Teachers Strategies in Strengthening Character Education Based on Islamic Values in Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Character education based on Islamic values is one of the significant challenges teachers face in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a crucial problem due to the numerous problems associated with the internalization of character in students. Therefore, this research aims to determine teachers' strategies to strengthen character education and the obstacles in online learning. It was carried out in Muhammadiyah Alternative Middle School (Mutual) Magelang City, Central Java Province, Indonesia. This is descriptive qualitative research with data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed based on teachers’ strategies in mapping the characterization of values, character analysis developed and providing solutions to the problems that arise. The results obtained the strategies developed by the teacher in strengthening character education are performed through (1) learning method innovation, (2) exemplary, (3) habituation, (4) reinforcement and sanctions, and (5) assessment. In conclusion, these strategies effectively strengthen the character values of students, including religiosity, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation.

Keywords: Teacher Strategy; Character Building; Online Learning; Covid-19

ABSTRAK


Kata-kata Kunci: Strategi Guru; Pendidikan Karakter; Pembelajaran Daring; COVID 19.
INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the teacher's strategy in strengthening character education in online learning as an alternative during the pandemic and suggests the obstacles that arise during online learning and their solutions. This activity was carried out at the Muhammadiyah Alternative Middle School (Mutual) Magelang City.

The application of character education starts from an early age at all levels of education as a strategy to strengthen the nation's character. This is stated in presidential regulations as the basis for education policymakers to shape the character and culture of the Indonesian nation's personality (*PerPres Number 87 of 2017*). Setiawan (2021) stated that learning has not been fully able to shape students' character since it is more in the realm of developing academic knowledge.

Currently, the government is strengthening this form of education by involving various academic units, schools, communities, and families. However, the implementation of this program faced many challenges, especially with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 which had a negative impact on various sectors, including education. This virus is forcing the government to replace traditional classroom learning in schools with online learning from home to prevent a more comprehensive rate of transmission (*Roziqin et al., 2021*) Therefore, there are obstacles in the implementation of online learning.

Several research have explored the impact of COVID-19 on patterns of change and public acceptance of the expansion of the digital system affected by the pandemic (*Mikhaylova et al., 2021*). This is in addition to the study on disaster jurisprudence and the pandemic's mitigation from the perspective of Islamic-neuroscience education (*Suyadi et al., 2020*). Lestari (2020) examined the importance of online learning strategies and character internalization in schools as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, several related studies, such as online learning solutions and constraints (*Handayani, 2020*), students activities during the pandemic (*Nurhayati, 2020*), the learning assessment model from home due to the virus (*Maryani, 2020*), the positive impact of online learning (*Pujilestari, 2020*), improving Islamic Education learning outcomes using Bookwidget (*Nugraha et al., 2021*), and moral education for children during the pandemic (*Daratista & Yusuf, 2021*) were also conducted. Although these preliminary studies discussed the phenomenon and impact of the pandemic on learning, the strategies needed to strengthen students' character have not been widely discussed. Therefore, this research offers an alternative strategy in character education in online learning.

Although this preliminary study discusses the phenomenon and impact of the pandemic on learning, the strategies needed to strengthen students' character have not been widely discussed. Therefore, this study offers an alternative strategy for character education in online learning. It is very important to instill Islamic character in students,
because with them students will become human beings with character and noble character (Lestari, 2020).

Education in the curriculum dimension is related to the development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor characters, which is carried out through various learning activities in schools. Competent students in the field of science and technology need to develop character education as an inseparable part of good character (akhlaqul karimah) and a commendable personality. Therefore, schools are fully responsible for creating a culture with the development of character values.

Character education more broadly can be interpreted as education that develops cultural values and national character in students so that they have values and character as their own character, apply these values in their lives as members of society, and are religious, nationalist, and religious citizens. productive, and creative (Amin, 2019). This concept must be taken seriously by the government and society as an answer to the real conditions faced by the Indonesian people lately, which is marked by the rise of criminal acts and the waning of religious tolerance as well as the loss of religiosity in society.

