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#### **Abstract**

This study aims to optimize Islamic character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan. With the challenges of globalization that erode Islamic character values, it is important to explore effective learning methods. Through a qualitative approach, this study analyzes the implementation, supporting factors, and obstacles in Islamic character education. The results of the study indicate that school commitment and parental involvement are very influential in creating a conducive learning environment. However, there are obstacles such as lack of resources and differences in student backgrounds that affect the application of character values. Therefore, the proposed strategy includes the development of innovative and collaborative learning methods between schools, parents, and the community. This study is expected to provide recommendations for the development of more effective curriculum and learning methods in Islamic character education.

Keywords: Character Education, Islamic Religious Education, SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan, Optimization, Learning Methods.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the important aspects in developing students' personalities. Good character is expected to form individuals who are not only academically intelligent, but also have high ethics and morals. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic role in shaping students' characters. Through PAI learning, students are taught moral and ethical values that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. In the era of globalization, the challenges to religious values are increasing. Students are faced with the influence of foreign cultures that can be known together and slowly erode indirectly the Islamic character values that have been taught. Therefore, Islamic character education through Islamic Religious Education learning needs to be optimized so that students not only master the subject matter, but also understand and apply Islamic values in their lives. This is important to build a generation that has high integrity, responsibility, and empathy. SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan as an educational institution based on Islamic teachings has a responsibility to instill these values in students. Although the Islamic Religious Education curriculum already exists, its implementation needs to be evaluated to ensure that the methods used are effective in instilling Islamic character. Teachers as educators and facilitators have an important role in creating a learning atmosphere that supports character education. (Bustan, 2020).

When in the family environment, students' behavior can be directly controlled by their parents, but not when in the friendship and school environment. Both environments are beyond the reach of parental supervision which has the potential to have an undesirable impact on the development of students' character. In its development, formal schools at elementary and secondary levels use a full-day learning system at school. Indirectly, students are in the school environment together with teachers and school friends eight hours a day. The role of schools is very important as a fortress and spearhead for determining the direction of morals and behavior of students. Moral quality in the student phase is the basic foundation for making humans who are moral and have good character. However, the reality that is

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currently happening is that the behavior of students is declining morally and ethically, such as students harassing teachers while at school. Examples of these actions are as if students do not have manners and courtesy towards teachers who are considered as substitutes for peopleold in school. The decline in students' morals has spread to the inappropriate use of social media technology by students, resulting in many inappropriate videos and photos being published in cyberspace. (Syaifuddin & Fahyuni, 2019)

In this context, it is important to explore learning methods that can attract students' interest and are relevant to current developments. Innovative and interactive methods can help students better understand and internalize Islamic character values. In addition, the involvement of parents and the community is also very necessary to create a supportive educational ecosystem. Through this study, it is hoped that an optimal strategy can be found in Islamic character education through PAI learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan. The results of this study will provide recommendations for the development of curriculum and learning methods that can improve the quality of character education in the school. Thus, this study is expected to provide a real contribution to efforts to create a young generation who are not only academically intelligent, but also have good character in accordance with Islamic teachings.(Armini, 2024)

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Ás Allah says in (QS. Luqman: 17)
يَبْنَيَّ آقِمِ الصَّلُوةَ وَأُمُرْ بِا لْمَعْرُوْفِ وَا نُهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَا صُعْبِرْ عَلَى مَا آصَا بَكَ ۗ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُ مُوْرِ
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*It means*: O my son, pray and command people to do what is right and prevent them from doing evil and be patient with what happens to you, indeed this is an important matter. (QS. Luqman 17).

The letterSurah Luqman is a Makkiyyah letter consisting of 34 verses. This letter is named Luqman because in verse 12 it is stated that Allah has given favors and knowledge to Luqman. Verses 13 to 19 contain Luqman's advice to his son.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a very important role in optimizing character education as learning Students' religious attitudes show low interest in educating Islamic character through learning in the SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan school environment, which sometimes becomes a complicated problem. Lack of religious understanding in students so that student character can trigger social unrest. Religious attitudes that are not well embedded in students tend to be more emotional than their thinking aspects. The environment, emotional instability, and lack of self-control also influence a person to act outside of religious values, so stages are needed in religious attitude education, in particular.

