

A Holistic Framework for Strengthening Students' Responsibility Character Through Islamic Religious Education: A Case Study of an Indonesian Madrasah

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the strategies for strengthening students' responsibility character through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, the research involved the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, and parents as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that responsibility character is strengthened through five interconnected strategies: integrating responsibility values into IRE lesson planning, promoting teacher role modelling, cultivating religious habituation through daily school activities, implementing character-based assessment, and fostering strong collaboration between the school and parents. These strategies collectively create a holistic learning environment that encourages students to internalize responsibility as both a moral and religious value. The study concludes that Islamic Religious Education serves as a strategic medium for cultivating students' responsibility when supported by a religious school culture and sustainable school-family partnerships. The proposed integrative model offers practical implications for strengthening character education in Islamic secondary schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is a planned and systematic process aimed at instilling moral values, ethical principles, and positive attitudes in individuals. Its primary objective is to develop integrity and a

positive personality so that individuals are able to behave responsibly, respect others, and make meaningful contributions to society. Character education is based on the understanding that morality and good character are not merely inherited traits but qualities that must be continuously nurtured through education and habituation (Nurtjahyo, 2013).

Responsibility is one of the fundamental values in character development within the national education system. Contemporary educational challenges indicate a decline in students' discipline, weakened commitment to academic responsibilities, and reduced moral awareness (Farid & Aziz, 2023). These issues have encouraged the Indonesian government to place character education at the center of educational reform through the Strengthening Character Education (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter PPK) policy, which identifies responsibility as one of the core character values to be cultivated in schools and madrasahs. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), responsibility refers to a condition in which an individual is obliged to carry out duties, bear obligations, accept the consequences of actions, provide accountability, and fulfill commitments with integrity.

Within the context of Islamic education, Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam PAI) serves not only as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a means of shaping students' moral and spiritual character. Islamic teachings emphasize the concepts of amanah (trustworthiness) and accountability as essential foundations of responsible behavior. Responsibility is therefore understood as the practical manifestation of amanah, requiring individuals to consistently fulfill their obligations toward Allah, themselves, other people, and the surrounding environment. This perspective positions Islamic Religious Education as an important instrument for developing students who possess strong moral integrity and social responsibility.

The Merdeka Curriculum further reinforces this orientation by emphasizing the development of learners who are faithful, morally upright, responsible, and capable of interacting positively within society. Students who demonstrate responsibility are generally characterized by their commitment to independent learning, willingness to participate actively in classroom activities, and discipline in completing academic tasks. Consequently, strengthening the value of responsibility has become one of the primary goals of educational practice, enabling students to develop self-discipline, commitment, courage, and accountability in both academic and social contexts.

As an Islamic educational institution, a madrasah has a strategic role in strengthening responsibility by integrating Islamic values into the curriculum, instructional practices, and school culture. MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya, one of the leading Islamic junior secondary schools in East Java, has demonstrated a strong commitment to internalizing Islamic values in students' character development. However, there remains a need for an in-depth investigation into how responsibility character education is systematically designed, implemented, and sustained within the institution. Understanding these processes is essential for identifying effective educational practices that contribute to students' responsible behavior.

One of the significant contributions of Islamic Religious Education in character formation lies in integrating religious values into classroom learning and everyday school activities. Teachers are expected not only to teach Islamic principles conceptually but also to demonstrate and model these values through their own behavior, thereby providing authentic examples for students. This perspective is consistent with Dodd's (1992) theory of character education, which emphasizes that ethical behavior is most effectively developed through exemplary practice (modeling). Therefore, examining the implementation of responsibility character education in Islamic Religious Education is expected to generate a conceptual model that can strengthen character education practices in madrasahs and provide meaningful contributions to the broader discourse on Islamic character education.

