



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Sociology and Community Development*

Instilling religious values in young learners: A narrative exploration of teachers' roles and realities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the strategies and challenges encountered by public elementary school teachers in Kedurang District, South Bengkulu Province, in their efforts to instill Islamic religious values in students. Employing a narrative inquiry approach, the research explored the lived experiences of six teachers through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings revealed that teachers employed a range of strategies, including routine-based habituation (e.g., congregational prayers and moral reminders), role modeling, the use of visual media, and collaborative activities with parents and communities. Programs such as Jumat Berkah, Pesantren Kilat, and Ramadan journals serve as both instructional and character-building tools, embedding religious values into daily student experiences. Despite these efforts, teachers encountered persistent challenges, notably student discipline issues, varied engagement levels, and classroom management difficulties, often linked to students' diverse backgrounds and learning preferences. The study underscores the pivotal role of teachers as moral agents and emphasizes the need for adaptive, emotionally engaging, and collaborative pedagogical approaches. Findings contribute to value-based education literature by highlighting context-specific strategies in secular public schools and recommending ongoing teacher development and stronger school-parent partnerships for sustained religious character formation.

KEYWORDS: religious values, teacher strategies, elementary school, narrative inquiry

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Introduction

Education is a fundamental necessity in building a nation and shaping its future. Through education, human potential can be optimally developed, resulting in competent, qualified, and competitive individuals. One of the primary channels for obtaining education is through formal institutions such as schools (Solovyova et al., 2022). In this context, teachers serve as central figures who guide, educate, and support students in achieving their learning goals (Darling-Hammond, 2023). The presence of teachers is crucial, not only to help students understand academic content but also to instill essential values for everyday life (Kools et al., 2020). As Hermawan and Kusniasari (2023) emphasize, education is vital for developing human resources and fostering individuals with strong moral character. Religious values are among the most important elements that should be introduced to students from an early age. As both educators and role models, teachers play a central role in cultivating these values within the school environment (Haryono et al., 2021). Through a combination of formal instruction and non-formal activities, teachers can instill religious attitudes such as honesty, discipline, tolerance, and gratitude in students' daily lives. These efforts are intended to nurture children who are not only academically capable but also spiritually grounded. Ideally, students will understand the religious values they are taught and apply them in their everyday interactions (Setyaningsih & Sabiq, 2021).

Previous studies have addressed the cultivation of religious values in education. Suyatno et al. (2023) identified several key approaches to the internalization of progressive Islamic values: positioning teachers as living role models, integrating religious values into school culture, embedding these values in general subject matter, and fostering collaboration between schools and parents. The present study adopted a similar approach by positioning the teachers as role models within the school environment, integrating religious values across subjects and school culture, and building partnerships with parents. This aligns with the findings of Tambak et al. (2021), who examined the internalization of Islamic values to enhance student morality at MTsN 3 Pekanbaru. Their study emphasized that the implementation of programs such as *duha* and *fardhu* prayers is closely tied to the institution's mission of moral development. Teachers in the school affirmed the importance of these practices in shaping students' everyday behavior. Additionally, Islamic values can be found embedded in traditional folktales. For instance, the *Sang Piatu* folktale of the Pasemah ethnic group in Kedurang District, South Bengkulu Province, contains numerous Islamic moral teachings, making it a valuable educational resource for religious instruction (Nafisendy et al., 2025). In Kedurang, Bengkulu, teachings of morality are often imparted through *andai-andai* folktales. These folktales, rooted in the local community, offer moral guidance and inspire acts of kindness among community members, including the young learners (Junaidi et al., 2024). Through folktales, children encounter educational examples that touch their hearts, fostering empathy and encouraging care for one another (Junaidi et al., 2024). This highlights the potential of local narratives as tools for teaching religious values.

While existing literature have contributed valuable insights into the cultivation of religious values in educational settings (Fajar et al., 2023; Hambali et al., 2022; Mareta & Muhammad, 2022; Muhja et al., 2022; Suyatno et al., 2023; Tambak et al., 2021), most have focused on religious-based institutions such as *madrasahs*, where the curriculum is explicitly faith-oriented. These studies predominantly highlighted structured religious programs and institutional efforts that align closely with religious teachings. However, there is a noticeable lack of research that specifically examines how public elementary school teachers, particularly those operating in non-religious schools, instill religious values in their students. This gap is especially evident in the context of Kedurang District, South Bengkulu Province, which has received limited scholarly attention in this area. Additionally, earlier research on Kedurang's cultural heritage, such as local folktales, tends to focus on their literary or cultural content rather than their application within classroom pedagogy. Furthermore, the voices and lived experiences of teachers, those who directly engage in the process of value education, are often underrepresented in the literature. These gaps underscore the need for a study that explores the real-world strategies and challenges faced by elementary teachers as they navigate religious value integration within secular educational frameworks.

