

STRATEGIES OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION TEACHERS IN SHAPING THE MORAL CHARACTER OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi yang diterapkan guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam membentuk akhlak generasi milenial di MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain penelitian lapangan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semiterstruktur, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan guru Pendidikan Agama Islam, kepala madrasah, peserta didik, wali kelas, serta pihak terkait lainnya. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru Pendidikan Agama Islam memiliki peran strategis melalui keteladanan, pembiasaan, bimbingan moral, motivasi, pengawasan, dan penegakan disiplin Islami. Pembentukan akhlak diwujudkan melalui shalat berjamaah, membaca Al-Qur'an, pembiasaan salam, kegiatan keagamaan, pemantauan perilaku, serta pendekatan komunikatif dan persuasif. Pelaksanaannya didukung oleh lingkungan madrasah yang religius, kepemimpinan institusi, kolaborasi antarguru, dan keterlibatan orang tua. Namun, paparan media sosial, keterbatasan pengawasan orang tua, dan pengaruh pergaulan negatif masih menjadi tantangan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pembentukan akhlak peserta didik memerlukan ekosistem pendidikan yang integratif dan adaptif yang menghubungkan nilai-nilai Islam, keteladanan guru, budaya madrasah, keterlibatan keluarga, dan realitas digital peserta didik.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam, Akhlak, Generasi Milenial

Abstract

This study examines the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping the moral character of the millennial generation at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a field research design. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving Islamic Religious Education teachers, the head of the madrasah, students, homeroom teachers, and relevant school personnel. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a strategic role through role modeling, habituation, moral guidance, motivation, supervision, and Islamic discipline. Character formation is implemented through congregational prayer, Qur'anic reading, greeting practices, religious activities, behavioral monitoring, and communicative and persuasive approaches. The implementation is supported by a religious school environment, institutional leadership, teacher collaboration, and parental involvement. However, social media exposure, limited parental supervision, and negative peer influence remain significant challenges. The study concludes that shaping students' moral character requires an integrated and adaptive educational ecosystem that connects Islamic values, teacher exemplarity, school culture, family involvement, and students' contemporary digital realities.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Moral Character, Millennial Generation

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education occupies a strategic position in shaping students' character so that they not only possess religious knowledge but are also able to internalize Islamic values in their everyday behavior. Education should not be directed solely toward the achievement of cognitive competencies but should also pay attention to the development of attitudes, morality, and character. From the perspective of Islamic education, *akhlakul karimah* represents an important indicator of educational success because it reflects the integration of religious understanding, moral awareness, and practical conduct. In the context of contemporary education, character strengthening has become increasingly important as students live in a social environment undergoing rapid transformation due to technological development, globalization, and changing patterns of communication. Research on character education indicates that character formation cannot be separated from the educational environment, the quality of teacher–student interactions, and the consistency of value-based habituation in school life (Birhan et al., 2021). This condition highlights the important role of religious education in ensuring that students' intellectual development progresses in balance with their moral and spiritual development.

These challenges have become increasingly complex for the millennial generation, which has grown up in a digital environment. Access to the internet, social media, communication platforms, and various sources of information has shaped patterns of interaction and ways of acquiring knowledge that differ from those of previous generations. Digital technology provides significant opportunities for learning; however, it simultaneously creates greater exposure to diverse values, lifestyles, and behaviors that are not always consistent with religious norms. Studies on character education in the digital era indicate that technological development has transformed the environment in which students develop morally, requiring schools to formulate educational strategies capable of integrating character values with the digital realities encountered by students (Rahayu et al., 2023). Therefore, the issue of character education is no longer limited to students' behavior in the classroom but also concerns how they communicate, interact, and make decisions within digital spaces.

These conditions can be observed in various issues, including declining politeness, diminished respect for teachers and parents, increasingly individualistic behavior, and weak communication ethics. Aulia et al. (2023) demonstrate that changes in the social environment and technological development have generated new challenges for the character formation of younger generations. Caisar et al. (2023) similarly emphasize that changes in patterns of social interaction can influence students' behavior and moral development. From a broader perspective, character education in the digital era requires strategies that do not merely emphasize the transmission of values in a normative manner but also help students understand the moral consequences of their actions. Budiyo (2024) argues that technological development requires character education to adapt to changes in the learning environment while utilizing technology constructively to support students' moral development.