Character education is one of the negative impacts of online learning due to the pandemic. In normal times, it is carried out from the development of school culture and through direct internalization in classroom learning. However, during the pandemic, the culture or character that is formed in students during face-to-face learning in class begins to disappear due to the implementation of mandatory online learning. Moreover, since the start of online learning, creating a school culture with character has become more of a challenge than a traditional learning process. Therefore, teachers need to develop strategies to grow or strengthen students' character

**METHOD**

This research used a qualitative descriptive approach to describe the actual events experienced by the subjects studied (Moleong, 2018) and to understand the social phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Sukmadinata, 2013), namely the Mutual Middle School teachers. According to Sugiyono (2016), descriptive research describes the phenomena found from a problem or event according to the actual situation systematically, accurately, and factual.

This research was conducted to determine the character strengthening of students at the Mutual Middle School in Magelang City based on social conditions in online learning during the pandemic. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation to determine teachers' strategies in strengthening character in online learning. It was then analyzed by mapping the teachers' strategies in the characterization of online learning and character analysis developed and analysis of the findings of obstacles that emerged and their solutions.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character education requires good planning and strategy because it is not taught in separate lessons but holistically embedded through subject matter and habituation in school culture. Its success is evaluated by emphasizing the achievement of the components of good character, including moral knowledge, feelings, and actions (Lickona, 1992). The aspect of moral knowledge is instilled through learning in the classroom, while moral feeling and action are acquired inside and outside the classroom. Of all these components, the moral aspect of action requires daily habituation. Therefore, moral values become school cultural values that form students with strong characters as citizens of wider global society.

Moreover, in Islamic schools, character education is always associated with the content of Islamic values, which are the main basis for students’ scientific and personality development. According to Suyanto, these contents include the domains of (1) belief (i'tiqadiyah), (2) actions ('amaliyah), and (3) ethics (khuluqiyah), which are related to the dimension of faith, worship, and muamalah as well as morals or manners that become the adornment of a human being (Mawardi, 2018).

This research focused on junior high school students, including in the category of early adolescence, a critical period of significant turmoil. Teenagers are more likely to imitate the character of those they admire as role models. Therefore, teachers need to approach character education by identifying the problems and providing solutions. This can be achieved by reinforcing character values based on Islamic values related to students' motivation, attitudes, behavior, and skills into learning strategies. However, during the pandemic where learning is carried out from home, special strategies are needed to achieve the expected goals.

1. Strategy for Strengthening Character Education in Online Learning as an Alternative to Learning in the COVID-19 Pandemic

The strategy for implementing character education is integrated with subject content. According to Kemendiknas (2011), character values are associated with the daily reality of students. Mawardi et al. (2020) stated that they are built on the values of Islamic teachings, which are based on the prophetic education of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as a civilizing dimension. The prophetic mission is a basic moral and spirit inherent in the overall implementation of the educational process. This is mandatory because it is the goal of educational institutions under the auspices of the Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah.

The internalization of character values touches the cognitive understanding and practice level in students' daily lives. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to package learning with character dimensions in each subject (Santika, 2020) by internalizing the
values of life skills based on Islamic values in shaping students' character (Umamah, 2018).

The challenge for Mutual Middle School teachers in Magelang City during the pandemic is associated with implementing government and school policies regarding online learning. The strategy mapping pattern is developed in such a way as to design online learning with various variations to make it interesting and not boring to improve students' cognitive abilities. Also, teachers need to creatively think about the internalization of strengthening character education based on Islamic values that can still be given even during the pandemic.

Teachers use several application variants in learning, including website pages and video conferencing. WhatsApp is the dominant application to convey learning information and communication activities between teachers and students. Teachers also create learning content uploaded on YouTube for students to study and replay. Video conferencing is a consideration for schools due to a more robust network which makes it easier to access meetings. Subsequently, the zoom application as online learning media strengthened character education because it enables teachers to meet face-to-face with students online. Teachers can greet and see the state of their students, communicate directly and determine their character values. For example, in Islamic Education (Fiqh) learning, teachers can give appreciation and feedback directly when the material is given. Moral messages associated with material and life act as a force in internalizing character values.

The strategies developed by teachers to strengthen character education through online learning at Mutual Middle School during the COVID-19 pandemic are as follows: First, the innovation of learning methods. In this case, Mutual Middle School teachers are required to innovate learning methods through interesting online learning presentation content. Therefore, with the help of the IT team and a mini studio owned by the school, teachers can explore themselves in developing creative learning models. The content aims to develop the professional competence of teachers and make learning interesting for students during the pandemic to arouse the character of curiosity, independence, creativity, honesty, courage, responsibility, and cooperation between students. The innovation of the learning method developed is still providing Islamic values.