From the above phenomena, it can be concluded that schools as agents of change have not been able to facilitate students to apply the education they have taken. Currently, national education faces various tough challenges, especially in preparing the quality of human resources (HR) which is not only to be productive but also to form human/societal character. To be productive, humans are not only equipped with the ability in the field of expertise, skills, but also with character education as a guide in behaving when working so that immoral phenomena as mentioned in the previous paragraph do not occur again.(Susanti, 2018)

The environment of SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan has a very important function and role, not only as a place to socialize with fellow community members but also needs to pay attention to the character of children in the environment of SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan, now various activities and religious education in order to function the Mosque, the pendopo located in the environment of SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan as a development or education of student character. So to find out how big the role and function of optimizing the Mosque as educating Islamic character in learning Islamic religious education, education and the spread of Islam, it is necessary to look back to the time of the Prophet, where he was a role model and the first person to create an assembly as the way the prophet educated his friends and children who made Islamic character. Optimizing the environment as educating student character through Islamic religious learning. Religious development and Islamic education really need to be optimized in educating the character of students, children and society. (Ifendi, 2021). However, in practicing or exemplifying Islamic character to children or students, it is also necessary for religious figures in the environment to exemplify it so that the assessment of a student is not only from the teacher but the Ustadz also contributes. At SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan, the mosque in the school environment that is available has not been utilized optimally for character and spiritual education of students. This is caused by various obstacles, such as lack of student interest, limited time, and lack of innovation in managing religious activities. Therefore, a special strategy is needed from Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to optimize a peaceful environment as a means of effective religious education.

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The characteristics of male students in SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan often make them less polite in interacting and tend to be rude in speaking. The difference in the implementation of the curriculum in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in other classes adjusts the learning materials determined by each teacher. Many students are still less serious in learning Islamic Religious Education and moral development in the environment of Sekolah Muhammadiyah 07 Medan. Meanwhile, teachers rarely use the surrounding environment as a learning medium outside the classroom.(Ikhsan et al., 2017)

#### II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze Islamic character education through Islamic Religious Education learning. The descriptive method is a method that attempts to describe the object of research broadly, comprehensively, and deeply. Data collection techniques use interviews and observations. The interview aims to obtain data on the process, mechanism, and results of implementing learning for children and students in the environment of SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan. In this case, the researcher uses religious figures and the principal as sources as parties who are authorized and responsible for character, moral education and children's learning. Observations were conducted by carefully observing all the processes of Islamic character education efforts through Islamic religious education learning, starting from how Religious Figures and School Principals provide direction, motivation to establishing mandatory regulations to make the environment the main place in every Islamic Religious Education learning in order to collect data for this research. By following this method, it is hoped that this study can provide a clear and in-depth picture of the optimization of Islamic character education through Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan.

### III. AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Islamic character education at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan from the many students still face various challenges for Islamic character education, such as Although there is a commitment from the school and parental involvement, there are still obstacles such as a lack of student understanding of Islamic character values, in addition to the lack of Islamic character values, students also have a lack of civility towards local parents, limited effective learning methods, and a decline in morals among students. Islamic Religious Education teachers play an important role in implementing effective learning, but there needs to be further evaluation and development in the methods used. Such as arranging or educating morals to students in the mosque or at each student's home in order to optimize effective learning as we hope for the future.

As for some Islamic Religious Education teachers, they optimize the application of Islamic character to students by using the four S's.

- 1. Smile. Smile has a value of worship and is counted as a good deed, just like giving alms with wealth. Worship that is very easy to do. By implementing a culture of smiling, reducing conflict, conflict, and love for peace.
- 2. Greeting. Greeting someone, whether by saying hello, smiling, or some other friendly greeting, is a way to show affection and concern.
  - Greetings. Greetings in this case can be done by shaking hands and saying hello according to each religion and belief. Greetings contain elements of friendship, joy, and an attitude or expression of respect for others. In the teachings of Natural Religion, greeting is one of the acts of piety.
- 3. Polite. Polite is a person's good attitude or behavior in front of others. Polite behavior can be done by respecting others. Polite behavior is also important to apply in schools, so that students have a sense of politeness when speaking, interacting with teachers or with their friends.
- 4. Politeness. Politeness in Islam is behavior that reflects noble morals, such as speaking and acting gently, respectfully, and being aware of the rights of others. Politeness is included in the category of akhlakul karimah (noble morals) which are highly emphasized in Islamic teachings.

Of course, the understanding of the four S culture can be understood by all students because teachers and staff in the school environment also apply the four S culture in themselves as the main role models for students, but only a few students do not do it for some personal reasons and it becomes a challenge for teachers here and when the teacher meeting is held, teachers and principals discuss how to guide children: in other words there is special attention for children.

### Discussion

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Character education is an ongoing process and is very important for student development. In the context of SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan, Islamic character education is expected to form individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also have good morals. Character education is not only the responsibility of teachers, but also parents and the community. The implementation of Islamic character education in schools must be carried out systematically and in a planned manner. This includes the integration of Islamic values in every aspect of learning, both in the curriculum and extracurricular activities. Thus, students can understand and internalize these values in everyday life.

School commitmentbecome an important factor in optimizing character education. School management must support programs that educate students' character. In addition, teachers must be involved in training to improve their competence in teaching character education. Parental involvement in the education process is also very necessary. Parents must understand the importance of character education and support the implementation of Islamic values at home. Synergy between schools and families can create a supportive environment for students.