Within the context of Islamic Religious Education, teachers occupy a central position in addressing these challenges. Islamic Religious Education teachers do not merely function as transmitters of religious knowledge but also serve as educators, mentors, motivators, supervisors, and moral role models. Research by Nasrullah et al. (2023) demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education teachers play an important role in character education through religious instruction, habituation, discipline reinforcement, and the internalization of moral values in school life. These findings indicate that character education becomes more effective when the values taught through religious instruction are translated into practices and educational culture in students' everyday lives. Sitompul et al. (2023) likewise demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education teachers contribute to the development of students' character and morality, not only at the individual level but also within their social lives. Accordingly, Islamic Religious Education teachers should be positioned as educational actors capable of bridging Islamic normative values with the dynamics of students' everyday lives.

Teacher role modeling is particularly important because character formation does not occur solely through the transfer of knowledge. Students learn not only from what teachers communicate but also from how teachers behave, communicate, resolve problems, and treat others. Research on character education from an Islamic perspective indicates that teachers function as moral exemplars who provide concrete experiences of how Islamic values are practiced (Andriani et al., 2025). This finding is consistent with Aprilia et al. (2024), who demonstrate that teachers serve as role models in helping students internalize moral values through various educational activities. Therefore, character-building strategies need to be understood as a process involving role modeling, habituation, guidance, supervision, motivation, and the creation of a school environment that supports Islamic behavior.

In addition to role modeling, instructional strategies constitute an important factor in character formation. Islamic education that focuses solely on mastery of religious content may create a gap between religious knowledge and students' actual behavior. Setiawan and Fahyuni (2024), for example, demonstrate that innovative Qur'anic teaching methods can contribute to the development of students' moral character. Budiyaniti and Parhan (2024), through their study of the Ulul Ilmi model, also highlight the importance of integrating spiritual and moral dimensions into pedagogical practices. These findings indicate that character education requires a holistic approach that connects knowledge, internalization, and the practical application of values in students' everyday lives.

Changes in the digital environment also require Islamic Religious Education teachers to develop more contextual strategies. Character education should not merely teach concepts of right and wrong but should help students address concrete issues such as social media ethics, information dissemination, digital communication, content consumption, and interaction with diverse social groups. Recent research on character education in Islamic education indicates that strengthening moral values in the digital era requires the integration of religious education, school culture, and students' ability to engage critically with the digital environment (Rahayu et

al., 2023). Furthermore, Jaya et al. (2026) demonstrate that the development of digital media has transformed students' behavioral patterns, learning patterns, and sources of moral reference, requiring Islamic education to provide a more adaptive response to these changes. Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected not only to teach religious knowledge but also to serve as moral mentors who assist students in applying Islamic values to their digital lives.

MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan, as an Islamic educational institution, bears an important responsibility for producing students who possess a balance between academic competence and moral character. As an Islamic-based madrasah, the institution is expected not only to provide theoretical religious understanding but also to establish an educational culture that enables Islamic values to be practiced concretely in students' everyday lives. In the context of the millennial generation, this responsibility has become increasingly complex because students encounter an open and dynamic digital environment. Therefore, the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' character need to be investigated empirically to understand how teachers translate Islamic values into educational practices, how these strategies are implemented in school life, and how teachers respond to changes in students' behavior.

Although research on the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers and character education has continued to develop, several research gaps remain. First, a number of studies discuss character education in general without giving specific attention to the characteristics of the millennial generation living within a digital ecosystem. Second, research on Islamic education and character formation often focuses on curriculum, instructional practices, or educational concepts in general, whereas the empirical experiences of teachers in implementing various character-building strategies have not always been examined in depth. Third, research that integrates teacher strategies, role modeling, habituation, guidance, supervision, and responses to digital challenges within a single empirical context remains relatively limited. Fourth, empirical studies specifically examining the strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping character within Islamic-based senior madrasahs, particularly MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan, remain scarce. Accordingly, this study does not merely replicate previous discussions of the "teacher's role" but seeks to understand how such a role is translated into concrete educational strategies.

