STRATEGIES OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN FORMING STUDENTS' SPIRITUAL MORALS IN PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (MIS) AISYIYAH NORTH SUMATERA REGION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' spiritual character at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) 'Aisyiyah in the North Sumatra region, including the outcomes of the guidance provided and the educational factors influencing these strategies. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through interviews, observations, and other educational methods. The findings indicate that the strategies used by PAI teachers at MIS 'Aisyiyah are highly effective in developing students' spiritual character through integrated approaches such as worship habituation, teacher role-modeling, and the use of Islamic storytelling media. These strategies are strengthened by contextual learning that connects religious material to students' daily experiences, making spiritual values more meaningful and applicable. Despite external challenges and limited instructional time, collaboration between teachers and parents through intensive communication and joint religious activities plays a vital role in fostering noble character in students.

Keywords: Teacher Strategy; Islamic education; Spiritual Morals.

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui strategi yang digunakan oleh guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam membentuk akhlak spiritual siswa di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) 'Aisyiyah di wilayah Sumatera Utara, termasuk hasil dari bimbingan yang diberikan serta faktor-faktor pendidikan yang mempengaruhi strategi tersebut. Penelitian ini bersifat deskriptif kualitatif, dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, serta metode pendidikan lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) 'Aisyiyah Sumatera Utara dalam membentuk akhlak spiritual siswa sangat efektif melalui pendekatan terintegrasi, seperti pembiasaan ibadah, keteladanan guru, dan penggunaan media cerita Islami. Strategi ini diperkuat dengan pembelajaran kontekstual yang mengaitkan materi agama dengan pengalaman sehari-hari siswa, sehingga nilai-nilai spiritual menjadi lebih bermakna dan mudah diterapkan. Meskipun terdapat tantangan eksternal dan keterbatasan waktu, kolaborasi antara guru dan orang tua melalui komunikasi intensif serta kegiatan keagamaan bersama menjadi kunci penting dalam membentuk akhlak mulia siswa.

Kata kunci: Strategi Guru; Pendidikan Islam; Akhlak Spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the activities in human life (Redja Mudyahardjo, 2002). Education in a systematic operational sense is a teaching and learning process. Learning is a process of constructing knowledge, both natural and human. The construction process is carried out personally and socially. This process is an active process. Several factors, such as experience, knowledge possessed, cognitive abilities, and the environment influence learning outcomes.

Education is a deliberate and directed effort to "humanize" humans. Through an educational process, humans can grow and develop naturally and "perfectly" so that they can carry out their duties as humans and maintain their surroundings well and usefully. Education is also something that cannot be separated from human life. Because with education humans can develop the potential that exists in themselves, namely the potential that God has bestowed on every human being.

The education process lasts throughout human life. Since birth, the first individuals who play a role in educating a child are their parents. Over time, parents need an educator who can provide quality education for their children, one of which is by sending their children to educational institutions. In the school environment, the main role in educating children is held by teachers. Thus, teachers can be considered as the second educator after parents in shaping the character and knowledge of students. In the learning process, teachers become a central element that contributes to the success of education. An educational institution cannot be said to be a learning institution without the presence of an educator or teacher. Islamic Religious Education Teachers have a role in conveying religious knowledge, guiding students towards maturity, and shaping the character of a Muslim with noble morals. Thus, the religious education provided aims to create a balance between worldly and afterlife happiness.

In this context, the main role is held by the teacher, which can be simply interpreted as someone who transfers knowledge to students. In the view of society, teachers are individuals who carry out educational tasks in various places, not only

limited to formal educational institutions, but also in mosques, prayer rooms, homes, and other locations.

In social life, teachers occupy a respected position. The authority they possess makes teachers gain respect from society, so that their presence is not in doubt. Society believes that teachers have an important role in guiding and educating their children to grow into individuals with good morals. This trust has consequences in the form of great responsibility that must be borne by teachers. Carrying out the task of being an educator is indeed difficult, but the burden of responsibility that must be borne is even greater. This is because the responsibility of a teacher is not limited to the school environment, but also extends to society. The guidance provided is not only in the form of groups (classical), but also individually. Teachers must understand that the task of educating is not only to form a generation that lives in the present, but also to prepare them to face challenges in the future.