This study offers several important contributions to the field of value-based education. *First*, it introduces a contextual novelty by focusing on public elementary schools in the Kedurang region, thereby filling a geographical and institutional gap in the literature. *Second*, it employed a narrative inquiry approach, allowing for a rich exploration of teachers' lived experiences, offering depth and nuance that are often missing

in quantitatively driven studies. This methodological choice highlights how educators not only teach religious values but also personally interpret and adapt them within specific classroom contexts. *Third*, the study shifted attention from curriculum content and cultural texts to the practical, day-to-day strategies that teachers use, including how they address real challenges such as limited instructional time, diverse student backgrounds, and the compartmentalization of religious and general subjects. By doing so, this research provides a unique, ground-level, original, and highly relevant perspective.

Literature Review

Religious values

Religious values serve as a moral foundation for individuals, encompassing character development and the cultivation of positive habits, which are elements that should be instilled from an early age. Early exposure to religious values is thus expected to shape children into honest, patient, compassionate, and responsible individuals (Haryono et al., 2021; Mohamed, 2017). Similarly, Djamdjuri et al. (2022) and Khair and Hamed (2023) assert that character values enhance the perfection of worship, encompassing traits such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, creativity, independence, curiosity, communicativeness, environmental awareness, social concern, and responsibility. The internalization of Islamic values includes the elements of *aqidah* (faith), *akhlak* (morals), and *ibadah* (worship), which are transmitted not only through classroom instruction but also through religious activities beyond the formal curriculum (Siahaan et al., 2022; Suyatno et al., 2023). These values play a vital role in laying the foundation and providing direction in life, enabling children to grow and live according to sound religious principles. They are expected to equip children with the necessary grounding to face life's challenges, based on knowledge, practice, and deep faith, ultimately fostering commendable moral conduct and proper worship. According to Mahfud and Arifuddin (2022), the core religious values that must be instilled in children encompass three main dimensions: faith, religious practices, and moral development.

In education, the inculcation of religious values is strategically important in fostering students' religious character development. Various theories of value internalization can be applied to ensure that religious values are understood cognitively, internalized emotionally, and practiced in everyday life. Previous research outlines a three-stage model for the internalization of religious values. The first stage is value transformation, during which educators verbally convey values to students. The second stage, value transaction, involves social interaction and the collective practice of these values. The final stage, transinternalization, occurs when the values are reflected in students' personalities, shaping their character (Budianti & Rifai, 2022; Naim & Sariman, 2022). This progression allows for a deeper integration of values, moving from mere understanding to holistic internalization. Another key strategy is modelling, which positions teachers as central moral exemplars. Their demonstrations of politeness, honesty, patience, gratitude, and consistent worship provide tangible examples for students to emulate within the school environment. Such modelling is highly effective in fostering a positive atmosphere conducive to the internalization of religious values (Indawati et al., 2022).

Habituation serves as a practical method for embedding religious values through daily routines at school. Activities such as reciting *Asmaul Husna*, performing *Dhuha* prayers in congregation, and practicing the "5S" culture (*senyum, salam, sapa, sopan, dan santun*; translated as smiling, greeting, friendly interaction, politeness, and courtesy) reinforce religious character formation through repetition and consistency, ultimately becoming part of the school's cultural fabric (Ali et al., 2020). Studies from Indonesia show that instructional models emphasizing honesty, tolerance, and empathy are effective in shaping students' moral character (Rofiah & Munadi, 2024). Schools in Indonesia have effectively implemented values such as tolerance, humanity, equality, and appreciation of local culture through hidden curricula and extracurricular activities. These efforts also support the development of a harmonious and inclusive community (S et al., 2024). Finally, the integration of curriculum and contextual learning represents a comprehensive approach that embeds religious values across all aspects of learning, both curricular and extracurricular. By incorporating prophetic stories, value-based discussions, religious-social studies, and community service, religious values become more practical, contextualized, and meaningful in students' daily lives (Rijal et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the integration of spiritual values into modern education, as emphasized in Islamic educational philosophy, represents a holistic strategy to shape learners with balanced intellectual and moral character through contextual curricula, teacher training, and supportive learning environments (Basori et al.,