This study seeks to explore how responsibility character education is developed and strengthened through Islamic Religious Education in MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya. Specifically, the study

investigates the process of designing responsibility character values within Islamic Religious Education learning, examines how responsibility character reinforcement is implemented in classroom instruction and the broader madrasah environment, identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation, and formulates a conceptual model of responsibility character strengthening through Islamic Religious Education based on the empirical findings.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the value of responsibility is developed through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya. A case study enables researchers to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context by collecting rich and comprehensive data from multiple sources over a specific period (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research was conducted at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya, an accredited Islamic junior secondary school located in Sambikerep District, Surabaya, East Java. The participants consisted of the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, eighth-grade students, and parents who were directly involved in the implementation of character education within the madrasah.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques to ensure comprehensive and credible findings. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, PAI teachers, students, and parents to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the development of responsibility character. Second, participant observation was carried out to examine classroom learning, religious activities, and students' social interactions within the school environment. Third, document analysis was undertaken by reviewing lesson plans, school activity schedules, habituation programs, and character assessment instruments to understand how responsibility values were integrated into educational practices.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Throughout the analysis, data were continuously compared across different sources and collection methods to identify recurring patterns and themes. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed triangulation of sources and techniques, thereby enhancing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Planning for Strengthening the Character of Responsibility

The planning process for strengthening the character of responsibility at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya is carried out by integrating responsibility values into the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) syllabus, lesson designs, and lesson plans (RPP), particularly in Aqidah Akhlak subjects. Teachers formulate indicators of responsible behavior based on students' spiritual and social competencies, including punctuality, quality of task completion, and awareness of collective responsibilities. This planning reflects the school's commitment to embedding character education systematically into the instructional process rather than treating it as an additional activity. Teachers play a fundamental role in shaping students' character as future generations and prospective national leaders. Therefore, responsibility and discipline are regarded as essential values that should be developed from an early age. The school believes that preparing students with strong moral character is as important as developing their academic competence because responsible individuals are more capable of contributing positively to society.

The school also recognizes that classroom culture significantly influences students' character formation. Daily routines, classroom norms, and consistent expectations regarding discipline and responsibility gradually become habits that shape students' behavior. Consequently, character education is integrated into every learning activity and supported by cooperation among teachers, school leaders, parents, and the wider school community. Interviews with the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, parents, and students indicated that the planning process for strengthening responsibility had been well designed. They explained that responsibility values were explicitly incorporated into learning programs and lesson plans, ensuring that character education became an inseparable part of classroom instruction rather than merely a theoretical objective.

Implementation in the Classroom and Madrasah Environment

The implementation of responsibility character education is realized through various instructional strategies during Islamic Religious Education lessons. Teachers intentionally design learning activities that encourage students to demonstrate responsibility both individually and collectively throughout the learning process. One important strategy involves assigning both individual and group tasks that require students to be accountable for their work. Through these assignments, students develop a sense of ownership, independence, and commitment to completing their responsibilities. A parent explained that the responsibilities assigned by the school had positively influenced their child's behavior, although the changes occurred gradually. The parent also acknowledged becoming more involved in supporting the development of responsible behavior at home.

Teachers also encourage students to reflect on their responsible behavior at the end of every lesson. During these reflection sessions, students evaluate how well they fulfilled their responsibilities throughout the learning activities. One student explained that learning Islamic Religious Education increased their awareness that every action would ultimately be accountable before Allah. As a result, the student felt more disciplined, completed assignments more punctually, and became increasingly aware of personal obligations as a learner. Similarly, an Islamic Religious Education teacher explained that each lesson concludes with reminders encouraging students to continue studying independently and complete assignments from all subjects. According to the teacher, consistently reminding students to fulfill their academic duties serves as an effective strategy for cultivating responsibility beyond the classroom session itself.

Teachers also function as role models by consistently demonstrating responsible behavior through punctuality, discipline, and commitment to their professional duties. Students reported that their teachers continuously reminded them to behave responsibly, provided positive examples, and corrected inappropriate behavior in a respectful manner. They emphasized that teachers not only explained responsibility theoretically but also demonstrated it through everyday practice by accompanying students, arriving on time, and making themselves available whenever students needed guidance.