The task of a teacher is not just to transfer knowledge to students but also to direct and shape good personalities, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers. The role of a teacher is not just the transfer of knowledge, but the most important thing is the transfer of character. With Islamic Religious Education, a teacher can more easily instill Islamic values in children, because the learning materials taught daily contain positive values that direct children in a better direction. The benefits of a teacher are teaching, guiding/directing and developing. A very vital function of a teacher is to develop. This is the culmination of a series of teacher functions. Coaching is making a serious effort to make something better than before, because after teaching something to a student, the teacher will then guide/direct, and then develop the student.

Therefore, in carrying out their duties, teachers must have a strategy, namely a broad outline of the direction to act in an effort to achieve the predetermined targets (Syaiful Bahri Djamarah, 2010). Or if it is associated with learning, strategy is every activity chosen to provide assistance to students in achieving learning goals.

According to the explanation of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Religious Education is intended to shape students into human beings who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty and have noble morals.Solid morals (matinul khuluq) or noble morals are attitudes and behavior that every Muslim must have, both in relation to Allah and to His creatures. With noble morals, humans will be happy in their lives, both in this world and in the afterlife. Because it is so important to have noble morals for mankind, Rasulullah SAW was sent to improve morals and he himself has modeled his morals for us.

The Prophet himself has given an example of noble character which is enshrined in the Al-Qur'an surah Al-Ahzab verse 21:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيْ رَسُوْلِ اللّٰهِ اُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللّٰهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْاٰخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللّٰهَ كَثِيْرًاۗ ٢١

The verse above, taken from Surah Al-Ahzab verse 21, emphasizes the importance of emulating the Prophet Muhammad as a figure who provides the best example in all aspects of life, including spiritual morals. The Prophet Muhammad is not only a role model in carrying out Islamic teachings perfectly, but also in instilling deep moral, ethical, and spiritual values. Islamic Religious Education teachers have a great responsibility to make the Prophet Muhammad a learning model, both through teaching theory and applying moral values in students' daily lives. Students are expected to be able to instill good habits that are the foundation of noble morals, so that they can become a generation that has an Islamic personality, noble morals, and is ready to face the challenges of the world and the hereafter.

The students have extraordinary intelligence that can be developed but because of the influence of the environment that is less supportive to do good things, then they pour that intelligence into things that are not useful so that it can damage their morals. All of these behaviors can occur because seeing the age of elementary school children is a vulnerable period, their emotions are still unstable and they do

not have a strong enough religious grip so that they easily experience mental turmoil which causes them to be confused about choosing which is good and which is bad for them.

The description based on the results of the researcher's observations at the 'Aisyiyah Private Elementary Madarasah regarding the moral problems that occurred at the 'Aisyiyah Private Elementary Madarasah, namely showing a lack of understanding andawareness of spiritual values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for others. Dishonest student behavior,likes to lie, cheat, or be dishonest in assignments and exams. Lack of discipline is characterized by being late to school and going home early and often violating school rules, in studying religion students often fall asleep in class, are lazy to read, do not attend prayers during congregational prayer times, often fight with friends, fight teachers, and some students even bring cell phones into the classroom.

Formation of Morals

According to the etymological approach, the word "akhlak" comes from the Arabic plural from its plural form "khuluqun" (خلق (which according to the dialect means: character, temperament, behavior or nature. This sentence contains aspects of conformity with the word "khalqun" (خلق (which means event, and is closely related to "khaliq" (خالق (which means creator) and "makhluq" (مخلوق (which means created) (Zahruddin AR and Hasanuddin Sinaga, 2004).

The definition of morality above appears as a mediator that bridges communication between the khaliq (creator) and makhluq (creatures) reciprocally, which is then referred to as hablum min Allah. From the verbal product of hamlum min Allah, a pattern of relationships between fellow human beings is usually born, which is called hablum min annas (a pattern of relationships between fellow creatures).

