

Strengthening character values through high-quality islamic religious education learning at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta in the 2025/2026 academic year

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the strengthening of character values through high-quality Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta in the 2025/2026 academic year. The research aims to analyze how the quality of IRE learning contributes to the development of students' character values, particularly in fostering religious attitudes, discipline, honesty, and responsibility. Strengthening character education through effective religious instruction is considered essential in responding to moral and social challenges among students in secondary education. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the learning process and its outcomes. The research involved 30 students as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The qualitative data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive percentage techniques to support the qualitative findings. The results indicate that high-quality IRE learning—implemented through interactive teaching methods, contextual learning materials, exemplary teacher behavior, and continuous evaluation—effectively strengthens students' character values. The findings show that 83% of students experienced an improvement in religious attitudes, 80% demonstrated increased discipline, 76% showed stronger honesty, and 78% exhibited enhanced responsibility in their daily school activities. These results suggest that the implementation of quality-oriented Islamic Religious Education plays a significant role in reinforcing students' character formation and can be categorized as effective in supporting character education at the junior high school level.

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Introduction

Character education has become a strategic issue in both national and global education systems in response to increasing moral, social, and cultural challenges among adolescent learners. Junior high schools occupy a crucial position in establishing the foundation of character values, as

students at this developmental stage are undergoing identity formation and value

internalization (Lickona, 2020: 45). Therefore, integrating character education into the learning process has become an urgent necessity.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a central role in strengthening character values because it encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions grounded in transcendental values. IRE learning is not solely intended to enhance religious understanding, but also to shape religious personalities, noble character, and social responsibility in everyday life (Suyanto & Jihad, 2021: 112).

The implementation of IRE learning in schools often encounters quality-related challenges, particularly when instruction remains oriented toward knowledge transmission and mastery of cognitive content. This condition results in a low level of internalization of character values as reflected in students' actual behavior within school and community settings (Rahman, 2022: 78).

Numerous studies indicate that learning quality has a significant correlation with the success of character education. Learning designs that are interactive, contextual, and reflective are able to enhance student engagement and strengthen the formation of attitudes and values (Hattie, 2020: 63). This finding underscores that learning quality constitutes a key factor in the effectiveness of character education.

Previous studies on character education through IRE have largely emphasized curriculum aspects, instructional methods, or the role of teachers in a partial manner. Research by Anwar and Salim (2021: 134) highlights the importance of IRE teachers' exemplary conduct, while Nasution's study (2023: 56) focuses more on the integration of character values into instructional planning.

Another study conducted by Kurniawan et al. (2022: 91) examined the effectiveness of value-based learning models in IRE subjects and found that contextual approaches were able to enhance students' religious attitudes. This research has not specifically linked the overall quality of IRE learning to the strengthening of character values within the Muhammadiyah school context.

International research has also emphasized the importance of the quality of religious education in shaping students' character. A study by Abdullah and Halstead (2020: 210) demonstrates that high-quality religious education contributes to the development of moral and civic values among secondary school students. The context of this research differs from the characteristics of Islamic education in Indonesia.

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited number of investigations that examine the strengthening of character values through high-quality IRE learning in a holistic manner, particularly at the junior high school level and within the context of Islamic organization-based schools such as Muhammadiyah. Studies that connect learning process quality, pedagogical strategies, and outcomes of students' character formation remain relatively scarce.

Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta possesses distinctive institutional characteristics, integrating Islamic values, Muhammadiyah principles, and character education within its learning practices. This context provides a relevant academic setting for in-depth investigation to obtain empirical insights into the implementation of high-quality IRE learning.

The novelty of this research lies in its analytical approach, which positions the quality of IRE learning as the primary variable in strengthening students' character values. Learning

quality is understood comprehensively, encompassing instructional planning, pedagogical strategies, teacher–student interactions, role modeling, and continuous evaluation.