2025). The integration of religious values through daily routines and school activities effectively shapes students into religious, virtuous individuals with strong social awareness (Jakandar et al., 2025). The habituation of religious values through spontaneous activities, programmed routines, exemplary modeling, and community involvement has proven to be a holistic and integrative approach that effectively builds children's religious character from an early age (Hafidz et al., 2025). Consequently, students do not merely understand religious values in theory, but also experience and internalize them in their daily lives. This process strengthens the connection between knowledge, attitude, and action, while simultaneously nurturing both spiritual and social awareness. As students grow accustomed to seeing and experiencing these values through various learning activities and social interactions, internalization occurs naturally and sustainably. In the long term, this not only shapes individuals who are faithful and noble in character but also fosters a religious, harmonious, and character-driven educational environment.

The Role of Teachers in Instilling Religious Values

Teachers occupy a central position in the educational landscape, significantly influencing classroom processes, instructional practices, and learning outcomes. Beyond their academic responsibilities, teachers play a pivotal role in character education and the transmission of religious values to students. A great education cannot be separated from internalization of good character values for pupils because they should not only be good at academics but also having good character (Junaidi, 2017). Hence, educators are expected to be active, creative, and innovative while embodying noble character in shaping and nurturing students' competencies (Tandana et al., 2022). Serving as facilitators of intellectual and moral development, teachers are instrumental in enhancing the quality of education and preparing future generations who will become the leaders of tomorrow (Dange, 2020). They are also regarded as professional educators tasked with a wide range of responsibilities, including teaching, guiding, mentoring, training, assessing, and evaluating students across all levels of formal education, from early childhood to primary education (Illahi, 2020). This perspective aligns with Wai-Cook (2022), who emphasizes that teachers are responsible for students' holistic development and must possess a deep understanding of, and commitment to, achieving educational objectives.

Instructional competence is inseparable from efforts to enhance students' moral and ethical foundations. Students need mentors who can empathize with them and guide their developmental journeys. Consequently, teachers are expected to serve as not only instructors but also role models whose behavior and attitudes positively influence the learning environment. According to Pedler et al. (2020), the teacher functions as a moral exemplar, whose presence elicits positive student responses within the learning process. In today's educational context, the demand for professionally competent teachers is paramount to ensuring that teaching and learning processes align with established standards. Datnow (2020) affirms that a qualified, professional, and broad-minded teacher assumes multiple roles, not only as an instructor but also as an educator, mentor, guide, trainer, assessor, and evaluator of students' development.

Several contemporary pedagogical approaches in modern education further underscore the teacher's role in instilling religious values. These approaches reconceptualize teachers not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as spiritual mentors, moral facilitators, and character builders. *First*, Emancipatory Pedagogy positions education as a tool for social transformation through critical dialogue. As Lovat et al. (2019) emphasize, teachers are responsible for guiding students in critically reflecting on their religious values, cultural beliefs, and spiritual identities. Rather than delivering religious values dogmatically, this approach encourages open discussions and problem-based dialogues, enabling students to internalize values consciously, critically, and meaningfully. *Second*, Cognitive-Emotional Pedagogy integrates religious values with students' emotional experiences and cognitive understanding. This approach links faith-based teachings to learners' personal experiences and real-life contexts. Bardi and Schwartz (2020) argue that such integration strengthens value assimilation, as emotionally resonant learning environments foster deeper engagement and personal connection with the values being taught. *Third*, Pedeutology, or the study of teaching and the teaching profession, frames the teacher as a central moral and professional figure. Teachers are not merely conveyors of knowledge but also mentors and ethical role models in students' daily lives. Mayes (2020) asserts that teacher-student interactions must be grounded in ethical awareness and reflective practice, given the teacher's influential role in modeling behavior and attitudes. *Fourth*, Holistic Education aims to develop all dimensions of a student's being, including

intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, and moral aspects. According to Noddings (2021), this approach transcends the simple transfer of religious knowledge, fostering profound spiritual connections and promoting a humanistic, open, and empathetic learning environment. In this model, the teacher serves as a spiritual mentor, nurturing students' religious character in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Through these contemporary pedagogical frameworks, the teacher's role in embedding religious values extends beyond curriculum delivery. It encompasses the shaping of students' identities, ethics, and worldviews in ways that are thoughtful, reflective, and transformative.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, a method used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems (Cresswell, 2013). This approach conveys data through words, phrases, verbal expressions, narratives, or visual forms such as images (Lapan et al., 2012). It is grounded in naturalistic inquiry and guided by phenomenological or similar paradigms to examine social phenomena within a specific context, emphasizing the holistic understanding of subjects from their own perspectives (Elliott & Timulak, 2021). In this study, the researchers employed a narrative inquiry approach to examine how primary school teachers instill religious values in students. In this regard, the values in question are not solely normative or theoretical in nature but are also rooted in lived experiences, social interactions, and personal reflections expressed narratively.