Based on these gaps, the novelty of this study lies in its empirical analysis of the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers to shape the moral character of the millennial generation while taking into account the context of madrasah education and the changing digital environment. This study conceptualizes teacher strategies comprehensively, encompassing role modeling, habituation, guidance, supervision, motivation, interpersonal approaches, and the integration of Islamic values into educational activities. Such an approach enables the study not only to identify the strategies employed by teachers but also to understand the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence their implementation. In this way, the study is expected to broaden the field of Islamic character education by providing an empirical perspective on

teachers' practices while offering a more contextual understanding of character formation among the millennial generation.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping the moral character of the millennial generation at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan, identify the forms of strategies used in character development, and analyze the factors that support and hinder their implementation. Academically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic character education scholarship, particularly concerning teachers' strategies for addressing the moral dynamics of the millennial generation. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a basis for evaluation and recommendations for teachers, madrasahs, and Islamic educational institutions in developing character-building practices that are more contextual, adaptive, and relevant to the demands of students' lives in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping the moral character of the millennial generation at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on exploring educational practices, experiences, interactions, and contextual factors that cannot be adequately represented through numerical measurements. According to Moleong (2021), qualitative research is appropriate for understanding phenomena in their natural settings by emphasizing the meaning and interpretation derived from participants' experiences.

The study adopted a field research design, in which data were collected directly from the research setting to obtain comprehensive and contextual information concerning the actual practices of character development. The research was conducted at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan, an Islamic educational institution that places particular emphasis on religious education and the development of students' moral character. Conducting the research in the natural school environment enabled the researchers to observe the implementation of character-building strategies and the interactions between teachers and students in their everyday educational activities.

The research participants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research objectives and their involvement in the implementation of Islamic character education. The participants consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers, the head of the madrasah, students, homeroom teachers, and other relevant school personnel who could provide information concerning the implementation of moral character development. The inclusion of participants from different positions allowed the study to obtain diverse perspectives and strengthen the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine teachers' strategies, students' behavior, classroom

interactions, religious activities, habituation practices, and the broader school environment related to moral character development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their experiences, perceptions, strategies, challenges, and responses concerning the formation of students' moral character. Documentation was used to complement the observational and interview data by examining relevant school documents, educational programs, activity records, regulations, and other supporting materials. The combination of these techniques enabled data triangulation and increased the credibility of the research findings (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data analysis employed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, relevant information was selected, organized, coded, and condensed according to the research focus. The reduced data were subsequently presented in a systematic manner to identify patterns, relationships, and recurring themes concerning teachers' strategies for developing students' moral character. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by continuously comparing emerging interpretations with the collected evidence. The analytical process was conducted iteratively throughout the research to ensure that the conclusions accurately reflected the empirical conditions of the research setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Strategies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Shaping the Moral Character of the Millennial Generation

The findings of observations, interviews, and documentation at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a strategic role in shaping the moral character of the millennial generation. Their role extends beyond the delivery of religious knowledge in the classroom to include character guidance, moral supervision, habituation, motivation, and the provision of exemplary behavior in students' daily lives. This finding confirms that the formation of *akhlakul karimah* requires an educational process that integrates religious knowledge with concrete behavioral practices. Amaliah and Nasution (2025) emphasize that Islamic Religious Education teachers have responsibilities not only as instructors but also as educators who guide and develop students' character. Similarly, Najamudin and Muliati (2025) conceptualize the Islamic teacher as *murabbi*, *mu'allim*, and *muaddib*: the *murabbi* develops students' potential, the *mu'allim* provides knowledge, and the *muaddib* instills values of manners and morality.

The research findings further demonstrate that the teacher's strategic role is manifested through an integrated approach involving role modeling, habituation, advice and motivation, supervision, and Islamic discipline. Among these strategies, role modeling emerged as particularly important. Teachers do not merely instruct students to behave politely, honestly, responsibly, and respectfully but demonstrate these values through their own conduct. Students observe teachers' ways of communicating, interacting, maintaining discipline, performing religious practices, and responding to problems. Consequently, the teacher becomes a direct source of

moral learning. This finding is consistent with Rahman et al. (2023), who found that teachers' personality competence, particularly discipline, responsibility, and religiosity, contributes to students' character formation.