This study also presents institutional novelty by focusing on Muhammadiyah schools, which have distinctive ideological and pedagogical characteristics. The research enriches the literature on Islamic education by presenting empirical practices of high-quality IRE learning within modern Islamic school environments.

The theoretical contribution of this study is reflected in the strengthening of an integrative concept linking the quality of IRE learning with character education. The findings are expected to expand the conceptual framework of character education based on Islamic values that is both applicable and contextual.

The practical contribution of this research is expected to provide strategic references for IRE teachers, school principals, and educational policymakers in designing IRE learning that is oriented toward character strengthening. The results may serve as a foundation for developing models of high-quality IRE learning at the secondary school level.

Policy contribution also constitutes an important aspect of this study. The empirical findings may serve as a basis for strengthening national character education policies, particularly in the development of religious learning that is responsive to the challenges of twenty-first-century education.

Accordingly, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education scholarship, enrich international discourse on character education, and offer best practices of high-quality IRE learning that are relevant for replication in similar educational contexts.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach supported by simple quantitative data. This approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the process of strengthening character values through high-quality Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning and to describe learning phenomena contextually within the school environment. The research design adopted a case study, which enabled an intensive and comprehensive examination of high-quality IRE learning practices in real settings, encompassing instructional planning, implementation, and evaluation oriented toward strengthening students' character values.

The study aimed to describe the implementation of high-quality Islamic Religious Education learning at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta, to analyze the process of strengthening students' character values through IRE learning, and to evaluate the achievement of character value reinforcement, including religious attitudes, discipline, honesty, and responsibility. The evaluation model applied was the CIPP model (Context, Input, Process, Product). Context evaluation focused on the alignment between IRE learning objectives and students' character development needs. Input evaluation examined the readiness of teachers, students, and learning facilities. Process evaluation analyzed the implementation of high-quality IRE learning in the classroom, while product evaluation was directed at students' character value outcomes as a result of the learning process.

The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta during the 2025/2026 academic year. The research subjects consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers and 30 students as the main informants, with the school principal serving as a

supporting informant. Data validity was ensured through technique and source triangulation. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and school authorities.

Data validity was further strengthened through peer debriefing and repeated verification of field findings.

Data collection techniques included classroom observations of IRE learning implementation, in-depth interviews with IRE teachers and the school principal, questionnaires administered to students to measure the strengthening of character values, and documentation in the form of instructional materials, activity reports, and other supporting data. The research procedure was conducted in several stages, comprising a preparation stage involving a preliminary study, instrument development, and research permission; a data collection stage through observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation; a data analysis stage involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing; and a reporting stage in which the research findings were presented in the form of a scientific article.

Result

This results section presents empirical findings on the implementation of character value strengthening through high-quality Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Surakarta in the 2025/2026 academic year. The findings were obtained through a systematic process of data collection and analysis based on the CIPP evaluation model, which encompasses the context, input, process, and product dimensions. The presentation of results focuses on the actual implementation of IRE learning, the level of resource readiness, the dynamics of the instructional process, and the outcomes of students' character value strengthening, including religiosity, discipline, honesty, and responsibility as the primary indicators of program effectiveness.

1. Context Evaluation

Context evaluation was conducted to assess the alignment of the school's vision and mission, the objectives of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning, and the need for strengthening students' character values at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta. The assessment was carried out through observations, interviews, and documentation.

Table 1. Scores of Context Evaluation Components

No	Context Component	Score (%)	Category
1	Alignment of the school's vision and mission with IRE	85	Good
2	School policy support for character education	82	Good
3	Students' need for character strengthening	80	Good
4	Religious and conducive school environment	86	Good
Average		83.25	Good

The average score indicates that the context of IRE learning has supported the strengthening of character values. The religious environment and school policies serve as dominant factors in building a character-based educational climate (Lickona, 2020: 45; Rahman, 2022: 78).

2. Input Evaluation

Input evaluation focused on the readiness of resources that support high-quality IRE learning.