Data Collection Techniques and Informants

Research data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, aiming to explore the strategies used by teachers to instill religious values in children. To ensure the validity of the data, the researchers applied triangulation of sources, time, and methods. This involved cross-referencing information obtained from various sources and timeframes, as well as comparing interview data with supporting documents. This study was conducted in Kedurang District, South Bengkulu Province, involving six primary school teachers as key informants. These teachers were actively engaged in educational activities at their respective institutions, which included SDN 62 Bengkulu Selatan, SDN 65 Bengkulu Selatan, SDN 67 Bengkulu Selatan, and MIN 1 Bengkulu Selatan. The informants were selected through a purposive sampling technique, intentionally chosen for their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in teaching religious values at the elementary school level. All participants were native residents of Kedurang, giving them a deep understanding of the local children's character. Their willingness to participate also allowed the researchers to obtain rich, relevant data. Specifically, the inclusion criteria included: 1) Actively teaching at the elementary school level (SD/MI); 2) Involved in both formal (e.g., Islamic religious education) and informal (e.g., school religious activities) religious instruction; and 3) Willing to participate in multiple sessions of data collection. Based on these criteria, the researchers determined that six participants were sufficient, as data saturation had been reached.

In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face over multiple sessions from June to July, specifically between June 24 and July 5. During this period, the researchers also carried out non-participatory observations, which took place across several sessions within the same timeframe. Additionally, documentation was used to support data credibility, including photographs of school activities and religious education materials. To further enhance the credibility of findings, member checking was conducted, wherein informants were invited to review the interview transcripts and narrative interpretations prepared by the researchers. Moreover, a peer debriefing process was implemented, involving discussions of preliminary findings held with colleagues or academic supervisors to prevent personal biases from influencing the interpretation of data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the qualitative data analysis model developed by Miles et al. (2018), which included four concurrent steps: 1) Data Collection: The researchers conducted interviews, observations, and documentation; 2) Data Reduction: Collected data were organized and filtered to retain only the most relevant information; 3) Data Display: Data were presented in structured forms for interpretation; and 4) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: The researchers interpreted the findings to draw conclusions based on patterns that emerged from

the field. Through these steps, the researchers constructed meaningful insights into how teachers embed religious values in their educational practice.

Results and Discussion

Results

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with six elementary school teachers in Kedurang, South Bengkulu, consisting of two male and four female participants. Among them were two English subject teachers, one physical education teacher, and three homeroom teachers. The interviews aimed to examine and analyze the strategies employed by these teachers in instilling Islamic values in their students. The interviews were conducted in person and followed a semi-structured format. The responses were subsequently processed and analyzed. Based on the analysis, several strategies were identified as explained in the following subsection.

Teachers' Strategies for Instilling Religious Values in Elementary Schools

The findings below synthesize interview and observational data from six informants regarding their strategies for instilling Islamic values in elementary students.

"Before starting the lesson, students are accustomed to praying together and are encouraged to practice honesty and discipline during the learning process." (Teacher YA)

"We train students through routines such as praying before and after learning activities." (Teacher NAC)
"One of our strategies is to encourage students to pray duha together before beginning the learning activities."
(Teacher SM)

"Our strategy involves habituating students with morning activities such as performing duha prayer, memorizing short surahs, and starting the day with collective prayer." (Teacher I)

The above excerpts demonstrate that teachers consistently implemented routine-based habituation, particularly joint prayers, and moral reinforcement as a core strategy for internalizing religious values in students. The teachers cultivated spiritual awareness, discipline, and honesty by embedding practices such as congregational *duha* prayer, pre- and post-lesson prayers, and moral reminders into daily routines. These rituals were not merely symbolic but served as embodied actions that reinforced values through repetition and community practice. Teachers acted as facilitators and moral exemplars, guiding students to integrate spirituality into their educational journey and fostering a collective identity rooted in religious principles and character formation.

