

## ISLAMIC EDUCATION STRATEGIES TO COUNTER MORAL DECADENCE AMONG VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

M. Zidni Abdul Jabar<sup>1</sup>, Sofyan Hadi<sup>2</sup>, Gunawan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia

Corresponden E-mail: [zidniabdul0@gmail.com](mailto:zidniabdul0@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*The increasing moral decadence among secondary school students – manifested through indiscipline, brawls, bullying, and disrespect for authority – poses a significant challenge for educational institutions. This study aims to explore the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in addressing this moral decline through classroom-based interventions and external collaborations. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from eight informants, including school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community figures. Techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation were used, with data analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, encompassing data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation of sources and techniques was applied to ensure data validity. The findings reveal that IRE teachers adopt a combination of preventive and corrective strategies, including the imposition of educational sanctions such as reciting toyyibah (e.g., tahlil, istighotsah), performing istighfar writing tasks, and engaging students in school clean-up activities. Character development is fostered through habituation of akhlakul karimah, such as honesty and mutual assistance. Furthermore, active collaboration with school administrators, counseling staff, parents, and community leaders enhances the effectiveness of these moral interventions. This study contributes to the discourse on character education by highlighting the integrative and community-based approach of IRE teachers in mitigating moral decline among adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Islamic Religious Education; Secondary Students; School-Community Collaboration

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### A. Introduction

Indonesia, as a country with a Muslim-majority population, bears a significant responsibility to ensure that its education system integrates religious values as a means to shape students' character in accordance with national norms and Islamic teachings, particularly *akhlakul karimah* (Alhidri et al., 2025). This aligns with Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that the function of national education is to develop students' abilities and character, fostering a dignified national civilization. Education is aimed at producing individuals who are faithful, devoted to God Almighty, of noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible democratic citizens (Winda & Ramedlon, 2022).

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in realizing these goals. IRE is a form of intentional and systematic guidance provided by educators to support students' spiritual and moral development in order to cultivate strong, character-driven

personalities (Satria et al., 2025). Previous studies highlight the importance of instilling Islamic values in education to guide students' behavior according to Islamic teachings, thus ensuring their well-being in both worldly and spiritual life (Nuha et al., 2024). However, these studies tend to emphasize curriculum content or cognitive development, with limited focus on the practical strategies employed by IRE teachers to address moral decline directly within school environments.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the concrete strategies implemented by IRE teachers in responding to moral decadence among secondary school students, while also examining the role of collaborative efforts among schools, parents, and community leaders in promoting holistic character education.

This is the formation of student morals and character as a person with character who has morals and complies with the norms of religion, nation and country as has been done by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH as an example in the world contained in Q.S Al-Ahzab verse 21.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

Meaning: "Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah there is indeed a good example for you, (i.e., for those who hope for Allah and the Day of Resurrection and who remember Allah a lot". (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21).

Imam al-Qurtubi revealed that the issue of exemplary religion is mandatory, while in the matter of the world, exemplary is an encouragement. In this regard, the example of the Prophet PBUH regarding religion is something that must be carried out before there is evidence of his recommendation. On the other hand, scholars are of the opinion that in world matters the Prophet PBUH has fully surrendered his relationship to their respective fields so that indirectly the example in the above verse can be directed to religious issues (Shihab, 2005).

Based on the interpretation of this verse, it can be seen that character or behavior as a world affair can be related to religious issues, especially for the Indonesian state that adheres to Islam as the majority so that it is indirectly required to emulate the behavior of the Prophet PBUH in each of his behaviors as an order and guideline in behavior. This matter is closely related to the behavior of students who are undergoing the educational process before living real life to be able to apply ahlakul karimah as their character in behaving within the scope of the school and outside the school environment which of course requires a quality learning system so that it can foster good character (Zulfa et al., 2024).

Moral instillation as an effort to form the character of students who have a good character can also be implemented through various local cultural wisdom in daily life as found in the school, family and community environment (Murniyetti et al., 2023). This is a form of strengthening the morality of students and minimizing the occurrence of moral deviations as there are many phenomena in today's society such as the number

of fights, bullying, abuse of addictive substances and various other criminal acts (Khoiriah et al., 2023).

