

Instructional Strategies in Islamic Religious Education to Promote Religious Awareness at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teaching strategies in enhancing students' religious awareness at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using data collection techniques such as observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The main informants included IRE teachers, the school principal, and students. The findings show that the strategies involved contextual lectures, active discussions, daily religious routines, and participation in socio-religious activities. Supporting factors included the school's religious environment, teacher role modeling, and open communication between teachers and students. On the other hand, challenges included low student motivation, limited digital infrastructure, and a lack of parental support at home. The implemented strategies positively impacted students' religious awareness in terms of spirituality, ethics, and social responsibility. Future studies could elaborate on concrete instructional practices, such as integrating critical media literacy or contextual discussions, to demonstrate how IRE strategies directly address the challenges posed by social media and global culture. This study is limited to a single school and does not quantitatively measure students' religious consciousness. The study implies the importance of integrative and contextual approaches in Islamic Religious Education. Its originality lies in its focus on rural-based Muhammadiyah madrasahs and their instructional strategies in shaping religious character. This finding offers a new contribution to the development of Islamic religious education studies, particularly in understanding how rural environments can*

serve as a significant factor in shaping students' religious awareness and practices.

Keywords: *Islamic religious education, Madrasah, Religious awareness, Religious character, Teaching strategy.*

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in shaping students' religious character. It is not only aimed at fostering theoretical understanding of Islam but also ensuring that students are able to practice Islamic values in their everyday lives. In an era of globalization and rapid technological development, effective and adaptive learning strategies are urgently needed. These strategies must not only be instructional but must also engage the affective and psychomotor aspects of students.¹

Moreover, there is an urgent need for innovative, interactive, and contextual learning strategies that can instill a strong sense of religious awareness from an early age. Religious education should not merely deliver doctrinal knowledge but also serve to develop spiritual attitudes. This necessity highlights the importance of conducting deeper studies on Islamic Religious Education strategies that are practically applicable in secondary school environments.²

In practice, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in schools—including MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo—is still largely dominated by conventional methods such as one-way lectures and memorization. These methods often fail to engage students actively and limit their internalization of Islamic values. As a result, many students understand Islam only at a theoretical level and do not consistently demonstrate religious behaviors in their daily life.³

A similar condition was found in MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo, where teachers still rely on traditional approaches. Although efforts such as group discussions and prayer practices have been initiated, they remain limited and not yet holistic. As a result, students' religious

¹ M Ag Zubaedi, *Desain Pendidikan Karakter* (Prenada Media, 2015).

² Zainal Abidin, "Inovasi Strategi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Meningkatkan Akhlak Siswa Di Madrasah Diniyah Al Mustofa Desa Ngumpakdalem Kecamatan Dander Kabupaten Bojonegoro" (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sunan Giri Bojonegoro, 2014).

³ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

awareness has not fully developed, particularly when they face complex, real-life situations.⁴

There is a noticeable gap between the educational expectations and the current reality. Ideally, IRE should integrate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains through contextual and participative methods. However, due to the continued use of conventional strategies, the core objectives of Islamic education remain partially unmet.⁵

Additionally, previous studies tend to emphasize religious knowledge acquisition without sufficiently addressing spiritual awareness and value internalization. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research that focuses specifically on learning strategies that promote spiritual consciousness through real-world experience, value reinforcement, and contextual moral education.⁶

This study aims to analyze the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning strategies implemented at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo in enhancing students' religious awareness. The research explores the methods used, the supporting and inhibiting factors, and evaluates how these strategies contribute to shaping students' spiritual attitudes. The study is expected to offer practical insights for the development of more relevant, contextual, and impactful religious education models.⁷

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the strategies used in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) to enhance students' religious awareness at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo. This approach was chosen because it enables a comprehensive depiction of real-life phenomena without manipulating variables and allows the researcher to gain contextual insights based on direct interaction with participants. A descriptive qualitative method is also considered suitable for answering research questions of an exploratory and contextual nature, particularly regarding the practice of religious education and its internalization among students. The lecture method is considered a failure when used as the only learning strategy

⁴ Arinda Restiana Nurmasari, "Penanaman Nilai-Nilai Religius Dalam Meningkatkan Kesadaran Beragama Melalui Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Budi Pekerti Di SMP Negeri 2 Kebonagung" (IAIN Ponorogo, 2022).