"Our strategy includes morning evaluations where we ask students about their activities before coming to school, and whether they prayed before and after studying." (Teacher PH)

Morning evaluations served as a formative assessment tool that integrated spiritual reflection, encouraging students to reflect on their pre-school activities and prayer habits. This practice fostered self-discipline, accountability, and spiritual mindfulness, effectively bridging character development with academic readiness. *"The strategy is to set an example for students, such as a teacher demonstrating honesty, discipline, and good behavior."* (Teacher SN)

"The teacher serves as a role model for students and habituates them to behave honestly, politely, and with care for others, as well as to pray before learning activities begin." (Teacher SM)

Role modeling emerged as a central strategy in character education, with teachers embodying values such as honesty, discipline, empathy, and religious devotion to guide student behavior. Rather than relying solely on verbal instruction, teachers acted as good examples (*uswah hasanah*), reinforcing moral development through daily practices like praying before class. This consistent demonstration of values aligned with Islamic pedagogical

principles leverages imitation during formative years to effectively internalize character traits.

“We remind and motivate students, and we also encourage the habit of praying before and after learning. In addition, religious instruction is supported through learning media such as posters illustrating how to perform ablution.” (Teacher NAC)

Teachers emphasized the internalization of religious values by combining verbal reminders with visual media. They motivated students to develop consistent habits, such as praying before and after learning, while using tools like illustrated ablution posters to make abstract concepts more tangible. This approach fostered engagement and reinforced religious understanding in an accessible and age-appropriate manner.

“During Ramadan, we give students a daily activity agenda book to record their home activities.” (Teacher YA)

“Teachers and parents work together effectively. For example, during Ramadan, we provide a Ramadan activity journal to monitor students’ religious practices at home. In addition, there are school committee meetings to discuss students’ development.” (Teacher I)

“There are activities such as Jumat Bersih and Pesantren Kilat during Ramadan.” (Teacher PH)

Structured Ramadan programs served as a bridge between school and home, fostering student accountability and parental engagement in spiritual development. Daily journals encouraged consistent religious practice, while committee meetings facilitated collaborative monitoring of student progress. Complementary activities such as *Jumat Bersih* (Friday Clean-Up Program) and *Pesantren Kilat* (Ramadan Short Course Program) extended moral and spiritual learning beyond the classroom, emphasizing character formation through environmental care and immersive religious experiences.

“School programs include reading and writing Qur’anic verses, Jumat Sehat, and during Ramadan, there are competitions such as memorizing short verses and giving infaq when there’s a disaster or emergency affecting the school community.” (Teacher YA)

“School programs include congregational prayer and Qur’anic memorization assignments.” (Teacher SN)

The above excerpts depict that the school integrated Qur’anic literacy with socially responsive activities to foster holistic moral development. Programs such as congregational prayer, Qur’anic reading and memorization, and Ramadan competitions promoted spiritual discipline, while initiatives like *infaq* during emergencies cultivated empathy and social responsibility. These structured and situational practices supported the intellectual and emotional dimensions of students’ religious values.

“There is a Jumat Berkah program, where collected funds are allocated to children in need.” (Teacher I)

“Programs include communal meals, Jumat Berkah, and weekly infaq every Friday.” (Teacher SM)

“Programs such as Jumat Berkah and communal meals are conducted to strengthen harmony among school community members.” (Teacher NAC)

The above excerpts reveal that recurring initiatives like *Jumat Berkah* (Literally: Blessed Friday Program), *infaq*, and communal meals served as practical embodiments of shared values within the school community. These programs fostered generosity, empathy, and collective responsibility while strengthening social bonds and spiritual awareness. Their consistency reinforced the internalization of moral values through habitual

participation and communal experience.

“We, the teachers and the school, work together with the parents of students to instill religious values, such as through meetings between teachers and parents to discuss the child’s development.” (Teacher YA)

“There are school meetings that discuss students’ growth and development.” (Teacher SN)

“There are school committee meetings between teachers and parents, which serve to discuss problems or the development of students.” (Teacher PH)

“There are collaborative activities, such as school meetings that discuss students’ growth and development. Teachers and parents agree that if students violate school rules, they will receive a sanction at school.” (Teacher NAC)

School-parent collaboration emerged as a key mechanism for sustaining students’ moral and religious development. Parental education is critical for the development of children’s intelligence; academic, emotional, and social (Junaidi et al., 2022). Regular meetings between teachers and parents enabled early identification of issues, aligned educational values, and fostered joint responsibility in guiding student behavior. Consensus on disciplinary measures further strengthened accountability, ensuring consistent moral reinforcement across school and home environments.