From the above understanding, it can be seen that morals are traits that humans carry since birth, embedded in their souls and always exist in them. These traits can be born in the form of good deeds, called noble morals, or bad deeds, called reprehensible morals according to their development (Asmaran AS, 1992).

So in essence, khuluk (characters) or morals are conditions or traits that have penetrated the soul and become personality, so that from there various kinds of actions arise spontaneously and easily without being pretentious and without requiring thought. If from these conditions good and commendable behavior arises in the view of the Shari'a and common sense. So it is called noble character and conversely, if bad behavior is born, it is called disgraceful character.

The formation of students' spiritual morals is one of the main goals of Islamic education, as stated in the national education goals that emphasize the development of students' potential to become faithful, pious, and noble human beings. In the perspective of Islamic education, teachers have a central role as role models, guides, and facilitators in forming students' characters in accordance with religious values. According to Al-Ghazali, the formation of spiritual morals involves the process of tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) which aims to accustom students to carrying out religious commands and avoiding its prohibitions.

Teacher Strategies in Learning

The word strategy comes from the word strategos (Greek) or strategus. Anissatul Mufarrokah said that: Strategos means general or also means state officer; this general is responsible for planning a strategy, from directing troops to achieve a victory (Anissatul Mufarrokah, 2009). In general, strategy has the meaning as an outline of the course of action to achieve something that has been determined. Syaiful Bahri Djamarah said that in relation to teaching and learning, strategy can be given as a general pattern of teacher-student activities in the realization of teaching and learning activities to achieve the goals outlined (Syaiful Bahri Djamarah, 2010). According to JRDavid quoted by Wina Sanjaya that: In the world of education, strategy can be interpreted as "a plan, method or series of activities sesigned to achieve a particular educational goal" (Wina Sanjaya, 2008). Dasim Budiansyah said that: Strategy is the teacher's ability to create strategies in various learning activities so as to meet the various levels of student ability (Dasim Budiansyah, 2008).

According to Baron quoted by Moh. Asrori defines: Strategy is the ability to outwit something here does not mean it has to be completely new but can also be a combination of previously existing elements (Moh Asrori, 2008). In this case, it is understood that teacher strategy is the teacher's effort to vary the way of teaching and create a pleasant teaching atmosphere in the classroom so that students can be involved and active in following learning actively, not passively. So, it can be concluded that learning strategy is a teacher's ability to create a way of teaching in the classroom by becoming better and enlivening a pleasant classroom atmosphere for students.

In fact, if viewed theoretically, according to an Australian educational psychology expert, Michael J. Lawson (1991) quoted by Muhibbin Syah, strategy is defined as a mental procedure in the form of a series of steps that use creative efforts to achieve certain goals (Muhibbin Syah, 2004). Effective learning strategies are key to shaping spiritual morals. According to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, learning that involves meaningful interactions and experiences can help students understand spiritual values in depth. Teachers can use various strategies, such as habituation of worship, role models, and moral reinforcement through Islamic stories, to instill moral values in students' daily lives. In addition, a contextual learning approach that links religious values to students' real lives can strengthen the understanding and application of spiritual morals.

In an educational institution, teachers have a very important role in it to shape the morals of students and make their students become successful people. In addition to the duties of teachers such as teaching, guiding, or channeling their knowledge to students, teachers also have the task of shaping the morals of students. Within each student there are different abilities. From this problem, teachers are required to have a high understanding to understand the different abilities of students. (Mila Intani, 2017: 64)

The theories that can be put forward in teacher learning strategies are as follows, First:*Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura.* The social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura (1977) suggests that individuals tend to imitate the behavior observed from others, especially when the model is considered a

competent and respected source. In the context of religious education, teachers function as role models who demonstrate desired behavior, which are then imitated by students. The teacher's exemplary behavior in demonstrating honesty, patience, and empathy is an important part of forming students' morals. Through observing the teacher's attitudes and actions, students internalize positive values in everyday life.