The importance of role modeling is also reflected in the Islamic educational concept of *uswah hasanah*. Character education becomes more meaningful when students encounter consistency between the values communicated by teachers and the behaviors demonstrated by teachers. In this context, the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education teachers depends not only on pedagogical competence but also on personal integrity. A teacher who consistently demonstrates Islamic manners creates an implicit learning environment in which students can observe and imitate desirable behaviors. This finding reinforces the argument that character formation cannot rely exclusively on cognitive instruction because moral values need to be experienced repeatedly before they become internalized dispositions.

In addition to role modeling, teachers at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan employ habituation as a strategy for embedding moral values into students' everyday routines. Habituation is implemented through activities such as greeting teachers and peers, performing congregational prayers, reading the Qur'an before lessons, maintaining discipline, and demonstrating respectful communication. Such practices indicate that character education is integrated into the broader culture of the madrasah rather than being restricted to Islamic Religious Education lessons. Prayoga and Hasanuddin (2024) identify habituation, guidance, supervision, and Islamic discipline as important approaches in the development of students' noble character. This is consistent with Ramayulis (2015), who emphasizes that Islamic character formation requires educational environments that consistently support the practice of moral values.

The findings also show that Islamic Religious Education teachers employ communicative and persuasive approaches when dealing with millennial students. Rather than relying predominantly on authoritarian instruction, teachers attempt to understand students' psychological and social characteristics and establish interpersonal communication that encourages openness. This strategy is particularly relevant because millennial students are closely connected to digital technology and are accustomed to rapid, interactive, and flexible forms of communication. Arsyad et al. (2023) explain that the millennial generation possesses distinctive characteristics shaped by technological development, including high exposure to social media and rapid access to information. Therefore, the teacher's strategy must adapt to students' social realities without compromising the fundamental values of Islamic morality.

The use of a communicative approach does not mean reducing discipline or weakening moral standards. Rather, it represents an effort to convey Islamic values through dialogue, explanation, motivation, and constructive guidance. Teachers provide advice when students demonstrate inappropriate behavior and encourage them to understand the consequences of their actions. Maulidina and Ningsih (2024) emphasize the importance of adaptive and relevant approaches in Islamic education for contemporary students. In this regard, the teacher acts not

merely as an authority figure but also as a mentor who helps students understand why particular behaviors are consistent or inconsistent with Islamic values.

The findings therefore suggest that the strategy of Islamic Religious Education teachers at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan is characterized by an integration of exemplary behavior, habituation, persuasive communication, moral guidance, supervision, and discipline. These strategies operate simultaneously rather than independently. Role modeling provides a behavioral example, habituation creates consistency, communication builds acceptance, while supervision and discipline ensure that values are translated into actual conduct. This integrated strategy strengthens the position of Islamic Religious Education teachers as central actors in character education. Nasrullah et al. (2023) similarly found that Islamic Religious Education teachers contribute significantly to character education through religious instruction, discipline, and the internalization of moral values.

Thus, the findings indicate that shaping the moral character of the millennial generation requires teachers to move beyond a transmission-oriented model of religious education toward a more holistic approach. The teacher's effectiveness lies in the ability to integrate religious knowledge, personal example, habitual practice, interpersonal communication, and continuous guidance. Such an approach enables *akhlakul karimah* to develop not merely as a set of concepts understood by students but as values progressively internalized and expressed in their everyday behavior.

Implementation of Moral Character-Building Strategies through Islamic Religious Education

The implementation of moral character-building strategies at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan demonstrates that the formation of students' *akhlakul karimah* is carried out through a combination of instructional activities, religious habituation, personal guidance, supervision, and school-based religious programs. The findings from observations, interviews, and documentation indicate that character formation is not treated as an additional activity separated from the educational process but is integrated into students' daily experiences at school. This approach is important because *akhlakul karimah* refers not merely to knowledge about good behavior but to the development of dispositions that encourage individuals to perform virtuous actions consistently. Al-Ghazali (2016) describes morality as a disposition embedded in the soul that enables a person to perform actions naturally without requiring extensive deliberation. Therefore, the effectiveness of moral education depends on the extent to which religious values are repeatedly practiced and internalized.