⁵ Abuddin Nata, *Kapita Selekta Pendidikan Islam* (Angkasa, 2003).

⁶ Dede Indriani et al., "Learning Strategies in Islamic Religious Education to Build Students' Spiritual Awareness and Islamic Ethics," *Eductum: Journal Research* 3, no. 3 (June 3, 2024): 86–91, <https://doi.org/10.56495/ejr.v3i3.586>.

⁷ Enco Mulyasa, *Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah* (Bumi Aksara, 2022).

because it is unable to create active, interesting, and meaningful learning for students.⁸

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interviews with IRE teachers, the school principal, and students of MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo. Secondary data were gathered from official school documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, religious activity logs, and visual documentation related to the teaching process. The combination of various sources enabled the researcher to collect rich and in-depth information, allowing triangulation to enhance the validity of findings.⁹

Data collection techniques included three main methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine classroom activities and students' religious practices in the school environment. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore perceptions, experiences, and the teaching strategies applied by IRE teachers. Documentation supported the observation and interview findings and served as additional evidence of actual practices in the field.¹⁰

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and summarizing relevant data from observations, interviews, and documentation. The reduced data were presented in descriptive narrative form, enabling pattern recognition and interpretation. The final step was concluding the data and verifying it through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.¹¹

Result and Discussion

Islamic Religious Education Teaching Strategies Used to Enhance Religious Awareness

The Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teaching strategies at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo are designed to internalize Islamic values through contextual and practical approaches. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as spiritual role models and guides. As expressed

⁸ Suharsimi Arikunto, "Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek," 2010.

⁹ Lexi J Moleong, "(Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif)," 2017.

¹⁰ John Cresswell, "Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches.," 2013.

¹¹ Matthew B Miles and A Huberman, "M., & Saldana, J.(2014)," *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook 3* (2014).

by Mr. Sudarsono, the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) teacher, the effectiveness of IRE instruction depends on patience, individualized strategy, and the ability to adapt to students' capacities to absorb religious values.¹² This is evident in the use of various methods such as interactive lectures, class discussions, and project-based learning. For example, in SKI classes, students are encouraged to explore the development of Islam in different regions through digital resources. This not only sparks their interest but also reinforces their understanding of the widespread impact of Islamic civilization. This approach aligns with Zubaedi's view that religious instruction must be contextual to shape students' moral character effectively. The effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, which prioritizes patience and individual strategies, has a significant positive impact on students' understanding, motivation, and religious character development. This principle can be replicated elsewhere, provided it is adapted to the context and needs of the students.¹³

Another key strategy is reinforcing daily religious practices. Based on observations and interviews, students perform salat dhuha, Qur'anic recitation, and memorization of short surahs before formal lessons begin. These routines improve memorization, instill spiritual discipline, and build consistent religious habits. Additionally, teachers assign students to deliver short sermons (kultum) on a rotational basis, helping to cultivate leadership and the courage to articulate Islamic messages in public.¹⁴

Beyond routine practices, students are also involved in Islamic celebrations such as Hari Besar Islam (Islamic Commemoration Days). These events involve the entire school community, where students serve as organizers, presenters, and performers of Islamic arts. This promotes responsibility, spiritual solidarity, and a deeper appreciation of "Islamic traditions Miles, Huberman, & Saldana", demonstrating the implementation of project-based learning within a religious context.¹⁵

A warm, respectful teacher-student relationship is also central to the strategy. Teachers are approachable and supportive, creating a comfortable space for students to ask questions or express opinions. The principal, Mrs. Yuyun Rahmawati, emphasizes that a positive

¹² Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

¹³ Zubaedi Zubaedi et al., "Learning Style and Motivation: Gifted Young Students in Meaningful Learning," *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists* 9, no. 1 (2021): 57-66.

¹⁴ Noza Afrianto et al., "Implementation of Religious Programs in Elementary Schools," *Ri'ayatu Al-Qur'an* 7, no. 1 (January 28, 2025): 42-48, <https://doi.org/10.62990/riq.v7i1.147>.