Second, exemplary. The example given by the teacher in online learning is carried out through a positive and friendly attitude which is firm and disciplined as an embodiment of Islamic morals to students. This is shown in the way of dressing, speaking, and behaving politely in every online learning class. Teachers' examples become the school's standard in providing guarantees for quality education at Mutual Middle School. It also becomes an orientation for continuous teacher development in Islamic education's prophetic treatise. One of the missions of the Prophet Muhammad
SAW is to serve as a good role model (Qur'an Surah Al-Ahzab: 21) and also declare noble character in human form (Qur'an Surah Al-Qalam: 4). Rasulullah SAW also expressed this in the Hadith narrated by Ahmad (2/381), "Indeed I was sent only to perfect noble character" (Mawardi, 2015).

This example is expected to provide comfort and imitation of positive attitudes for students, especially discipline in participating in online learning and assignments given by the teacher. Exemplary is also exemplified in the language of communication on social media through greetings, permission sentences, and excuses. Teachers also always remind students to be kind and make use of polite and pleasant language.

Third, habituation. This is a form of character internalization that needs to be carried out continuously hence it becomes the cultural awareness of students. The teacher's pattern of refraction as a characterization of students in learning from home is conducted programmatically at the beginning, middle, and end of learning. In the beginning, students are familiarized with greetings and prayers to form a religious character. In the middle, the teacher emphasizes the attitude of independent learning to form the character of independence and discipline. While, in the end, the teacher gives character strengthening with good advice and ends with prayers and greetings. This aims to form the character of responsibility, togetherness, and religiousness.

Fourth, reinforcement and sanctions. The teachers' strategies in internalizing character values are also carried out through reinforcement and sanctions. Reinforcement is given as a form of appreciation for the students' achievements or discipline in participating in online learning and assignments. The form of appreciation given by the teacher is in line with praise to giving gifts, such as books, etc. Meanwhile, sanctions are given as a form of learning to prevent students from repeating the same mistakes in online tasks. The form of sanctions varies from each teacher, but the sanctions given do not burden students and contain educational elements, for example, memorizing verses of the Qur'an and summarizing a reading determined by the teacher.

Fifth, through assessment. This is a measure of the level of minimum success competence obtained by students. It is carried out holistically from the assessment components from the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Therefore, during the pandemic, the teachers' strategies in providing assessments did not demand many things on students' abilities. Special assessment of character attitudes is carried out through Google Forms to determine the moral attitudes of students towards their daily activities when studying from home.

These five strategic steps emphasize that strengthening character education in online learning during the pandemic is important. The creativity of teachers in designing interesting learning methods and the ability to relate the substance of the material to character values tends to strengthen students' positive learning character.
These results reinforce Setyaningrum & Husamah (2011) research that providing opportunities for students in the learning process to experience the desired characterization process will have a direct impact. Furthermore, this is also in line with Atriyanti (2020) research that the character of students can be formed by teachers characterized and professional in carrying out their educational tasks offline and online.

Based on the innovation of teachers at Mutual Middle School in the internalization of strengthening character education through online learning, the values set by the government can be implemented properly, although with various limitations. Five character values that are strengthened in learning include religiosity, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation (Kemendikbud, 2017).

The first character strengthening is religiosity, which is performed through the habit of greeting and praying before and after the lesson. The second is the nationalist character, a foster sense of belonging and showcasing love for the Indonesian nation by singing the national anthem Raya after the prayer at the beginning of the lesson. The third is the character of integrity given through the discipline and ability of students to be responsible for the tasks given. Fourth is the independent character fostered through the attitudes and behavior of students in meeting their needs, without depending on others. It is also the ability to use thought, time, and energy to achieve goals creatively and professionally. The fifth is the character of mutual cooperation carried out through group assignments and other activities that reflect positive collaboration with full responsibility in solving problems through mutual respect for others and an inclusive attitude.