One of the most visible forms of implementation is the habituation of religious practices. The findings show that students are accustomed to greeting teachers and peers, praying in congregation, reading the Qur'an before learning activities, maintaining cleanliness, observing discipline, and participating in religious activities organized by the madrasah. These activities function as practical mechanisms for transforming abstract Islamic values into observable behavior. For example, the practice of greeting and showing respect toward teachers is not

merely a matter of etiquette but represents the internalization of Islamic values concerning respect and interpersonal relationships. Similarly, congregational prayer reinforces religious discipline, while Qur'anic reading creates a routine that connects students' academic environment with their spiritual development.

The implementation of habituation is consistent with the view that character cannot be effectively developed through theoretical instruction alone. Ramayulis (2015) emphasizes that Islamic education requires an educational environment that facilitates the continuous practice of moral values. Prayoga and Hasanuddin (2024) likewise identify habituation as one of the important approaches to developing students' noble character. The findings at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that repeated religious practices create opportunities for students to transform values into behavioral routines. Over time, these routines can contribute to the formation of stable moral dispositions.

Another important implementation strategy is the integration of moral guidance into classroom learning. Islamic Religious Education teachers do not restrict discussions of morality to specific lessons concerning *akhlak*, but connect moral values with students' actual experiences. Teachers provide advice concerning honesty, responsibility, respect, discipline, friendship, and appropriate social interaction. This contextual approach allows students to understand that Islamic morality is relevant to various dimensions of their lives rather than being confined to religious rituals. Amaliah and Nasution (2025) emphasize that the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers encompasses educational guidance and character development in addition to the transmission of religious knowledge.

The findings also reveal that teachers employ interpersonal and persuasive communication when providing moral guidance. When students violate school rules or demonstrate inappropriate behavior, teachers tend to provide explanations, advice, and motivation rather than immediately relying on punitive measures. Such communication is intended to encourage students to recognize their mistakes and develop an internal awareness of responsibility. This approach is particularly relevant to the characteristics of millennial students, who tend to be exposed to diverse information and social influences through digital media. Maulidina and Ningsih (2024) argue that Islamic education needs to employ approaches that are communicative, creative, and relevant to contemporary students' circumstances. Therefore, persuasive communication can help establish a relationship in which moral guidance is perceived as constructive rather than merely disciplinary.

Supervision is another important component of implementation. Teachers monitor students' behavior both inside and outside the classroom, particularly with regard to discipline, communication, religious practices, and compliance with school regulations. Supervision is not intended merely to identify violations but also to provide opportunities for immediate correction and guidance. In this respect, supervision operates as a continuous process of moral reinforcement. Students receive feedback regarding their behavior, while teachers can identify recurring problems that require further intervention. This finding supports Prayoga and

Hasanuddin's (2024) argument that supervision and character development should operate together in Islamic educational settings.

The implementation of character education is also strengthened through the madrasah's religious environment. Religious programs provide a collective context in which students can practice Islamic values with their peers. Such an environment is significant because character development is influenced not only by individual instruction but also by the norms and expectations established within an educational community. When religious behavior becomes part of the institutional culture, students receive consistent messages concerning what constitutes appropriate conduct. Rahayu et al. (2023) argue that character education in the digital era requires the strengthening of Islamic values through educational environments that consistently support their implementation.

The findings further indicate that the teachers attempt to respond to students' digital realities. Rather than viewing technology exclusively as a threat, teachers use communication channels and digital media as complementary means of maintaining interaction with students and reinforcing positive values. This strategy reflects an adaptive orientation in Islamic Religious Education. Arsyad et al. (2023) note that millennial students are characterized by intensive interaction with digital technology, while Huda and Rahman (2025) emphasize the importance of guiding students to utilize technology positively without abandoning Islamic identity and morality. Accordingly, moral education needs to enter the spaces in which students actually live and interact.

The implementation observed at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan therefore demonstrates a movement from value transmission toward value internalization. Religious knowledge is accompanied by practice, practice is strengthened through habituation, habituation is monitored through supervision, and inappropriate behavior is addressed through guidance and motivation. This interconnected process creates opportunities for students to develop moral awareness through repeated experience. The findings are consistent with Nasrullah et al. (2023), who found that Islamic Religious Education teachers contribute to character formation through religious learning, discipline, and the internalization of moral values.