¹⁵ Miles and Huberman, "M., & Saldana, J.(2014)."

rapport between students and teachers facilitates meaningful discussions on religious topics.¹⁶ This echoes Muhaimin's argument that religious education must be grounded in compassion and exemplary conduct.¹⁷

Outside the classroom, religious awareness is further developed through extracurricular activities such as communal clean-up projects, mosque visits, and community service. These experiences reinforce values like mutual assistance, cooperation, and respect for others, allowing students to apply Islamic teachings in real-life social settings.¹⁸

Value-based education also plays a key role. Teachers explicitly integrate moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and courtesy into every lesson. When teaching honesty, for example, teachers not only cite Qur'anic verses but also include real-life scenarios relevant to students. This method strengthens the perception that Islamic values are not only normative but also practical and applicable.¹⁹

Modern technology is also incorporated into learning. Students are encouraged to research Islamic history online and present their findings using visual media. While traditional lectures remain, teachers attempt to balance them with digital tools such as videos and PowerPoint presentations. This strategy fosters engagement and accommodates the digital habits of the younger generation.²⁰

Teachers adopt individualized instruction to accommodate diverse learning abilities. Students with cognitive difficulties receive additional support and tailored assignments. This inclusive approach ensures that all students can develop religious awareness at their own pace, aligning with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development.²¹

However, the strategies face several challenges, especially regarding student motivation and participation. Some students exhibit apathy

¹⁶ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

¹⁷ Sukiman Sukiman, Suyatno Suyatno, and Siti Nursheila Khairuddin Yap, "Revitalizing Love and Compassion Values Education at Religious Education Learning in National Curriculum in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 18, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 331–52, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.182-07>.

¹⁸ Muhaimin, *Pengembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam: Di Sekolah, Madrasah, Dan Perguruan Tinggi* (RajaGrafindo Persada, 2005).

¹⁹ Wanda Syafika and Nabilah Marwa, "The Evolution of Values-Based Education: Bringing Global Insights and Local Practices to a Sustainable Future," *Sinergi International Journal of Education* 2, no. 4 (November 30, 2024): 238–52, <https://doi.org/10.61194/education.v2i4.589>.

²⁰ Reyaz Ahmad Bhat, "The Impact of Technology Integration on Student Learning Outcomes: A Comparative Study," *International Journal of Social Science, Educational, Economics, Agriculture Research and Technology (IJSET)* 2, no. 9 (August 17, 2023): 592–96, <https://doi.org/10.54443/ijset.v2i9.218>.

²¹ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

toward religious studies and are reluctant to engage in religious activities unless closely supervised. Teachers address this with motivational strategies such as personal counseling, connecting lessons to real-life situations, and incorporating enjoyable learning activities.²²

In summary, the IRE teaching strategies at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo emphasize the integration of theory and practice, focusing on role modeling, habit formation, and active student involvement. These strategies have proven effective in shaping students' religious awareness as seen in their behaviors both in and outside the school setting. This supports the idea that effective religious education must holistically engage students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.²³

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Islamic Religious Education Strategies in Shaping Students' Religious Awareness

The success of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strategies in shaping students' religious awareness at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo is significantly influenced by a combination of supporting and inhibiting factors. These factors stem from internal conditions within the school environment as well as external elements that affect students' learning experiences.²⁴

One of the keys supporting factors is the presence of a strong religious culture within the school. Daily routines such as congregational salat dhuha, Qur'an recitation, and short sermons (kultum) have become integral parts of the students' school life. These practices foster habitual spirituality and contribute to the internalization of religious values. Furthermore, student involvement in religious student organizations like the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM) encourages leadership and responsibility in Islamic activities.²⁵

Another major factor is the harmonious relationship between teachers and students, built on mutual respect and trust. Teachers act not only as educators but also as role models whose behavior reflects Islamic values. The school principal, Mrs. Yuyun Rahmawati, emphasized that habits such as greeting, smiling, and showing kindness

²² Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

²³ Zubaedi, *Desain Pendidikan Karakter*.

²⁴ Agus Yulianto and Didit Darmawan, "Effective Implementation of Teaching Skills and Religious Activities to Enhance the Quality of Learning In Islamic Religious Education at MTsN 2 Surabaya," *Educan : Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (February 27, 2024): 68–85, <https://doi.org/10.21111/educan.v8i1.11719>.

