

Value-Based Leadership of Islamic Education Teachers and Its Role in Disciplinary Religious Practice Formation: A Qualitative Case Study in an Indonesian Public School

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to explore the contribution of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers' leadership competencies in shaping students' discipline in religious observance at SMPN 2 Sintoga. The research addresses an empirical gap in the literature, which seldom links the leadership of IRE teachers to students' worship practices within formal educational settings.

Design/methods/approach – A qualitative approach was employed using an intrinsic case study method. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving IRE teachers, the school principal, and students. Thematic analysis was conducted with methodological triangulation and validated through member checking.

Findings – The leadership of IRE teachers plays a strategic role in fostering students' religious discipline through the habituation of congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and motivational approaches. Among the 24 eighth-grade students interviewed, more than two-thirds reported a shift from reluctance to regular engagement in religious practices. Leadership strategies included cross-functional coordination, reward-and-sanction systems, and consistent spiritual guidance.

Research implications – The results offer practical implications for educators and policymakers in designing character education programs rooted in daily worship practices, positioning religious teachers as moral and spiritual change agents.

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1. Introduction

Discipline is a fundamental component in the educational process, as it reflects students' orderly behavior, adherence to rules, and personal responsibility both in daily life and within the school environment (Akhyar et al., 2024). From the perspective of Islamic education, discipline is not merely associated with social order, but also encompasses spiritual dimensions, as it is regarded as a form of self-restraint and reverence for religious precepts (Rahmat et al., 2017). Religious discipline, particularly at the junior secondary school level, plays a vital role in the formation of students' character and moral integrity. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers hold a strategic position in fostering this discipline, both through direct instruction and exemplary conduct in daily interactions (Akhyar et al., 2024).

Previous research has indicated that IRE teachers play a pivotal role in instilling values of discipline through religious approaches, including the use of exemplary narratives such as those of the prophets and companions that illustrate devout worship practices (Akhyar et al., 2024). Teachers serve not only as educators but also as leaders responsible for guiding students holistically—encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Rusnadi & Hafidhah, 2019). Teachers who exhibit strong leadership qualities are expected to serve as role models and inspire students in the development of a robust religious character. In this context, religious discipline—such as punctuality in



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prayer, consistency in Qur'anic recitation, and sincerity in performing voluntary worship—constitutes a tangible manifestation of a teacher's spiritual leadership.

Furthermore, the importance of leadership competencies among *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* teachers in addressing the challenges of contemporary education has been highlighted (Hasanah et al., 2020). They concluded that such competencies not only aid in classroom management but also significantly influence the effectiveness of character education both within and beyond the school setting. However, most prior studies have emphasized conceptual and descriptive aspects of IRE teacher leadership, with limited in-depth exploration of its direct impact on students' religious discipline, particularly at the junior secondary school level.

This limitation reveals a gap in the literature, particularly in the categories of empirical and methodological gaps as classified, referring to the lack of empirical studies that specifically link IRE teachers' leadership competencies with the development of students' religious discipline in formal school settings (Miles et al., 2017). Many existing studies remain conceptual in nature or fail to investigate specific contexts in a systematic manner. Moreover, there is a dearth of research that rigorously examines local contexts, such as SMPN 2 Sintoga, which could offer contextual insights into how Islamic values and teacher leadership are implemented in educational practice.

Based on the above background and identification of research gaps, this study seeks to address the following research question: *How do the leadership competencies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers contribute to the development of students' religious discipline at SMPN 2 Sintoga?* The purpose of this research is to explore the roles and leadership strategies of IRE teachers in instilling religious discipline among students, and to analyze the impact of such leadership in the context of religious character formation.

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it aims to enrich the literature on IRE teacher leadership and religious discipline by providing empirical findings from a locally grounded context that has been underrepresented in previous scholarship. Practically, the results may serve as a reference for educators—particularly IRE teachers—in developing effective leadership competencies to cultivate students' religious and disciplined character, and may also contribute to the development of educational policies that are grounded in Islamic values within school settings.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using an intrinsic case study method, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of how the leadership competencies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers influence the development of students' religious discipline at SMP Negeri 2 Sintoga. The case study approach was chosen for its capacity to facilitate intensive contextual exploration of complex social phenomena, particularly leadership practices within a secondary school setting grounded in Islamic values (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

The selection of SMPN 2 Sintoga as the research site was purposive, intended to address the identified empirical gap concerning the limited contextual studies on the role of IRE teacher leadership in fostering students' religious character through habitual worship practices in formal educational settings (Miles et al., 2017). This approach aligns with the study's objective to examine the practical enactment and impacts of spiritual leadership by IRE teachers within a specific local context.

2.2. Participants and Sampling Techniques

The participants included the IRE teacher, the school principal, and students from SMP Negeri 2 Sintoga. Purposive sampling was employed to select individuals considered to have direct understanding and experience relevant to the research problem (Patton, 2015). The IRE teacher was selected for their central role in guiding students' worship practices, the school principal for their function in implementing religious disciplinary policies, and students as the primary subjects experiencing the influence of such leadership.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three primary techniques: participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations involved directly witnessing students participating in congregational *Dhuhr* prayers at the school mosque and engaging in Qur'anic recitation sessions led by the IRE teacher after formal class hours. The researcher also accompanied the IRE teacher during classroom visits aimed at enforcing religious discipline among students who failed to attend congregational prayers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the IRE teacher's perspectives and strategies in instilling religious discipline, the principal's policies and views on enforcing religious norms, and students' experiences and reflections on their religious development. These interviews were guided by open-ended questions derived from theoretical and practical themes in Islamic character education (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Document analysis served as a supplementary data source, encompassing school regulations, worship attendance records, and religious activity agendas, which supported the triangulation of data obtained from observations and interviews.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed thematically following the framework established for thematic analysis in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved six systematic steps: (1) familiarization with data through reading and transcription, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of potential themes, (4) review of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) reporting of findings. Manual coding was employed to trace narrative and conceptual patterns in the qualitative data.