Learning methodsused in Islamic character education must be varied and innovative. The use of active methods such as discussions, group projects, and extracurricular activities can increase student involvement in the learning process. Students are not only passive listeners, but also actively participate in learning. Obstacles faced in Islamic character education include lack of resources and differences in student backgrounds. Schools need to address these issues by providing adequate materials and facilities, as well as a more inclusive approach.

Environmental influencesalso plays a big role in character education. A positive environment can support the formation of good character, while a negative environment can erode the values that have been taught. Therefore, it is important to create a supportive school environment. Evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of character education need to be done periodically. By conducting an evaluation, the school can find out the effectiveness of the methods used and make improvements if necessary.

Use of technologyin character education can also be a solution to improve the effectiveness of learning. Technology can be used as a tool to spread Islamic values and expand students' access to learning materials. Students' social awareness must be increased through social activities that involve them. These activities not only teach the values of empathy and solidarity, but also invite students to contribute to society, this is that Islamic character education at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan requires a holistic and collaborative approach. All parties must be involved in creating an environment that supports character education, so that students can grow into individuals with good morals and are responsible.

#### 1. Implementation

The implementation of Islamic character education at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan is a strategic step in forming the character of students with noble morals. This process is carried out through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that is integrated with Islamic values. In this implementation, PAI teachers act as role models, not only conveying theories but also providing examples of behavior that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. Through a well-designed curriculum, students are taught to internalize moral values, ethics, and good attitudes that shape their character.

Islamic character education is very important in forming a young generation with noble character and faith. SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan as an Islamic educational institution has a strategic role in developing students' Islamic character through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Islamic character education is one of the important aspects of education in Indonesia, especially in religious-based schools. SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan is committed to integrating Islamic values in every aspect of learning, especially through Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

The main objective of Islamic character education is to form students who have noble morals, faith, and knowledge. This is in line with the vision of SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan. Islamic character education at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 is to form students who are not only academically intelligent but also have good morals and can apply Islamic values in everyday life.

Islamic Religious Education serves as a foundation in instilling Islamic character values. Through this lesson, students are taught about Islamic teachings that teach morals, ethics, and good attitudes. Islamic character education is based on Islamic values such as: faith, knowledge, charity, and morals. This concept is integrated into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. The curriculum in education has an important role in achieving educational goals. The role of the curriculum can be used as a means to transition the values of past cultural heritage that are considered still relevant to the present.(Pratama & Ginting, 2023)

The Islamic Religious Education curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 integrates values such as honesty,



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discipline, and tolerance. Every material taught is always linked to practical applications in everyday life. The Islamic Religious Education curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan includes: Al-Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Akidah, and Islamic History. This material is delivered in an integrated manner with Islamic character values. The implementation of the independent curriculum in Islamic Religious Education must focus on several important things: improving students' critical thinking skills, presenting relevant and useful content in accordance with the modern context, fostering students' creativity, and honing their practical skills.(Susandi & Pohan, 2024)

At SMP Muhammadiyah 07, various learning methods are used, such as lectures, discussions, and direct practice. This method aims to make it easier for students to understand and internalize Islamic values. The PAI learning methods at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan include: discussions, lectures, worship practices, and extracurricular activities. This method is designed to develop students' abilities.

Islamic Religious Education teachers act as role models for students. They not only teach theory, but also provide real examples in everyday behavior. This is important to foster students' trust in the values taught. Islamic Religious Education teachers as educators, mentors, and role models. They must have adequate competence in delivering Islamic Religious Education materials. Islamic Religious Education serves as a foundation in instilling Islamic character values. Through this lesson, students are taught about Islamic teachings that teach morals, ethics, and good attitudes. Teachers are human resource figures who occupy positions and play important roles in education. At school, teachers are present to devote themselves to humanity in this case students.(Arafah & Pohan, 2023)

### 2. Optimizing Islamic Religious Education learning in Islamic character education

Optimizing Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan aims to improve the quality of Islamic character education. This is done by integrating character values into the curriculum and using innovative learning methods. For example, interactive and contextual learning is very important to attract students' interest. In addition, the involvement of parents and the community is also needed to create an ecosystem that supports students' character education, so that they can apply the values taught in everyday life. Islamic character education at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan aims to form students who are not only academically intelligent, but also have noble morals. In this process, there are various factors that can support or hinder the optimization of character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Supporting Factors: School CommitmentOne of the main supporting factors is the commitment of the school, including the leadership and teachers. SMP Muhammadiyah 07 has a clear vision to implement Islamic character education, which is reflected in policies and curriculum that support Islamic Religious Education learning. This commitment creates a conducive environment for the development of student character. Teacher Quality The quality and dedication of Islamic Religious Education teachers are also important supporting factors. Teachers who understand and internalize Islamic values can deliver material more effectively and become role models for students. Teachers' skills in managing the classroom and interacting with students contribute to the success of character education.(Arfa & Lasaiba, 2024)