Moral decadence that occurs in many circles of society if various values of good character (*akhlakul karimah*) begin to decline or moral decadence, this matter can be indirectly proven by the many criminal acts committed by students who are still in the learning period including acts of violence between students, abuse of addictive substances, free sex, theft and so on (Zakiyah et al., 2025). These various deviant behaviors indirectly become a reflection of the occurrence of moral decadence among students and even carried into adulthood so that the emergence of irresponsible behavior, corrupt practices, persecution, fraud and various other criminal behaviors (Asnawi et al., 2022). These things are certainly very concerning, especially in a country with a Muslim majority and within the scope of educational institutions (Mashuri et al., 2021).

As a teacher of Islamic Religious Education, a teacher is required to be able to formulate an accurate strategy as a form of effort to respond to the phenomenon of moral decadence that occurs, especially in the scope of education such as indisciplined behavior, bullying, lack of respect for teachers, responsibility and acts of violence between students so that they can indirectly change the characteristics of students for the better in the period of growth so that they can respect each other's differences both in a positive way. personal, opinion, and group (Astriana et al., 2023). The urgency of Islamic religious education as the main pillar of Islam plays an important role in fostering the character of students in educating, guiding and instilling positive morality as contained in the teachings of Islam so that all forms of student behavior in their daily lives can be organized and in accordance with the norms of religion, nation and state (Lubis & Murniyetti, 2023).

This research is based on and refers to various theories of Islamic religious education, overcoming moral decadence, character growth and the role of the environment around students in the hope of answering various previous problems, especially in vocational high schools. The lack of teaching hours in an educational institution requires teachers not only to be able to provide knowledge to students through classroom learning alone, but more than that, a teacher is required to be able to be a role model for students both in the school environment and outside the school so that the role of an Islamic religious education teacher is the main highlight of the occurrence of moral decadence.

Although there have been many studies related to character, this study emphasizes more on an innovation carried out by teachers in answering the problem of moral decadence that occurs among students in vocational secondary education institutions through collaborative strategies between educators, educational stakeholders within the institution, student guardians, and community leaders with different characteristics of students in different environments as a form of effort to establish morality Positive students (*ahlakul karimah*).

## B. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach to provide an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through rich description, analysis, and interpretation of field data (Scott, 2022; Kardi et al., 2023). The research was conducted at SMK Ma'arif, with informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in student character development and moral guidance. The eight informants included the Principal, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Homeroom Teacher, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Teacher, Counseling Guidance Teacher, a student guardian (parent), a student, and a local community leader. Data collection techniques included non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Engkizar et al., 2022). Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process was complemented with thematic coding strategies as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021), to ensure that recurring patterns in the data were systematically identified and interpreted.

To ensure trustworthiness, several validation strategies were applied. In addition to methodological and source triangulation, the study employed member checking to confirm the accuracy of interpreted findings with participants and maintained an audit trail for transparency and replicability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, assuring confidentiality and anonymity, and securing institutional permission for fieldwork.

## C. Finding and Discussion

This section presents the key findings derived from data triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation) with eight informants, followed by synthesis with relevant theoretical frameworks. To deepen the interpretation, cross-informant analysis is applied and supported with direct quotations and existing literature.

### 1. Educational Consequences as Moral Intervention

One major strategy employed by Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers is the implementation of *educational consequences*, a structured form of disciplinary action rooted in pedagogical intention rather than punitive response. As clarified by the Vice Principal of Student Affairs:

*"We don't punish to hurt, but to awaken conscience – reading istighfar or cleaning the yard helps them reflect and reset their behavior."*

These actions include reciting surah Yasin, writing istighfar, and performing community tasks, aligning with moral pedagogies rooted in Islamic ethics (Sapitri et al., 2022; Al-Baihaqi et al., 2024). Unlike conventional punishment, these practices are rehabilitative and spiritual, aiming to foster repentance (*taubat*) and instill self-discipline. This approach resonates with the model proposed by Asrori (2022), who distinguishes between corrective punishment and spiritually transformative discipline.

Cross-case analysis reveals a pattern: students under recurring moral violations (e.g., disrespect, truancy, bullying) showed behavioral improvements after consistent

application of these consequences, especially when reinforced by peer monitoring and teacher mentoring.

## 2. Internalization of Mahmudah Morality

The cultivation of *akhlak mahmudah* (commendable character) is central to the strategy, integrated across curricular and extracurricular spaces. The IRE teacher described:

*"We embed values of honesty and patience in every lesson and also practice them during extracurriculars."*

This value-based instruction involves continuous habituation (*ta'dib*) of Islamic morals such as honesty (*ṣidq*), humility (*tawadhu'*), and helpfulness (*ta'awun*), with strong reinforcement from religious narratives and prophetic traditions (Furqon, 2024; Qinaroh & Nafisah, 2024). Synthesis with the theory of moral development by Lickona (2013) confirms that repetitive exposure to moral exemplars and community-based reinforcement accelerates character formation. Data from student informants showed that peer-led reinforcement of these morals (e.g., collaborative chores or collective prayers) fostered both social bonding and behavioral transformation.