In conclusion, the strategies employed by teachers to instill Islamic values in elementary students centered on routine-based habituation, moral modeling, formative reflection, and collaborative engagement. Teachers nurtured a consistent moral environment by embedding spiritual practices such as congregational prayers, Qur’anic literacy, and moral reminders into daily routines. Their role as exemplars further reinforced values through lived demonstration. Supplementary tools, like visual media and Ramadan journals, enhanced accessibility and relevance, while structured programs like *Jumat Berkah* and *Pesantren Kilat* extended moral learning into communal and social realms. Crucially, ongoing collaboration with parents ensured coherence between school and home, solidifying a holistic and sustained approach to character education grounded in Islamic principles.

Instilling Religious Values in The Classroom

During the learning process, students responded in varied ways due to their diverse backgrounds. Some were attentive, while others appeared disengaged. The teachers described the outcomes as follows.

“Students’ responses in learning have shown improvement in behavior, such as completing assignments honestly and behaving courteously in daily interactions.” (Teacher YA)

The excerpt reflects a positive thematic pattern of behavioral transformation through value internalization. Students’ increased honesty and courtesy indicate the early effects of religious value education on their cognitive awareness and everyday conduct. This behavioral shift suggests that the learning environment and consistent teacher reinforcement fostered moral growth, pointing to the beginning of deeper character development aligned with the school’s ethical and religious framework.

“When Islamic values are instilled, students respond positively and follow what has been habituated by the teacher, such as behaving politely, being tolerant, being disciplined when coming to school, and caring for one another during lessons.” (Teacher SM)

The excerpt illustrates the impact of structured moral habituation in shaping students’ behavior through the consistent reinforcement of Islamic values. Positive responses, such as increased politeness, tolerance, discipline, and empathy, suggest that when teachers repeatedly model and encourage values, they take root in students’ daily

conduct. Although some challenges persist, the observed behavioral improvements indicate that internalization occurs not just at the cognitive level but also through lived, relational experiences fostered in a value-based learning environment.

“Students respond well. However, a teacher must deliver the lesson clearly so that it is easy for students to understand.” (Teacher SN)

“Each student has a different way of responding, so teachers must be careful in selecting methods and approaches to maintain a conducive learning environment.” (Teacher I)

The excerpts emphasize that the internalization of religious values depends on clear, student-centered teaching. In this context, while students were generally receptive, their understanding varied, requiring teachers to adapt methods to different learning styles. Effective instruction should combine clarity with inclusive strategies, including verbal, visual, and experiential, to meet diverse cognitive and emotional needs. This approach not only facilitates comprehension but also fosters meaningful engagement and application of values in daily life.

“Students respond differently. Therefore, teachers must carefully consider the methods and approaches used in the learning process.” (Teacher I)

“Students respond in various ways. Some participate well, while others show a lack of discipline during the lesson.” (Teacher NAC)

“Some are enthusiastic, while others are less responsive during the learning process.” (Teacher PH)

Teachers observed varied student responses, from enthusiasm to disengagement, highlighting the need for adaptive and responsive teaching methods. This variability calls for personalized approaches that address individual learning styles and behavioral dynamics. Besides, effective moral education should ideally involve managing classroom conduct and fostering intrinsic discipline through positive reinforcement and contextual relevance.

“Sometimes during the lesson, students leave and re-enter the classroom and lose focus.” (Teacher I)

“During the process of instilling religious values, there are still students who act disorderly, entering and leaving the classroom as they please.” (Teacher NAC)

“As facilitators, teachers must use media that captures students’ attention so they remain orderly during the lesson.” (Teacher I)

The excerpts reveal issues in maintaining student focus and discipline, particularly during religious or value-based lessons. Disruptive behaviors, such as students entering and leaving the classroom, reflect gaps in self-regulation and engagement. Teachers emphasized the importance of using engaging media to sustain attention and foster orderly behavior. Effective classroom management strategies, including interactive tools, structured routines, and co-created behavioral norms, are essential for reinforcing moral development. In creating a supportive classroom environment, teachers encourage open discussions and reflective thinking, fostering collaboration and teamwork that is essential for holistic development. During instruction, teachers can use multimedia tools to engage students actively, employing questioning strategies, guided discussions, and language-based activities inspired by storytelling to enhance language skills and character development (Yanti, et al., 2025). In addition, educators can help students internalize values more deeply and meaningfully by creating emotionally engaging and participatory learning environments.

In conclusion, the findings underscore that the internalization of religious values in the classroom led to early signs of positive behavioral transformation, such as increased honesty, courtesy, and empathy.

However, student responses remained varied, influenced by individual backgrounds and learning preferences. This highlights the need for adaptive, student-centered teaching approaches that combine clarity, inclusivity, and engagement. While consistent value reinforcement by teachers could foster moral growth, challenges in maintaining discipline and focus persisted. Addressing these through effective classroom management, engaging media, and emotionally resonant instruction is crucial for cultivating deeper, sustained character development.