Second, the Social Constructivism Theory by Lev Vygotsky. The social constructivism theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978) focuses on the importance of social interaction in learning. In this context, learning does not only occur in the classroom, but also through meaningful relationships between students and their social environment, including teachers and peers. The use of Islamic stories as a learning medium that links religious values to real-life experiences is in line with this theory. With interactive discussions, students can more easily develop a deep understanding of moral values. Third, the Behaviorism Theory by BF Skinner. The behaviorism theory popularized by BF Skinner (1953) emphasizes the importance of reinforcement and repetition in shaping desired behavior. In the context of habituating worship, positive reinforcement such as praise or awards when students perform worship well will strengthen the behavior. Each repetition of worship becomes a stimulus that strengthens students' positive associations with the activity. Therefore, the habituation of worship routinely and consistently can strengthen students' spiritual character. Fourth, the Learning Relevance Theory by John Keller. The learning relevance theory by John Keller (1983) emphasizes that learning that is relevant to students' life experiences can increase their motivation to learn. When subject matter, including religious values, is linked to everyday life situations, students will feel more motivated to apply the knowledge gained in real action. A contextual learning approach that links Islamic values to students' experiences, such as honesty in trading or responsibility in completing schoolwork, is a real implementation of this theory. Fifth, the Theory of the Role of the Family in Religious Education. Research by Rohman (2021) shows that parental involvement in children's religious education can strengthen the formation of character and noble morals. Parents as the first and foremost educators play a very important role in

providing examples and supporting religious education provided in schools. Collaboration between teachers and parents in joint religious activities, such as religious studies or discussions about Islamic values, can strengthen the formation of students' spiritual morals.

Based on the description above, it can be understood that there are problems between theory and practice in the field. For that reason, researchers are interested in conducting research entitled:"Strategies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Forming Students' Spiritual Morals at the Private Elementary Madrasah (MIS) 'Aisyiyah in North Sumatra Region.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study research type to explore the strategies of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' spiritual morals at the Private Elementary Madrasah (MIS) Aisyiyah in North Sumatra. The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply understand the process of shaping students' spiritual morals through various strategies applied by teachers. The location of the study was MIS Aisyiyah in North Sumatra, which was chosen because of the relevance of its Islamic education practices to the research objectives.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Islamic religious education teachers and principals to obtain information on learning strategies at the Aisyiyah Private Elementary Madrasah (MIS) in North Sumatra. In addition, direct observation was conducted on classroom learning activities to observe the interaction between teachers and students and the implementation of spiritual moral formation strategies.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which include data reduction, data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives, and drawing conclusions related to the strategy for forming students' spiritual morals. The validity of the data was guaranteed through source triangulation by comparing information from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was carried out to ensure the accuracy of data from informants

and peer debriefing to discuss the results of the study with colleagues or experts in the field of Islamic education. This study also complies with the principles of research ethics, such as requesting permission from the madrasah, maintaining the confidentiality of the identity of the research subjects, and ensuring that the data is only used for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the Private Elementary Madrasah (MIS) 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers apply various methods to build students' spiritual morals. Some of these methods include habituation of worship, role models, moral reinforcement through Islamic stories, and contextual approaches in learning. Habituation of worship, such as congregational prayer, prayer before and after activities, and reading the Qur'an, has proven effective in instilling spiritual values in students from an early age. These activities directly affect students' religious awareness which is reflected in their daily behavior. In addition, teacher role models also play a crucial role. Teachers not only convey religious teachings in theory, but also provide examples through their attitudes and actions, such as showing honesty, patience, and respect for others, which are then emulated by students. This approach is in line with Bandura's social learning theory which states that individuals tend to imitate the behavior they observe in their environment. In Islamic education, teachers function as role models who have a great responsibility to reflect Islamic moral values.