Supportive School Environment A positive school environment integrated with Islamic values is also a supporting factor. According to the journal (Idrawati 2020) that in order to achieve educational goals in the formation of quality student character, teachers have a very important role during the learning process. Schools that act as education providers need qualified, trained teachers who have a high sense of responsibility in carrying out their profession. If teachers are able to carry out their duties and carry out their roles professionally, then learning will take place effectively. (Salamah, 2020). SMP Muhammadiyah 07 creates a supportive atmosphere, such as the implementation of religious activities, religious studies, and Islamic competitions, which strengthen the teaching of Islamic Religious Education in the classroom.

### 3. Strategies to Increase Student Effectiveness

One of the main strategies is to integrate Islamic values into the curriculum as a whole. This means not only teaching Islamic Religious Education material separately, but also linking it to other subjects, so that students can see the relevance of these values in various life contexts. By integrating Islamic values into various subjects, such as science, mathematics, and civics, students can understand how Islamic principles interact with science and ethics in everyday life. For example, in science lessons, the concept of creation and responsibility for the environment can be taught by linking them to verses from the Qur'an that support the preservation of nature. In addition, in mathematics lessons, students can learn about justice and honesty through the principles of fair

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distribution, which are core values in Islam. This approach not only makes learning more interesting, but also encourages students to think critically and apply Islamic values in various aspects of their lives, thus forming a holistic and balanced character.(Dalimunthe, 2023)

Using active learning methods such as discussions, group projects, and role-playing can increase student engagement. With this method, students are not only passive listeners, but also actively participate in the learning process, which can help them internalize Islamic character values. This active learning method also encourages students to interact with each other, share views, and learn from each other's experiences, thus creating a dynamic and collaborative learning atmosphere. For example, in group discussions, students can discuss moral issues that are relevant to their daily lives, while at the same time relating them to Islamic teachings, which strengthens their understanding of these values. Group projects, on the other hand, allow students to apply Islamic values in practice, such as carrying out social or environmental activities, which teach responsibility and concern for the community. Thus, through this active learning method, students not only understand the theory, but can also feel and practice Islamic character values in real contexts, which will be more profound and memorable. (Muhammad et al., 2025)

Extracurricular activities that are oriented towards Islamic values, such as religious studies, social service, and Islamic competitions, are also important to support character education. These activities provide students with practical experience in applying Islamic teachings in their daily lives and build a sense of social awareness. In addition, these extracurricular activities also serve as a forum for developing students' interpersonal and leadership skills. For example, in religious studies, students can learn to speak in public, listen well, and discuss relevant religious topics. Social service activities not only teach the values of empathy and solidarity, but also invite students to contribute directly to society, which strengthens their sense of responsibility as individuals with good morals. Islamic competitions, such as Quran memorization competitions or writing articles about Islamic values, motivate students to delve deeper into their religious teachings, while also rewarding their efforts. (Islam et al., 2024)

Improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers through training and professional development can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of learning. Teachers who are skilled and understand the latest pedagogical approaches can be more effective in delivering materials and instilling character values in students. Inviting parents to actively participate in the process of educating students' character is an effective strategy. SMP Muhammadiyah 07 can hold regular meetings with parents to discuss the importance of Islamic values and how to implement them at home, so that there is synergy between the school and the family.

Creating a school environment that supports Islamic character education is essential. This includes arranging classrooms that respect Islamic values, using positive symbols, and implementing rules that reflect Islamic morals in daily interactions at school. Utilizing technology, such as learning applications and social media, can increase the effectiveness of Islamic Education learning. With technology, students can access additional materials, participate in online discussions, and gain inspiration from relevant Islamic sources.(Curup, 2024)

Conducting regular evaluations of the learning process and student character is very important to determine the effectiveness of the strategies implemented. Feedback from students and teachers can be used to make improvements and adjustments to learning methods to better suit students' needs. Implementing these strategies at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan will help improve the effectiveness of Islamic character education through Islamic Religious Education learning. With a holistic and collaborative approach, it is hoped that students will not only understand Islamic teachings, but also be able to implement them in their daily lives, so that they grow into a generation with good morals and are responsible.(Abidin et al., 2023)

#### IV.CONCLUSION

Islamic character education at SMP Muhammadiyah 07 Medan is an important effort in forming a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has noble character. Although there are various challenges in its implementation, such as lack of student understanding and limited resources, with the commitment of the school, parental involvement, and the use of innovative learning methods, character education can be optimized. Continuous evaluation and development are needed to ensure that Islamic values can be internalized by students and applied in everyday life. Thus, this study is expected to provide a real contribution to the development of character education in the school environment.

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