Another strategy is the implementation of learning contracts agreed upon by teachers and students. These agreements establish standards of responsibility that students are expected to fulfill during the learning process. Students explained that the learning contracts include attendance, classroom cleaning duties, group assignments, participation in flag ceremonies, congregational prayers, Duha prayers, and memorization of short Qur'anic chapters. Students who fail to fulfill these agreements receive constructive reminders from teachers. The principal also emphasized that these contracts include moral commitments such as speaking politely, respecting others, and greeting people with Islamic salutations.

Religious Habituation as a Means of Internalizing Values

Religious habituation serves as an essential medium for internalizing responsibility among students. Daily religious programs, including congregational prayers, morning religious talks, and classroom cleaning duties, encourage students to develop collective responsibility while simultaneously strengthening their spiritual commitment. These activities transform responsibility into a daily habit rather than a temporary classroom expectation. Regular religious practices include performing Duha prayers together, participating in congregational Dhuhr prayers, and memorizing Juz 30 of the Qur'an. Parents expressed their full support for these religious habituation programs, believing that such activities reinforce the responsibility values taught at school and help students practice them consistently in their daily lives.

Character-Based Evaluation System

Character evaluation is conducted through continuous assessment of students' attitudes. Teachers observe students' responsible behavior during classroom activities as well as their participation in various school programs. The evaluation emphasizes the practical application of responsibility rather than simply measuring students' cognitive understanding of moral concepts. The principal explained that the character-based evaluation system enables students to become more aware of their obligations both inside and outside the school environment. Likewise, an Islamic Religious Education teacher stated that assessing responsibility continuously motivates students to complete learning tasks sincerely without feeling forced, thereby creating a more positive and meaningful learning atmosphere.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Several factors support the successful implementation of responsibility character education. The first is the strong commitment demonstrated by the principal and Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing character programs. According to the principal, effective collaboration among teachers is essential for achieving educational objectives and minimizing potential conflicts during program implementation. Another supporting factor is the strong religious culture developed throughout the madrasah. Daily congregational Duha and Dhuhr prayers are consistently practiced with the active participation of school leaders, teachers, staff members, parents, and students. This collective commitment creates a learning environment where responsibility is reinforced through shared religious experiences.

Collaboration between the school and parents also contributes significantly to strengthening students' responsibility. Parents described communication with the school as highly effective and inspiring, making them feel actively involved in their children's character development. Teachers further explained that close cooperation with parents includes regular communication and home visits whenever students are absent for several consecutive days, while parents also proactively provide updates regarding their children's condition. Despite these strengths, several challenges remain. Differences in students' family backgrounds create variations in the understanding and implementation of responsibility values. Economic conditions also present difficulties for some families, although educational assistance programs help reduce these obstacles.

Social media has also become a challenge because it may distract students from academic activities and positive character development. Excessive engagement with digital media can reduce students' focus on learning and weaken their commitment to fulfilling academic responsibilities if not accompanied by appropriate supervision. Another obstacle is the inconsistency of parental supervision at home. Teachers emphasized that responsibility is more effectively developed when parents consistently monitor and reinforce school expectations. Inconsistent supervision may cause children to misunderstand their responsibilities and become less aware of the consequences of their actions, thereby slowing the development of responsible character.

Conceptual Model of Responsibility Character Strengthening

Based on the findings, the strengthening of responsibility through Islamic Religious Education at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya follows an integrative and holistic conceptual model. This model combines curriculum integration, teachers' role modeling, religious habituation, continuous character evaluation, and strong collaboration between the school and parents. These interconnected components collectively reinforce students' responsibility across academic, religious, and social contexts. The findings indicate that character strengthening becomes more effective when implemented systematically, consistently, and collaboratively by all educational stakeholders.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that strengthening students' responsibility character at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya is implemented through a holistic educational approach consisting of curriculum integration, teacher role modelling, religious habituation, character-based assessment, and collaboration between the school and parents. These findings indicate that responsibility is not developed through a single instructional strategy but through an integrated educational ecosystem that continuously reinforces students' moral behaviour across academic, religious, and social contexts. This finding is consistent with recent studies emphasizing that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) functions not only as cognitive instruction but also as a comprehensive medium for developing students' moral identity through curriculum integration, contextual learning, and value internalization (Nasrullah et al., 2023; Rachman, 2025).