²⁵ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

are part of the school's moral culture and serve as indirect lessons in religious conduct.²⁶

This relational approach to teaching supports affective engagement and builds a conducive learning environment. Flexibility in instructional strategies is also a strength. Teachers adjust their methods based on students' individual needs. Those with lower comprehension receive more support and simplified tasks, while more capable students are given challenging assignments such as presentations and digital research projects. This differentiated instruction enhances inclusivity and encourages all students to grow at their own pace.²⁷

The use of diverse learning methods, ranging from lectures and discussions to experiential learning and group projects, makes the teaching process more engaging and meaningful. These methods not only convey religious knowledge but also offer practical experiences that reinforce spiritual values.²⁸

Additionally, the school administration supports the process by providing clean classrooms, prayer facilities, and periodic religious events that enrich students' learning experiences.²⁹

Despite these strengths, implementing IRE strategies also faces several challenges. One of the main inhibiting factors is students' low motivation and interest in religious education. Some students perceive the subject as less engaging or less relevant to their daily lives. Teachers reported that certain students are reluctant to join religious activities unless they are closely supervised, indicating a need for more motivational teaching approaches.³⁰

Another barrier is the limited technological competence among teachers. Although digital tools are increasingly important in modern education, not all IRE teachers possess the skills to integrate them into the learning process effectively. Consequently, lessons may remain too conventional and fail to capture students' interest.³¹

Infrastructure also poses a challenge. The lack of adequate digital facilities, such as projectors or stable internet access in classrooms, restricts the implementation of technology-assisted learning. This

²⁶ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

²⁷ Muhaimin, *Pengembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam: Di Sekolah, Madrasah, Dan Perguruan Tinggi*.

²⁸ Zubaedi et al., "Learning Style and Motivation: Gifted Young Students in Meaningful Learning."

²⁹ Surya Sigdel, "Teaching-Learning Strategies for Fostering Creative and Innovative Skills in Community School Students," *Teacher Half-Yearly Journal* 17, no. 1 (April 25, 2025): 244-60, <https://doi.org/10.3126/thj.v17i1.77901>.

³⁰ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

³¹ Moleong, "(Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif)."

limitation affects not only the delivery of materials but also the quality of student engagement in lessons that could otherwise benefit from visual and multimedia elements.³²

Furthermore, external cultural influences such as exposure to social media and global youth culture present ongoing challenges to maintaining Islamic values among students. Some students struggle to reconcile Islamic teachings with modern entertainment and online trends. This situation emphasizes the importance of reinforcing religious values in a way that is relevant and relatable to students' everyday lives.³³

Another crucial factor is the limited involvement of parents in reinforcing religious education at home. Islamic education should ideally be a shared responsibility between school and family. However, the lack of consistent parental support weakens the reinforcement of values taught at school. Therefore, enhanced communication between teachers and parents, such as.³⁴

Impact of Islamic Religious Education Strategies on Enhancing Religious Awareness

The impact of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strategies at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo can be seen across multiple domains: students' spiritual habits, moral attitudes, and social engagement. Implementing learning strategies that emphasize habituation, experiential learning, and teacher role modeling has brought about measurable changes in students' behavior and outlook, both inside and outside the classroom.³⁵

One of the most observable impacts is the improvement in students' religious practices. Students consistently participate in daily routines such as salat dhuhā, Qur'anic recitation, and memorization of short surahs. These routines are no longer seen as mere school obligations but have become meaningful spiritual exercises that foster inner discipline. Students demonstrate increased commitment to prayer schedules, recite verses with fluency, and show attentiveness during religious rituals. This indicates that the strategies have effectively

³² J Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (New York: Sage Publication, 2018).

³³ Zubaedi, *Desain Pendidikan Karakter*.

³⁴ Awwalina Khairunnisa, "The Relationship between Educational Priorities and Students' Religious Attitudes," *International Journal of Curriculum Development, Teaching and Learning Innovation* 1, no. 1 (November 30, 2022): 27–32, <https://doi.org/10.35335/curriculum.v1i1.59>.

³⁵ Rindi Amelyna Arrum Sofiatin, 2025

internalized spiritual values through structured daily practice (Moleong, 2017; Sofiatin, 2025).

Moreover, there has been a noticeable shift in students' personal character. Teachers report that students have become more honest, respectful, and socially responsible. They greet their teachers with sincerity, take care of their school environment, and resolve interpersonal conflicts more constructively. This behavioral transformation reflects the success of value-based education, in which moral lessons are continuously reinforced through direct instruction, teacher modeling, and real-life applications (Zubaedi, 2011).