Teachers' Challenges in Instilling Religious Values

The challenges encountered by teachers in instilling Islamic values in elementary school students in South Bengkulu were multifaceted, as depicted in the following excerpts.

“One of the challenges we face is that some students lack focus during lessons. They engage in activities outside the learning process, such as being preoccupied with distractions they make.” (Teacher YA)

This statement highlights that a major challenge was the students' lack of focus. Learners often failed to fully engage in the instructional process and tended to participate in unrelated activities. Such circumstances indicate the need for more engaging, interactive teaching methods to sustain students' attention and participation.

“Another challenge is that students often lack discipline during the learning process.” (Teacher SN)

Student discipline during lessons was another common concern. A lack of discipline hindered the effective delivery of religious values, as students might ignore instructions or disregard classroom norms. Hence, the continued presence of distracted and unfocused students remained a significant obstacle in promoting discipline and instilling values. This situation emphasizes the need for consistent rule enforcement and the cultivation of positive behavioral habits.

“Students need to be reminded during every lesson, and some still show a lack of discipline in class.” (Teacher PH)

“Students still lack order and discipline during the learning process.” (Teacher SM)

“Some students remain undisciplined and unfocused during the learning process.” (Teacher NAC)

“One of the current challenges is how teachers manage the classroom environment so that it becomes conducive to learning.” (Teacher I)

These statements collectively reinforce earlier findings regarding student discipline, revealing the persistent need for repeated reminders and sustained teacher presence. This suggests that the internalization of religious values is not achieved through one-off efforts but requires consistent guidance and reinforcement. The teachers consistently pointed out the recurring issues of order and focus, which significantly impede students' moral development and engagement with learning content. These challenges highlight the essential role of teachers in fostering a conducive learning environment for academic and moral growth. Another key challenge was the lack of mastery in classroom management, which undeniably affected the quality of the students' learning experience. Poor management ultimately resulted in disengaged learners and lost opportunities for value-based instruction.

“Differences in students' abilities and backgrounds have been a significant issue for me.” (Teacher NAC)

This excerpt introduces another layer of complexity: student heterogeneity. The diversity in students' abilities, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds requires adaptive teaching approaches and differentiated instruction. Teachers must adjust their methods to cater to varying capacities for internalizing religious values, making inclusivity and responsiveness crucial in value-based education.

“Maintaining discipline and creating a conducive classroom atmosphere requires the right strategy, especially when dealing with students who are difficult to manage or unmotivated.” (Teacher SN)

This reflection integrates several previously mentioned challenges and underscores the necessity for a broad repertoire of classroom management strategies. Teachers must be equipped to handle students with diverse needs, particularly those exhibiting disruptive behaviors or lacking intrinsic motivation. Selecting and applying appropriate strategies is essential for establishing an orderly and conducive environment for value transmission.

“A challenge we encounter is the teacher’s readiness to manage the classroom, because essentially, all children are good and capable of being disciplined if the teacher employs the right method of instruction.” (Teacher I)

This reflection shifts the focus from students to teachers, underscoring the importance of teachers’ preparedness in classroom management. It suggests that challenges related to discipline and focus might, in part, result from ineffective instructional strategies. Thus, the continuous development of pedagogical competencies becomes critical. Teacher preparedness should encompass not only lesson planning and instructional techniques but also professional readiness to address diverse classroom dynamics.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by teachers in instilling Islamic values in elementary students in South Bengkulu stemmed primarily from issues of student focus, discipline, and classroom management. Recurrent distractions, lack of order, and the need for constant reminders hindered effective value transmission. Moreover, the diversity in students’ backgrounds and abilities added complexity, requiring adaptive, inclusive teaching approaches. These findings highlight that the successful internalization of religious values depends not only on student behavior but also on the teacher’s ability to manage classrooms effectively and apply appropriate instructional strategies. Continuous professional development and strategic classroom practices are essential to fostering a conducive environment for moral and academic growth.

Discussion

This study examined the strategies, challenges, and student responses related to instilling Islamic values among elementary students in Kedurang District, South Bengkulu Province. Using non-participatory observations, in-depth interviews with six teachers, and documentation, the findings illuminate the strengths and limitations of value-based religious education. Teachers employed a holistic approach, ritual habituation, moral exemplification, and programmatic engagement to internalize Islamic values through consistent, embodied practices. These strategies align with the concept of the “hidden curriculum,” where values are conveyed both explicitly and implicitly. Karwadi and Indrawan (2023) support this finding, noting that Islamic religious education teachers model ethical behavior and lead congregational prayers. Such practices underscore how recurring interactions foster character formation and moral development. The teacher’s role as a *moral exemplar* is central in Islamic pedagogy, especially through the concept of *uswah hasanah* (good example). Teachers in this study not only delivered religious instruction but also modeled behavior in daily interactions. Amanullah et al. (2023) highlight that such modeling enhances Islamic learning by showing that values are best conveyed through actions, reinforcing the teacher’s pivotal role in character education.