One of the most significant findings concerns the integration of responsibility values into lesson planning, learning objectives, and classroom implementation. The integration of responsibility into the syllabus and lesson plans demonstrates that character education is intentionally designed rather than incidentally delivered. This approach supports the concept of whole-school character education, which argues that moral values become more sustainable when embedded within curriculum planning, classroom instruction, assessment, and school culture simultaneously. Moslimany et al. (2024) further argue that a holistic curriculum enables Islamic educational institutions to balance cognitive achievement with spiritual and moral development, ensuring that character education becomes an integral part of educational practice rather than an additional program. Likewise, Rachman (2025) emphasizes that Islamic Religious Education should integrate moral values into curriculum design to strengthen students' *akhlaq* through contextual learning and systematic instructional planning.

The present findings also reveal that teachers intentionally cultivate responsibility through individual and collaborative learning assignments. Students are encouraged to complete academic tasks independently while simultaneously contributing to collective learning activities. Such instructional practices develop students' accountability, ownership, and self-regulation, which are essential dimensions of responsible behaviour. These findings are consistent with Farid and Aziz (2023), who found that responsibility develops more effectively when classroom activities encourage active participation, independent learning, and meaningful interaction between teachers and students. Similarly, Safitri (2024) reported that contextual learning integrating Islamic values into everyday classroom activities significantly improves students' responsibility because learners experience moral values directly rather than merely understanding them conceptually.

Another important finding is that responsibility develops through continuous reflective practice. Students explained that they became increasingly aware that every action carries accountability before Allah SWT, encouraging them to become more disciplined, honest, and punctual in completing academic responsibilities. Reflection therefore functions not only as an evaluation strategy but also as a process of moral internalization in which students connect classroom experiences with spiritual consciousness. This finding aligns with Irfan and Sain (2024), who argue that Islamic Religious

Education contributes to character formation through psychological and spiritual development simultaneously, allowing students to understand moral responsibility as both religious obligation and personal commitment. Likewise, Fatoni and Subando (2024) emphasize that reflective evaluation encourages students to develop intrinsic motivation rather than merely complying with external rules.

Teacher role modelling emerged as one of the strongest determinants of responsibility character development. Students consistently perceived their Islamic Religious Education teachers as individuals who demonstrated discipline, punctuality, commitment, and responsibility through everyday behaviour. Rather than merely explaining moral concepts, teachers became living examples whose behaviour shaped students' attitudes through observation and imitation. These findings strongly support social learning theory, which argues that behavioural modelling constitutes one of the most influential mechanisms of moral learning. Saepudin (2023) similarly concludes that teachers occupy a central position in building Islamic personality because students naturally imitate teachers' behaviour in both academic and non-academic situations. Likewise, Hidayat (2025) found that teacher exemplars significantly strengthen the internalization of Islamic character because students perceive teachers as credible moral references whose actions reinforce classroom instruction.

The importance of teacher exemplification is further reinforced by recent studies indicating that successful character education depends upon consistency between teachers' words and actions. Nasrullah et al. (2023) explain that students are more likely to internalize moral values when teachers consistently demonstrate ethical behaviour during daily interactions. Similarly, Safitri (2024) found that responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and discipline become sustainable character traits when teachers consistently integrate these values into classroom communication, instructional strategies, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, teacher professionalism within Islamic Religious Education extends beyond pedagogical competence to include moral integrity and exemplary conduct.