From this perspective, the formation of *akhlakul karimah* among millennial students should be understood as a continuous educational process rather than a short-term program. The implementation of character-building strategies becomes meaningful when the school environment, classroom instruction, teacher behavior, religious activities, and interpersonal relationships communicate consistent moral messages. The experience of MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan indicates that the integration of these elements provides a practical framework for developing students who are not only knowledgeable about Islamic teachings but are also capable of expressing Islamic values through respectful, disciplined, responsible, honest, and socially responsible behavior. This finding reinforces the view that Islamic Religious Education can function as a comprehensive character-building process when religious knowledge is systematically connected with habituation, exemplary behavior, and students' lived experiences.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Shaping the Moral Character of the Millennial Generation

The formation of students' moral character at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan is influenced not only by the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers but also by the broader educational environment in which those strategies operate. The findings indicate that several supporting factors strengthen the implementation of *akhlakul karimah*, including the Islamic school environment, religious programs, leadership support, teacher collaboration, and parental involvement. At the same time, the process faces several inhibiting factors, particularly students' exposure to social media, inadequate parental supervision at home, and negative peer influences. These findings demonstrate that moral character formation is a multidimensional process that cannot be attributed exclusively to teachers or classroom instruction.

One of the most significant supporting factors is the religious environment established within the madrasah. MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan provides an educational atmosphere in which religious practices and Islamic values are integrated into students' daily routines. Congregational prayer, Qur'anic reading, greetings, religious activities, and adherence to school regulations create an environment that continuously reinforces desirable behavior. Such an environment is important because students encounter Islamic values repeatedly in different contexts rather than only during Islamic Religious Education lessons. Rahayu et al. (2023) emphasize that strengthening character education in the digital era requires an educational environment capable of consistently implementing and reinforcing Islamic values. The findings of this study support this argument by demonstrating that the school environment functions as a form of indirect character education.

Leadership support also represents an important institutional factor. The support of the head of the madrasah enables teachers to implement religious programs and character-building activities more consistently. The findings suggest that character education becomes more effective when it is supported by institutional policies rather than being treated as an individual responsibility of Islamic Religious Education teachers. School leadership can provide direction, establish regulations, facilitate religious activities, and encourage cooperation among teachers. Consequently, character formation becomes part of the institutional mission of the madrasah. This finding is consistent with the broader understanding of character education that emphasizes the importance of a supportive school culture and shared institutional commitment (Birhan et al., 2021).

Teacher collaboration constitutes another supporting factor. The formation of students' moral character cannot be delegated entirely to Islamic Religious Education teachers because students interact with different teachers throughout the school day. When teachers share similar expectations concerning discipline, politeness, responsibility, and respect, students receive consistent moral messages. Conversely, inconsistent expectations among teachers may weaken the internalization of character values. Therefore, collaboration among Islamic Religious

Education teachers, homeroom teachers, school administrators, and other educational personnel is essential to creating continuity between classroom learning and students' broader school experiences.

Parental involvement is equally important. The findings show that cooperation between teachers and parents supports the continuity of character development between school and home. Values introduced at school are more likely to become habits when parents reinforce them in the family environment. Conversely, limited parental supervision can become an obstacle when students are exposed to influences that contradict the values promoted by the madrasah. This finding confirms that character formation is a shared responsibility between educational institutions and families. Teachers can provide guidance during school hours, but parents play an essential role in monitoring students' behavior, media consumption, friendships, and daily routines outside school.

The most significant external challenge identified in this study is the influence of social media and digital technology. Millennial students have extensive access to information and online interaction, exposing them to diverse lifestyles, communication patterns, and value systems. Arsyad et al. (2023) highlight that the close relationship between the millennial generation and digital technology creates both educational opportunities and moral challenges. Social media can facilitate learning and communication, but uncontrolled exposure may contribute to inappropriate language, excessive individualism, imitation of negative trends, and weakening sensitivity toward social and religious norms. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education teachers need to help students develop the ability to critically evaluate digital content rather than simply instructing them to avoid technology.