Table 2. Scores of Input Evaluation Components

No	Input Component	Score (%)	Category
1	Competence of IRE teachers	84	Good
2	Students' readiness and motivation	78	Fair
3	Availability of learning facilities	80	Good
4	Instructional materials and lesson planning	83	Good
Average		81.25	Good

The competence of IRE teachers and instructional planning achieved high scores, indicating teachers' readiness to integrate character values into learning. Students' motivation was categorized as fair and requires strengthening through more participatory pedagogical approaches (Nasution, 2023: 56).

3. Process Evaluation

Process evaluation examined the implementation of high-quality IRE learning in the classroom.

Table 3. Scores of Process Evaluation Components

No	Process Component	Score (%)	Category
1	Interactive learning strategies	82	Good
2	Teachers' role modeling in learning	85	Good
3	Teacher-student interaction	80	Good
4	Character-based learning evaluation	78	Fair
Average		81.25	Good

The learning process demonstrated effectiveness in strengthening character values through teachers' role modeling and educational interaction. The evaluation of character-based learning requires the development of more systematic assessment instruments (Hattie, 2020: 63).

4. Product Evaluation

Product evaluation was directed at the achievement of students' character value strengthening.

Table 4. Scores of Product Evaluation Components

No	Character Value	Score (%)	Category
1	Religious attitude	83	Good
2	Discipline	80	Good

3	Honesty	76	Fair
4	Responsibility	78	Good
Average		79.25	Good

Religious attitude obtained the highest score and was reflected in students' participation in religious activities. Honesty was categorized as fair and requires continuous habituation through the strengthening of school culture (Kurniawan et al., 2022: 91).

5. Recapitulation of CIPP Evaluation Results

Table 5. Recapitulation of CIPP Evaluation Scores

CIPP Component	Average Score (%)	Category
Context	83.25	Good
Input	81.25	Good
Process	81.25	Good
Product	79.25	Good
Average	81.25	Good

The recapitulation indicates that high-quality IRE learning falls within the good category in supporting the strengthening of students' character values. The product component recorded the lowest score and therefore requires sustained pedagogical follow-up.

Based on the presentation of the research findings across the context, input, process, and product dimensions, it can be concluded that the implementation of high-quality Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Surakarta provides a comprehensive empirical portrayal of efforts to strengthen students' character values. The findings demonstrate an integrated relationship among school policies, resource readiness, instructional strategies, and students' character outcomes as key indicators of program success. These results affirm that PAI learning functions not merely as a means of transferring religious knowledge, but also as a strategic medium for the sustainable formation of students' attitudes and behaviors.

The concluding remarks of the research findings emphasize that strengthening character values through high-quality PAI learning requires systemic support and consistent implementation. Program effectiveness is strongly influenced by the continuity between instructional planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as by the active involvement of all school stakeholders in fostering a value-oriented educational culture. Therefore, these findings are expected to serve as a basis for reflection and further development aimed at improving the quality of PAI learning and strengthening character education at the junior secondary school level.

Discussion

The findings indicate that high-quality Islamic Religious Education learning at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta has supported the strengthening of students' character values. The alignment between the school's vision and a religious environment reinforces the context of character education, in line with Lickona's (2020: 45) emphasis on

the importance of a value-based school climate.

Adequate learning inputs, particularly the competence of IRE teachers, constitute a key factor in the successful implementation of character education. This finding supports Nasution's (2023: 56) assertion regarding the crucial role of teachers in value internalization.

In terms of process, teachers' role modeling and educational interaction proved effective in fostering students' religious attitudes and responsibility. This result is consistent with Hattie's (2020: 63) argument concerning the influence of instructional interaction quality on attitude formation.

Product evaluation shows that character strengthening is categorized as good, with religious values as the highest achievement. Honesty requires more intensive habituation strategies through the integration of school culture and continuous evaluation (Rahman, 2022: 78).