Another distinctive finding concerns the implementation of learning contracts between teachers and students. The agreements include classroom attendance, completion of assignments, congregational prayers, classroom duties, and respectful interpersonal behaviour. Such agreements encourage students to regulate their own behaviour while understanding the consequences of failing to fulfil shared commitments. This finding illustrates that responsibility becomes stronger when behavioural expectations are negotiated collaboratively rather than imposed unilaterally. Previous studies have similarly concluded that classroom agreements increase students' ownership of behavioural standards and promote greater accountability throughout the learning process (Farid & Aziz, 2023; Ernawati, 2023).

Religious habituation represents another major finding of this research. Daily congregational prayers, Qur'anic memorization, morning religious lectures, and classroom cleaning routines provide continuous opportunities for students to practice responsibility through authentic religious experiences. Unlike conventional moral instruction that primarily emphasizes knowledge acquisition, habituation transforms moral values into everyday behaviour through repetition and consistency. Rachman (2025) argues that Islamic Religious Education becomes effective when moral values are repeatedly practiced through contextual religious activities, while Munawaroh et al. (2023) emphasize that Islamic school culture significantly strengthens students' character because religious activities continuously reinforce ethical behaviour throughout school life.

Character-based assessment also contributes significantly to responsibility development because teachers evaluate behavioural growth alongside academic achievement. Continuous observation allows teachers to identify behavioural changes, provide constructive feedback, and encourage students to improve their responsibility over time. Fatoni and Subando (2024) argue that evaluation within Islamic education should assess affective and behavioural dimensions rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive achievement. Consequently, assessment becomes an educational strategy that promotes character development rather than merely measuring learning outcomes.

Finally, collaboration between schools and parents constitutes a crucial supporting factor in strengthening responsibility character. Parents actively reinforce religious habituation at home, maintain communication with teachers, and participate in monitoring students' behavioural development. Alfiyanto et al. (2024) conclude that parental involvement significantly influences students' moral and spiritual development because consistent reinforcement across home and school environments creates stronger character internalization. Likewise, Tihama et al. (2025) emphasize that active parental participation provides children with a stable moral environment where responsibility is consistently practiced within everyday family life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that strengthening the character of responsibility through Islamic Religious Education at MTs Unggulan Girilaya Surabaya is implemented through a holistic and integrated educational approach. Responsibility is not taught merely as a theoretical concept but is systematically embedded in curriculum planning, classroom instruction, religious activities, character-based assessment, and collaboration between the school and parents. The integration of responsibility values into lesson plans and learning objectives demonstrates the school's commitment to making character education an integral component of the educational process rather than a complementary program.

The implementation of responsibility character education is realized through various instructional strategies, including individual and collaborative assignments, reflective learning, teacher role modelling, and learning contracts that clearly define students' academic and moral responsibilities. Furthermore, religious habituation, such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic memorization, classroom duties, and other routine religious activities, provides continuous opportunities for students to internalize responsibility through consistent practice. Character-based assessment further reinforces this process by evaluating students' behavioural development alongside their academic achievement, enabling teachers to monitor responsibility continuously and provide constructive guidance.

The findings also reveal that the success of responsibility character strengthening is supported by several important factors, including strong leadership commitment, teachers' consistency in modelling responsible behaviour, a well-established religious school culture, and active collaboration with parents. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, particularly the diversity of family backgrounds, the influence of social media on students' behaviour, and inconsistencies in parental supervision at home. These challenges indicate that responsibility character development requires continuous cooperation among schools, families, and the wider community to ensure consistency between educational experiences in school and students' daily lives.

The principal contribution of this study lies in the development of an integrative-holistic conceptual model for strengthening responsibility character through Islamic Religious Education. The model demonstrates that responsibility develops most effectively when curriculum integration, teacher exemplification, religious habituation, authentic assessment, and school-parent partnerships operate simultaneously as interconnected educational components. This study therefore enriches the discourse on Islamic character education by providing empirical evidence that responsibility is the cumulative outcome of systematic educational practices supported by both institutional commitment and family involvement. The findings offer practical implications for Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen students' responsibility character through sustainable, collaborative, and value-based educational practices.

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