The findings also indicate that inadequate family supervision can intensify the influence of digital media. Students may encounter content at home that is difficult for teachers to monitor. When parents do not provide sufficient guidance regarding media use, the values promoted by the school may compete with external influences. This condition demonstrates the importance of strengthening communication between the madrasah and families. Rather than positioning parents merely as recipients of information, schools need to involve them as partners in character education. Regular communication concerning students' behavioral development can help ensure that moral guidance continues beyond the school environment.

Peer relationships constitute another inhibiting factor. Adolescents and young adults are strongly influenced by their social environment, particularly peers with whom they interact regularly. Negative peer groups can encourage behaviors that conflict with school expectations, including indiscipline, inappropriate communication, and reduced commitment to religious practices. Huda and Rahman (2025) emphasize that Islamic education has an important role in helping young people maintain Islamic identity and moral values amid changing social environments. Therefore, teachers need to understand students' social relationships and provide guidance that enables them to make responsible choices regarding friendship and social interaction.

Interestingly, the findings also demonstrate that these inhibiting factors do not necessarily make character education ineffective. Instead, they indicate the need for teachers and schools to modify their strategies according to the changing environment. The communicative and persuasive approach identified in the previous findings becomes particularly important in addressing external influences. Rather than responding to digital culture solely through prohibition, teachers can encourage students to reflect on the moral implications of their online behavior. This approach transforms digital challenges into opportunities for moral literacy. Students can be guided to practice honesty, respect, responsibility, self-control, and empathy not only in face-to-face interactions but also in digital communication.

The interaction between supporting and inhibiting factors therefore reveals that the success of character education depends on the strength of the educational ecosystem surrounding students. A religious school environment, supportive leadership, collaborative teachers, and engaged parents can reinforce the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers. Conversely, uncontrolled social media use, weak parental supervision, and negative peer influence can weaken the process. This finding suggests that character education cannot be approached through isolated classroom interventions. It requires coordination among school leadership, teachers, families, and the students' wider social environment.

The findings are particularly relevant to the millennial generation because their moral development occurs simultaneously in physical and digital spaces. Islamic Religious Education therefore needs to extend its orientation from classroom-based moral instruction toward comprehensive moral guidance that responds to students' lived realities. Jaya et al. (2026) emphasize that digital media has influenced students' behavioral patterns, learning processes, and sources of moral reference, requiring Islamic education to develop adaptive approaches. In this context, the role of teachers becomes increasingly complex because they must preserve fundamental Islamic values while helping students navigate rapidly changing social and technological environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that the formation of *akhlakul karimah* at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan is supported by a relatively strong religious school culture, structured religious activities, leadership support, teacher cooperation, and parental involvement. However, the process remains challenged by digital media, family circumstances, and peer environments. The effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education teachers therefore depends not only on their individual competence but also on their ability to build cooperation with the wider educational community. The most sustainable strategy is one that integrates teacher role modeling, habituation, supervision, religious programs, parental partnership, and digital moral guidance within a coherent school culture. Such integration enables the madrasah to respond to contemporary challenges while maintaining the fundamental objective of Islamic education: developing students who possess religious knowledge, moral awareness, self-discipline, social responsibility, and *akhlakul karimah*.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education teachers at MAS Muallimin UNIVA Medan play a strategic role in shaping the moral character of the millennial generation through an integrated process of religious instruction, role modeling, habituation, guidance, supervision, motivation, and Islamic discipline. The findings demonstrate that character formation is not limited to classroom instruction but is embedded in students' daily educational experiences. Teachers function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as moral exemplars, mentors, motivators, and supervisors who facilitate the internalization of Islamic values into students' behavior. The implementation of character-building strategies is reflected in religious habituation, including greeting practices, congregational prayer, Qur'anic reading, moral guidance, disciplinary practices, and participation in religious programs. A communicative and persuasive approach also enables teachers to respond more effectively to the characteristics of millennial students and their digital environment. The effectiveness of these strategies is supported by a religious school culture, institutional leadership, teacher collaboration, and parental involvement. However, social media exposure, limited parental supervision, and negative peer influence remain significant challenges. Overall, the study demonstrates that strengthening students' *akhlakul karimah* requires a collaborative and adaptive educational ecosystem. Islamic Religious Education teachers need to integrate traditional Islamic values with contextual approaches that address students' contemporary social and digital realities.

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