The research findings indicate that the implementation of character value reinforcement through high-quality Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Surakarta has been carried out in a structured manner and is aligned with the school's educational vision. PAI learning is oriented not only toward cognitive achievement but also toward the internalization of character values such as religiosity, discipline, honesty, and responsibility. These findings reinforce the view that character education is effective when it is integrated into core subjects and supported by a consistent school culture (Lickona, 2020).

From the contextual perspective, a religious school environment and school policies that support character education serve as an essential foundation for the implementation of high-quality PAI learning. Character values are strengthened through religious habituation, school regulations, and the exemplary conduct of all members of the school community. This condition is consistent with the findings of Rahman (2022), who emphasizes that a value-based school climate plays a significant role in shaping students' behavior and attitudes in a sustainable manner.

In terms of input, the competence of PAI teachers emerges as a key factor in the success of character value reinforcement. Teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral and spiritual role models for students. Learning planning that integrates character values into objectives, instructional materials, and assessment demonstrates teachers' readiness to implement high-quality PAI learning. This finding supports the study by Nasution (2023), which states that teacher quality has a direct influence on the effectiveness of character value internalization in schools.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that the availability of supporting resources and learning facilities still requires improvement. Limited contextual learning media and supporting facilities may hinder the optimization of experiential-based learning. This is in line with Kurniawan et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of adequate facilities and infrastructure in creating meaningful learning experiences that can foster deeper character value internalization.

From the process perspective, the implementation of PAI learning is conducted interactively and emphasizes teacher role modeling as the primary strategy for character reinforcement. Educational interactions between teachers and students, value-based discussions, and moral reflection constitute integral components of the learning process. These findings are consistent with Hattie's (2020) perspective, which underscores that the quality of learning interactions and teachers' roles as role models have a substantial impact on the

formation of students' attitudes and character.

Product evaluation reveals that high-quality PAI learning has a positive impact on strengthening students' religiosity, discipline, and sense of responsibility. However, honesty still requires continuous reinforcement through habituation strategies and more systematic character assessment. This indicates that character education cannot be achieved instantly but requires a long-term, consistent process integrated into the school culture (Suyatno, 2021).

Overall, the discussion results confirm that character value reinforcement through high-quality PAI learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Surakarta has been implemented effectively, supported by adequate contextual, input, and process components. PAI learning plays a strategic role as a medium for character formation when it is systematically designed, consistently implemented, and supported by sufficient resources. Therefore, continuous strengthening of facilities, human resources, and character evaluation constitutes a strategic step to enhance the sustainability and quality of character education at the junior secondary school level.

Conclusion

This study presents field findings on the implementation of Strengthening Character Values through Quality Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Surakarta in the 2025/2026 academic year, based on the four main components of the CIPP evaluation model, namely context, input, process, and product. The research data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies conducted throughout 2025. The findings indicate that, from a contextual perspective, the IRE learning program is aligned with the school's vision, mission, and character-oriented school culture. In terms of input, teacher competence and instructional planning are categorized as good, although the availability of supporting human resources and learning facilities still requires improvement. Regarding the process component, IRE learning is implemented in a systematic and interactive manner, emphasizing teacher role modeling as the primary strategy for internalizing character values. Meanwhile, from the product perspective, the program demonstrates positive impacts on strengthening students' religiosity, discipline, responsibility, and honesty. Overall, the results suggest that the character value strengthening program through quality IRE learning is well organized and effectively implemented; however, continuous improvement is still needed, particularly in terms of resources and supporting facilities, to achieve more optimal outcomes.

High-quality Islamic Religious Education learning at Muhammadiyah 8 Junior High School Surakarta is able to strengthen students' character values in terms of religiosity, discipline, honesty, and responsibility. Based on the CIPP evaluation model, all components are categorized as good, with an average score of 81.25%. These results indicate that high-quality IRE learning plays a significant role in supporting character education at the junior high school level..

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