The relationship between the five strategies for strengthening character education in online-based learning is shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Character Education Strategy](image)

The figure 1 above shows that strengthening character education during the pandemic through online media requires teachers' creativity in developing learning
strategies. However, all policies and creativity produced have to be still guided by Islamic values outlined by the school with benefits for the community. Meanwhile, Mutual Middle School, as an educational institution in the development of Muhammadiyah organizations, always strives to provide the best education in line with advanced Islamic and national cadres in Pancasila, which are capable of creating social order of a good country with a Forgiving God (baladatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghafir).

2. Obstacles and Solutions in the Implementation of Strengthening Character Education in Online Learning

Despite the various efforts made by teachers in presenting online learning with mature strategies, there are still some obstacles that need to be solved. Schools as part of management provide direction and deliberation to map the types of barriers and ways to solve them to anticipate further impacts. These obstacles include the signal network constraints, family's economic situation, student discipline, and the emergence of boredom and lack of social, mental attitude.

The signal network constraints are associated with poor networks in certain areas where students live, which hinders the implementation of online learning. The proffered solution is that the school cooperates with the village government to allow students to use the village's wifi facilities. Subsequently, the family's economic situation, which makes it unable to provide adequate online learning facilities, adversely impacts student learning. Cellphone communication tools are used interchangeably by family members, therefore, their usage during the same study hours decreases student learning outcomes. Therefore, to overcome this problem, Mutual Middle School opened learning activities in special schools for students with limited online learning facilities while still paying attention to health protocols.

Student discipline is essential for ignorant of participating in online learning and collecting study assignments, even though there are no obstacles when the teacher visits their home. Consequently, teachers need to build positive communication with parents to overcome this problem while students are motivated to participate in learning the process actively.

The emergence of boredom and lack of social, mental attitude in students due to the use of online learning systems is the final problem. Many students find the use of online learning boring, and they prefer playing online games or using other applications. Furthermore, this is due to a lack of interaction with peers, especially new students that never interacted with their friends from the start. Hence, to overcome this problem, teachers at Mutual Middle School design learning according to the interests of junior high school students through creative innovations based on polls.
chosen by students. The teachers also create WhatsApp groups that can build social interaction between students to reduce the risk of not knowing each other.

The four obstacles and their solutions in implementing character education in online learning at Mutual Middle School may differ from the conditions in other schools. However, the efforts made have provided an alternative solution in overcoming problems due to the impact of the pandemic. These results are also in accordance with the preliminary research conducted by Pujilestari (2020) and Lestari (2020) that are more critical of the government's network constraints and online facilities. This is in addition to the problem of using mobile phones alternately in one family and senior teachers' difficulty in using network technology. Furthermore, the internet connection in certain areas is not strong, especially when used by many people. Several schools experience similar obstacles, however, no possible solutions have been found to these problems.

This research has synthesized that every model, approach, and strategy is not free from obstacles. Moreover, the use of online learning due to the pandemic has experienced an extraordinary acceleration, hence the character problem is slightly neglected. Anticipatory efforts in overcoming the obstacles found in Mutual Middle School are to continue to put forward a persuasive Islamic approach as part of the developed school culture.

Teachers need to be serious in the internalization of character education as curriculum implementation during a pandemic. Interestingly, irrespective of the object limitations at the junior high school education unit level, this research illustrates that even in online learning, character education can still be strengthened with varied approaches and methods. The associated obstacles need to be anticipated with positive efforts to minimize the emergence of bigger problems. Therefore, the creativity of the teacher becomes a determining factor in the characterization of learning. Further research needs to be carried out as a recommendation on its effectiveness when applied in learning at a lower or higher level of education.

CONCLUSION

The process of strengthening character education in online learning at the Mutual Middle School in Magelang City due to the COVID-19 pandemic is carried out through several strategies. These include (1) learning method innovation, (2) exemplary, (3) habituation, (4) reinforcement and sanctions, and (5) assessment. The strategy developed is imbued with Islamic values, which are internalized in the entire online learning process. These strategies have the ability to instill character values developed as a government mandate, consisting of strengthening religiosity, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation characters. However, the presence of obstacles, such as signal networks, family economic conditions, neglect of students, the emergence of boredom,
and lack of social attitudes, is unavoidable. This research provides a positive contribution to the model of strengthening character education in online learning in such a way that it is conducted in an interesting and fun way by teachers through various innovative and creative methods.

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