The impact is also evident in students' participation in religious leadership roles. Through activities such as delivering kultum, organizing Islamic events, or leading prayers, students develop public speaking skills, religious confidence, and a sense of responsibility toward the Muslim community. These roles provide them with opportunities to express Islamic values in public settings, fostering both personal growth and social awareness.³⁶

Outside the school context, students are increasingly involved in community-based religious and social activities, such as assisting in mosque events, participating in religious processions, or joining charity initiatives. These forms of experiential learning strengthen their empathy, collaboration skills, and real-world application of Islamic ethics. As a result, students not only learn about Islam but also live its principles in their everyday lives.³⁷

Furthermore, the integration of religious values into academic subjects and daily interactions has contributed to holistic character development. Students are guided to reflect on Islamic teachings in all aspects of life, including time management, honesty in completing assignments, and cooperative behavior. Teachers also report improvements in student discipline, such as punctuality, attentiveness, and readiness to learn, which are seen as extensions of their growing religious awareness.³⁸

Despite these positive outcomes, the level of impact varies among students. Factors such as home environment, personal motivation, and peer influence still play a role in determining how deeply students

³⁶ Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

³⁷ Ahmad Lahmi, Syaflin Halim, and Hendri Novigator, "The Effect of Religious Extracurricular on Students' Spiritual and Social Attitudes at School," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2025): 28-43, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v9i1.58>.

³⁸ Muhaimin, *Pengembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam: Di Sekolah, Madrasah, Dan Perguruan Tinggi*.

internalize the lessons. Some students show rapid improvement, while others progress more slowly. This variation highlights the need for ongoing guidance and differentiated support based on students' backgrounds and needs.³⁹

Nevertheless, the overall outcome indicates that the strategies have significantly contributed to strengthening students' religious identity. The emphasis on both cognitive and affective learning—through reflection, repetition, dialogue, and practice—has created a learning ecosystem where students gradually develop a sincere understanding and embodiment of Islamic values. The integration of structured religious routines, teacher modeling, and social engagement serves as an effective combination in shaping spiritually aware individuals.⁴⁰

These findings affirm the notion that religious education must extend beyond textual comprehension. As supported by Zubaedi, successful religious education emphasizes experience, context, and continuity. The case of MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo demonstrates how a comprehensive strategy, when supported by institutional culture and community involvement, can yield deep and sustainable impacts on religious consciousness.⁴¹

Conclusion

This study analyzed the teaching strategies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in enhancing students' religious awareness at MA Muhammadiyah Watulimo. The findings reveal that teachers implement a combination of contextual lectures, active discussions, project-based religious learning, and habitual religious practices such as salat dhuha, Qur'an recitation, and short sermons (kultum). These strategies are not only effective in transferring religious knowledge but also instrumental in fostering spiritual attitudes and behaviors among students. Participation in Islamic celebrations and structured spiritual programs has significantly contributed to shaping students' character and religious identity.

The study also identifies key supporting factors, including a religious school environment, exemplary teacher behavior, and open communication between teachers and students. However, challenges such as low student motivation, limited access to digital learning tools,

³⁹ Rusmawati Rusmawati, Nur Raafitta Suci Zahratun Nisa, and Zahrotun Nisa, "Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Interdisiplin Di Sekolah Dasar," *Sittah: Journal of Primary Education* 3, no. 1 (2022): 90–101.

⁴⁰ Nicholas J. S. Gibson, "The Experimental Investigation of Religious Cognition," November 5, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.31237/osf.io/mxwfc>.

⁴¹ Zubaedi et al., "Learning Style and Motivation: Gifted Young Students in Meaningful Learning."

and minimal parental involvement remain significant. Teachers have addressed these challenges through personal mentoring, motivational approaches, and adaptive teaching methods. As a result, students demonstrate improved spiritual discipline, ethical behavior, and social responsibility, both in school and within the broader community.

The implications of this study suggest that effective IRE must integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Religious education should not only convey Islamic doctrines but also immerse students in meaningful experiences that cultivate long-term religious awareness. Schools and educators are encouraged to adopt innovative, context-based strategies that engage students both intellectually and emotionally.

However, this study has limitations. It focuses on a single institution and does not apply quantitative methods, limiting the generalizability of its findings. Furthermore, it does not explore the external influences of media and peer environments in depth. Future research is recommended to adopt a mixed-method approach across diverse school settings to gain broader insights into the effectiveness of religious education strategies.

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