## 3. Strategic School-Based Collaboration

Effective mitigation of student moral decline was achieved through multisectoral collaboration among school stakeholders. The Principal emphasized:

*"We don't just discipline; we co-design programs, evaluate students weekly, and ensure all teachers model what we teach."*

Collaboration included weekly evaluation meetings, behavioral mentoring, and integration of moral themes across subjects. This interdepartmental strategy ensured continuity of moral education across different learning settings. The Counseling Guidance (BK) teacher shared a best practice of integrating behavioral reports with spiritual reflection journals, enhancing moral cognition and emotional self-awareness. This aligns with the systems approach to character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2020), which stresses stakeholder synergy and consistent moral ecology in the school environment.

## 4. Family Collaboration as Moral Continuity

The home remains a crucial site for character continuity. The homeroom teacher stated:

*"We send reflection assignments home and communicate monthly with parents to follow up student progress."*

Parents were involved through WhatsApp groups, moral report cards, and home-based spiritual tasks (e.g., prayer logs, parental testimonials). Informants reported that students with strong parental moral reinforcement exhibited higher emotional regulation and empathy.

The findings align with Epstein's theory of parental involvement (2011), which emphasizes learning partnership across home and school environments. Moreover, Sanusi et al. (2023) highlighted that joint responsibility between educators and parents

accelerates the internalization of moral values, especially when supported by trust and consistent communication.

### 5. Collaboration with Religious Leaders

Community leaders played a vital role in bridging school ethics and societal moral norms. These collaborations involved guest sermons, holiday commemorations, and mosque-based mentoring. A community leader explained:

*“When students see their teachers and ustadz delivering the same message, they know it's not just school rules, it's life.”*

This strategy created what scholars refer to as an “Islamic moral ecosystem” (Zamroni et al., 2024), where norms are consistently modeled and reinforced across social domains. Synthesis with Durkheim’s moral education theory (1995) confirms that social integration and collective moral frameworks are necessary for stable internalization of norms.

### E. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that the moral decadence among students – manifested in behaviors such as indiscipline, disrespect, conflict involvement, and lack of empathy – can be systematically mitigated through a comprehensive, collaborative, and spiritually grounded educational approach. First, the implementation of educational consequences as a pedagogical form of discipline proves effective in fostering students’ self-awareness and behavioral transformation. Rather than punitive, these consequences are reflective, moral, and spiritual in nature – designed to reorient students toward commendable conduct (*akhlak mahmudah*), echoing the Islamic principle of *ta’dib* and supported by moral education theory (Al-Baihaqi et al., 2024; Lickona, 2013). Second, the internalization of commendable morals such as honesty, patience, humility, and helpfulness – conducted through both explicit teaching and habituation – emerged as the foundation for long-term character development. This process demonstrates the synergy between intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence in shaping holistic student morality. Third, collaboration among school stakeholders – including principals, student affairs personnel, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and counseling staff – plays a vital role in creating a coherent and consistent moral climate. Their collective efforts strengthen the school’s capacity to act as a moral community, as emphasized in character education theory (Berkowitz & Bier, 2020). Fourth, collaboration with parents or guardians ensures continuity of moral education beyond the school environment. Parents, as primary moral agents at home, reinforce school-based values through daily supervision and role modeling, forming a feedback loop of moral reinforcement that aligns with the ecological approach to moral development (Epstein, 2011; Sanusi et al., 2023). Fifth, engagement with community and religious leaders enriches students’ moral orientation by connecting them to real-life role models outside the school. Their involvement in religious and social activities bridges the gap between abstract values taught in school and their practical application in community life, contributing to the formation of an “Islamic moral ecosystem” (Zamroni et al., 2024). In synthesis, overcoming moral decadence in students requires a

multi-layered strategy that includes spiritually grounded disciplinary practices, moral habituation, intra-school synergy, family engagement, and community collaboration. This integrated model not only addresses deviant behavior reactively but also cultivates proactive moral growth – preparing students to become ethically grounded individuals in both educational and societal contexts.

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