Another method is moral reinforcement through Islamic stories, which are integrated into daily learning. Teachers tell stories from the Qur'an and hadith that are relevant to students' lives. This helps students understand moral values in a more relevant context and inspires them to apply them in real life. Vygotsky's social constructivism theory supports this approach, where learning that involves meaningful interactions and experiences can deepen students' understanding of spiritual values.

The results of the interview with Mr. Hakim, S.Pd.I, an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher at MIS 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra revealed that the strategy

for forming students' spiritual morals is carried out through the habit of worship and an exemplary approach. The PAI teacher explained that the habit of praying in congregation, reading prayers before and after studying, and memorizing verses of the Qur'an are routine activities that aim to instill religious awareness in students. The teacher also emphasized the importance of providing real examples in behaving, such as showing honesty, patience, and empathy, both inside and outside the classroom. The teacher stated that "Children tend to imitate what they see, so we try to be good role models so that Islamic values can be instilled naturally."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Rubiah, S.Pd as the Head of MIS 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach in shaping students' spiritual morals. She explained that the school actively communicates with parents to ensure that religious values are also applied at home. The Head of MIS said that activities such as family religious studies, discussions on the importance of religious education, and monitoring student behavior outside of school are carried out routinely to support classroom learning. "We believe that strong character building can only be successful if there is synergy between the school, parents, and the community," said the Head of MIS.

In addition, teachers and principals also acknowledged the challenges in forming students' spiritual morals, such as the negative influence of social media and limited time for religious learning in class. To overcome this, schools try to use time effectively, such as inserting Islamic values in various subjects and holding additional religious activities outside of class hours. The principal added, "We try to create a supportive environment, where every student feels comfortable learning and applying Islamic values without feeling forced."

Overall, these interviews show that a holistic approach involving habituation, role modeling, contextual learning, and collaboration with parents is key in schools' efforts to shape students' spiritual morals that are strong and relevant to the challenges of modern life.

Observations also show that the contextual learning approach has a major impact on shaping students' spiritual morals. Teachers often relate religious values to situations they face every day, such as the importance of honesty in playing or

responsibility in completing assignments. This approach strengthens the relationship between Islamic moral values and real practices that occur in students' lives. However, this study also identified several challenges in implementing spiritual character-building strategies, such as limited time for religious learning in schools and negative influences from the environment outside the school. Teachers try to overcome these challenges by involving parents in the process of character-building students through intensive communication and collaboration.

Overall, this study shows that the formation of students' spiritual morals at MIS 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra is carried out through various pedagogical approaches that emphasize the integration of religious values in students' daily lives. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play an important role in this process by implementing strategies based on habituation, role models, moral reinforcement through Islamic stories, and contextual approaches in learning.

Worship Habitual Strategy

Worship habituation is one of the main approaches in building students' spiritual morals, because through this activity, religious values can be deeply instilled through regular and repeated practices. In the context of education, worship habituation is carried out through various activities such as congregational prayer, prayer before and after activities, and memorizing verses of the Qur'an. This process not only aims to train students in carrying out worship properly, but also to form a mindset and attitude that supports the application of Islamic values in their daily lives.

Through congregational prayer, for example, students not only learn the procedures for worship, but also understand values such as togetherness, discipline, and mutual respect. This activity also provides an opportunity for students to strengthen their relationship with Allah SWT and others, creating a balance in vertical (hablum minallah) and horizontal (hablum minannas) relationships. In addition, the habit of reciting prayers regularly helps students to build spiritual awareness that is manifested in gratitude and hope for God, while memorizing verses of the Qur'an deepens their understanding and love for Islamic teachings.

Observations made show that this habit of worship not only increases students' religious awareness, but also helps develop a deep sense of responsibility in carrying out religious obligations. Students who are accustomed to regular worship tend to have a higher commitment in maintaining consistent positive behavior, such as honesty, discipline, and empathy for others. This reflects the success of the habit of worship as a tool to internalize moral values that underlie the formation of noble character.