Despite positive outcomes, varying student engagement was observed. Specifically, some students showed enthusiasm and discipline, while others were inattentive or disruptive. These disparities might stem from family background, religiosity, and learning preferences, echoing Tomaszewski et al. (2020), who found behavioral and cognitive engagement often vary across socio-economic backgrounds. Ng et al. (2023) emphasize that moral education must accommodate differing sensitivities to normative content. Encouraging reflection helps students internalize values more meaningfully. Teachers identified monotonous instruction and unclear delivery as contributors to disengagement. Stevenson et al. (2020) affirm that engaging pedagogy fosters involvement and reduces behavioral issues. Consequently, teacher education programs should include training in classroom management and pedagogical clarity, which is especially important in religious education, where values must be conveyed clearly and meaningfully. Maulana et al. (2023) highlight that structured, developmentally appropriate instruction improves both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, emphasizing that effective teaching supports

holistic student growth.

Differentiated instruction, which tailors content to students' readiness and preferences, was found effective in managing behavior and enhancing engagement (Godor, 2021). Interactive and contextual methods such as role-playing, visual media, and religious storytelling promote emotional engagement and active learning (Knaus, 2023). These approaches improve participation, deepen value comprehension, and foster a more inclusive environment. As Weimer (2022) notes, experiential learning and student reflection lead to better internalization of values. Making content emotionally resonant and tied to students' lived experiences is critical for effective discipline and moral development (Whitney et al., 2021).

Integrating parents and community (e.g., through Ramadan events or communal charity) strengthens the moral ecosystem. Such collaborations reflect a *maqasid al-shari'ah*-driven pedagogy supporting spiritual and social well-being. Ayala-Pazmiño (2023) advocates for dialogical, inclusive value education over dogmatic approaches. Open dialogue and reflection foster empathy, responsibility, and social connectedness. In this study, students responded more positively to participatory activities like *Jumat Berkah* and *Pesantren Kilat* than to traditional lectures, reinforcing the need for contextual and meaningful content (Gattani et al., 2023). In sum, effective value-based education must be adaptive, emotionally resonant, and responsive to students' diversity. Successful internalization of Islamic values requires not only ritual and moral instruction but also pedagogical strategies that address emotional needs and sociocultural contexts.

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' strategies and challenges in instilling religious values among elementary students, several limitations should be acknowledged. The researchers involved only six teachers from four schools in Kedurang District, potentially limiting generalizability. The narrative inquiry approach, while rich, relies on subjective interpretation and may carry researcher bias. Additionally, the study focused solely on teachers' perspectives, omitting views from students and parents. The brief data collection period may not reflect long-term classroom dynamics, and the predominantly Muslim context may limit applicability to more diverse settings.

Conclusion

This study examined the strategies and challenges faced by elementary school teachers in Kedurang District, South Bengkulu Province, in their efforts to instill Islamic values in students. Employing a narrative inquiry approach, the research revealed that teachers employed various methods, including routine-based habituation, moral modeling, visual media, and collaborative programs with parents, to cultivate values such as honesty, discipline, empathy, and spiritual awareness. These efforts extended beyond the classroom, integrating communal and religious practices like *duha* prayers, *Jumat Berkah*, *Pesantren Kilat*, and Qur'anic literacy programs. Despite these strategic approaches, teachers encountered significant challenges related to student discipline, focus, and engagement. These challenges were exacerbated by students' diverse backgrounds, learning preferences, and limitations in classroom management capacity. The findings emphasize that the internalization of religious values is a complex and dynamic process that requires not only consistent teacher modeling and structured programming but also emotionally engaging instruction tailored to students' needs. In conclusion, the study underscores the pivotal role of teachers as moral agents and highlights the importance of adaptive, reflective, and collaborative pedagogical strategies. To strengthen the effectiveness of religious value education, future efforts should focus on continuous teacher training, the development of inclusive instructional materials, and sustained parent-school partnerships. Further research involving students' and parents' perspectives could offer a more holistic understanding of the value internalization process and inform more contextually relevant educational policies.

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