professional Development

The findings of this research have important implications for the professional development of PAI teachers. PAI teachers are required not only to master religious material but also to have diverse pedagogical competencies, the ability to serve as role models (personality competence), and skills to integrate various learning strategies. The Competency Standards for Islamic Religious Education Teachers from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2020) emphasize the importance of role modeling as a personality competence in PAI learning. PAI teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum successfully demonstrated that teacher professionalism is not only required in pedagogical competence but also in personality and spiritual integrity. This is evident from the patient, honest, disciplined, and polite attitudes of teachers in daily life, which serve as models for students. Furthermore, PAI teachers need to continuously develop creativity in choosing and combining learning strategies. Teachers are not sufficient using only lecture methods but need to integrate interactive, reflective, and experiential learning so that moral values are more easily internalized by students. Research by Majid (2024) on learning strategies emphasizes the importance of varying methods to accommodate students' diverse learning styles. PAI teachers are also expected to pay more attention to moral development through personal approaches to students, because each student has a different background and character, thus requiring individual guidance, persuasive advice, and positive reinforcement so that behavioral changes can occur sustainably.

The Role of Parents and Community in Moral Education

Although this research focuses on learning strategies at school, the findings indicate that moral education cannot succeed without family and community support. The PAI teacher acknowledged that the main obstacles come from outside influences, including the social environment and social media that are difficult to control. Therefore, parental involvement is very necessary in instilling noble character, because the school cannot fully

supervise students at all times. Research by Sahlan (2020) on religious culture in schools emphasizes that synergy between schools, families, and communities is key to the success of character education. Parents need to synergize with schools in developing children's morals in the family environment, because character formation cannot be done at school alone but also requires primary family support. Moral education will not succeed without family support, because character formation takes place all the time, not only at school. The community also plays a role as a social environment where students internalize moral values. Thus, noble character education requires a holistic approach involving three main pillars: school, family, and community. Research by Ramayulis (2022) on Islamic education science also emphasizes that the goal of Islamic education is to form faithful, knowledgeable, and morally noble human beings, which can only be achieved through collaboration among all parties.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMA Riyadlul Ulum Sukoharjo apply five learning strategies in instilling noble character in students. First, direct instruction through interactive lectures, explanation of Qur'anic and Hadith evidence, giving concrete examples, and structured assignments, which provides a strong cognitive foundation for moral values. Second, indirect instruction through teacher role modeling, habituation of religious culture (greetings, prayers, congregational prayers, recitation), and creating a conducive educational environment, which instills moral values naturally through observation and habituation. Third, interactive instruction through group discussions, reflective question-and-answer, case studies, and collaboration, which develops social awareness, tolerance, empathy, and moral responsibility. Fourth, independent study through self-reflection (muhasabah), daily moral journals, assignments to read religious evidence, and independent moral practice assignments, which builds internal awareness and moral independence in students. Fifth, experiential learning through direct worship practice, social activities (community service, charity), school organization activities (student council, scouting, Rohis), and habituation of disciplined living, which provides real experience in practicing Islamic values so that morals are no longer abstract but become daily life practices.

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