This finding is supported by Anwar's research (2018), which shows that the habit of worship in schools is effective in improving the quality of students' character. Anwar explained that the repetition of religious activities creates a pattern of behavior that slowly becomes part of the student's personality. This result is in accordance with the theory of behavioristic learning, which emphasizes the importance of repetition and reinforcement in forming desired behavior. In this case, each repetition of worship becomes a stimulus that strengthens the positive relationship between worship and feelings of peace, meaning, and happiness, so that students are motivated to continue it.

Furthermore, the habituation of worship is also closely related to the concept of reinforcement in behaviorist theory. Teachers and parents often provide positive reinforcement in the form of praise or awards to students who perform worship well. This reinforcement not only strengthens the expected worship behavior, but also fosters a sense of pride and self-confidence in students in practicing religious values. In addition, this approach can be strengthened with consistent supervision, which makes students feel supported to maintain the good habits that have been formed.

Thus, the habit of worship is not just a routine, but also an effective tool to instill sustainable spiritual values. The integration of behaviorist theory, environmental support, and moral reinforcement from various parties makes this strategy relevant and important in forming a young generation with strong spiritual morals.

Teacher's Exemplary Behavior as a Role Model

Teachers' exemplary behavior is one of the important factors in the formation of students' character, especially in the context of religious education. At MIS 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers consistently strive to be good examples for students by demonstrating honesty, patience, and empathy in various situations, both inside and outside the classroom. This exemplary behavior is not only limited to theory, but is also manifested in real actions that can be directly observed by students, such as discipline in completing assignments, patience in facing challenges, and concern for students' needs and feelings.

The role of teachers as role models is based on the social learning theory proposed by Bandura (1977). This theory states that individuals tend to imitate the behavior observed from someone who is considered competent, respected, and relevant. In education, Islamic Religious Education teachers who demonstrate positive values become "learning models" that directly influence student behavior. For example, when teachers consistently demonstrate honesty in giving assessments, students will learn about the importance of the value of honesty in their lives.

Kurniawan's (2020) research shows that teacher role models have a significant impact on the formation of students' character, especially in terms of honesty, discipline, and respect for others. Disciplined teachers, such as arriving on time and fulfilling commitments, teach students to value time and responsibility. Likewise, teachers who show patience and empathy help students understand the values of caring and tolerance that are important in social life. In addition, teacher role models have a long-term impact on the formation of students' character. Positive values demonstrated by teachers not only help students behave well at school but also influence how they interact with their families and communities. For example, teachers who show empathy teach students to be more sensitive to the feelings of others and to pay attention to the social conditions around them.

The role of teacher role models is further strengthened by a holistic approach to education. Teachers not only teach religious values through subject

matter, but also demonstrate how these values are applied in everyday life. Teacher role models thus become an integral part of the character education process that focuses on the formation of students' personalities as a whole.

On the other hand, school environmental factors also influence teacher role models. A supportive environment, such as a school culture that values honesty, discipline, and empathy, strengthens the role of teachers as role models. Collaboration between teachers, principals, and parents in instilling these values creates an effective synergy in shaping students' characters. Therefore, teacher role models are not only an individual responsibility, but also part of a collective effort to create a generation with superior personalities and noble morals.

Moral Strengthening Through Islamic Stories

Islamic stories play an important role as an effective means of conveying moral values to students. At MIS 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra, teachers often use stories from the lives of prophets, companions, and Islamic figures to teach values such as honesty, patience, and courage. These stories provide concrete examples of how moral values can be applied in everyday life, so that students not only understand the theory behind them, but also feel motivated to emulate the attitudes and actions of these figures. For example, the story of the Prophet Yusuf who showed patience in facing life's trials and remained honest is a valuable lesson for students to continue to do good even in difficult conditions. By listening to these stories, students can connect abstract values with concrete experiences, making learning more meaningful and easier to understand.

This approach is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and meaningful experiences in the learning process. Through the delivery of Islamic stories that are carried out interactively, such as discussions or questions and answers, students can gain a deeper understanding of moral values. In addition, Mulyadi's (2019) research shows that the use of Islamic stories not only increases students' moral awareness but also strengthens their emotional connection with religious teachings. The use of Islamic stories in learning allows students to feel the relevance of religious

teachings in their daily lives and motivates them to apply them in real behavior. Thus, Islamic stories not only function as a means of education, but also as a source of inspiration that contributes to the formation of students' character as a whole.

Contextual Approach in Learning

The contextual learning approach applied in MIS 'Aisyiyah aims to link the subject matter with the students' life experiences, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful. Teachers often provide examples of everyday situations, such as the importance of honesty in trading taken from the story of the Prophet as a trader, or responsibility in completing school assignments which is connected to the concept of amanah. In this way, students not only understand Islamic values in the form of abstract concepts, but also learn how these values can be applied in everyday life. These concrete examples help students connect religious teachings with the reality they encounter, making learning more relevant and interesting.

This approach is in line with the relevance theory proposed by Keller (1983), which states that learning that is connected to students' experiences can increase motivation and strengthen their understanding. When students feel that the material they are learning is directly related to their lives, they will be more motivated to understand and apply it in practice. In addition, this contextual learning also supports the development of problem-solving skills, where students are invited to assess real-life situations based on Islamic principles. Thus, this approach not only increases the effectiveness of learning, but also plays an important role in forming students' Islamic character that is strong and relevant to face challenges in the modern era.

Challenges and Efforts to Overcome Them

This study also revealed several obstacles in the process of forming students' spiritual character, such as the negative impact of the environment outside the school, including the influence of social media, unsupportive relationships, and the entry of cultures that conflict with Islamic values. In addition, limited time for

religious learning in class is another obstacle, which is often not enough to study the material in depth and internalize moral values thoroughly. These factors are important barriers to building strong spiritual character in students. However, at MIS 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra, teachers try to overcome these challenges with a comprehensive approach, both inside and outside the school.

One of the strategies implemented is cooperation between teachers and parents through active communication and joint religious activities, such as family religious studies, discussions of Islamic values, and monitoring children's behavior at home. Research by Rohman (2021) supports this approach, which shows that parental participation in children's religious education has a great influence on the formation of character and noble morals. Parents as the first educators play an important role in setting an example in everyday life. With the synergy between schools and families, efforts to form students' spiritual morals become more effective, especially in facing external challenges that can affect the moral values that have been taught. This also emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach in education, where all parties work together to support the development of students' character as a whole.

The results of this study are consistent with Al-Ghazali's view on the importance of tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) in the formation of spiritual morals. In addition, these findings support the theory of Islamic education which emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers as role models, guides, and facilitators in the process of forming students' character. The strategies implemented at MIS 'Aisyiyah can be a model for other educational institutions that face similar challenges in forming students' noble morals. This study emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach in character education, which involves not only academic aspects but also the formation of students' personalities and spiritual values.

CONCLUSION

The strategy of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at the Private Elementary Madrasah (MIS) 'Aisyiyah North Sumatra in forming students' spiritual morals is very effective through various integrated approaches. The habit of

worship, such as praying in congregation, reading prayers, and memorizing verses of the Qur'an, has been proven to increase students' religious awareness and foster a sense of responsibility in carrying out religious obligations. In addition, the exemplary behavior of teachers as role models who demonstrate honest, patient, and empathetic attitudes, plays a major role in shaping students' character, where students tend to imitate the behavior of teachers they consider competent and respected.

The use of Islamic story media is also an effective strategy in conveying moral values, by providing concrete examples of the application of morals in real life. A contextual learning approach that links material to students' life experiences strengthens the relevance of religious values in everyday life. However, challenges such as the influence of the environment outside the school and limited time for religious learning in the classroom remain obstacles that need to be overcome. Teachers at MIS 'Aisyiyah collaborate with parents through intensive communication and joint religious activities, which have been proven to strengthen the formation of character and noble morals in students. Overall, collaboration between schools and families is the main key in creating an environment that supports the formation of students' spiritual morals effectively.

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