Key themes sought included: (a) leadership strategies of the IRE teacher in fostering religious practice, (b) forms of students' worship discipline, and (c) the contribution of teacher leadership to students' religious character formation, in alignment with the study's objectives. Data validity was ensured through methodological and source triangulation, member checking with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations, and the construction of an audit trail to ensure analytical transparency and traceability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.5. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established principles of ethical qualitative research. Approval was obtained from both the school administration and the Department of Education of Padang Pariaman Regency. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, benefits, and their rights as informants, and provided written informed consent. To protect confidentiality and privacy, participants' identities were anonymized throughout the research process.

3. Results

This study aimed to explore the leadership role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in cultivating students' religious discipline at SMPN 2 Sintoga, with a primary focus on the implementation of *Dhuhr* congregational prayer and Qur'anic recitation guidance. To obtain comprehensive data, the researcher adopted a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing field observation, in-depth interviews with IRE teachers, the principal, and students, as well as documentation of religious activities conducted at the school. Observations were carried out over a two-week period during worship activities, while interviews involved five key informants: two IRE teachers, the school principal, and two groups of students from grades VII and VIII.

3.1. Implementation of *Dhuhr* Congregational Prayer

Observational data indicated that the *Dhuhr* congregational prayer was being conducted effectively at SMPN 2 Sintoga, with participation from students across grades VII to IX. Due to limited space in the school's prayer hall (*mushalla*), the prayer was performed in rotation. The IRE teachers, along with several subject teachers and school security personnel, actively monitored student attendance.

"We patrol the classrooms and school grounds during *Dhuhr* to ensure all students participate in prayer. Those caught skipping are sanctioned on the spot," (IRE Teacher, interview).

Students found to be absent from prayer were subject to immediate disciplinary measures such as push-ups or reading a page from the Qur'an afterward. Repeat offenders were assigned cleaning duties in the *mushalla* or surrounding areas.

The IRE teacher did not carry out this responsibility alone. There was strong coordination among the IRE teachers, homeroom teachers, subject teachers teaching during *Dhuhr*, and class leaders in maintaining prayer discipline.

"During *Dhuhr*, teachers direct students to the *mushalla*. I also ask class leaders to take attendance, and those who missed prayer must make it up after class," (IRE Teacher, interview).

This multi-stakeholder involvement underscores a collective commitment to instilling religious discipline within the school.

3.2. Qur'anic Literacy Development

In addition to prayer discipline, the IRE teacher also focused on improving students' Qur'anic reading proficiency. For students struggling with pronunciation or Tajwid, additional sessions were held after school for 15–30 minutes.

"After prayer and classes, I guide students who aren't yet fluent in Qur'an reading. I also give them *lqra'*books," (IRE Teacher, interview).

This approach was non-coercive, offering consistent guidance to support students' Qur'anic literacy. At the beginning of each class, students were encouraged to recite short surahs from *Juz' Amma*, with random selections made by the teacher to ensure active participation.

"Before lessons, the teacher usually asks us to recite a short surah. At first I was shy and made mistakes, but over time it became routine," (Grade VIII student, interview).

This practice gradually fostered a deeper connection between students and the Qur'an as an integrated part of their learning experience.

3.3. Motivational and Disciplinary Strategies

IRE teachers consistently provided motivation and direction during lessons, after prayers, and in other worship-related activities. The approach was positive and non-compulsive.

"We instill that prayer is a duty, not coercion. With continuous motivation, students eventually become accustomed," (IRE Teacher, interview).

This fostered a supportive environment that internalized worship as a conscious act of devotion rather than mere compliance. A system of rewards and punishments was employed to reinforce discipline. Rewards included extra academic credit or pocket money for diligent students, while sanctions for noncompliance included light physical tasks or cleaning duties.

"I give extra points or small cash rewards to students who are diligent in worship. But those who skip still face penalties," (Principal, interview).

The balance between encouragement and corrective measures proved crucial in this approach.

IRE teachers demonstrated strong leadership competencies in guiding students' religious discipline. These included the ability to collaborate with other educators, design worship habituation strategies, manage interpersonal communication with students, and enforce rules judiciously.

"I have to coordinate with other teachers and homeroom teachers so that religious guidance isn't solely the responsibility of the IRE department. It's a collective effort," (IRE Teacher, interview).

The role of the teacher as a spiritual leader was also evident in efforts to instill worship values not merely as rituals but as integral to character development.

"Every morning, I remind students to view worship as an act of obedience, not a burden. I want them to love prayer and the Qur'an with their hearts," (IRE Teacher, interview).

3.4. Student Perceptions and Experiences

Grade VIII students admitted that initially they often skipped prayer or felt compelled to perform it. However, over time and through consistent habituation and supervision, their attitudes changed toward greater discipline.

"I used to skip and go to the canteen. Now I'm afraid because of inspections and continuous teacher advice," (Grade VIII student, interview).

"It was difficult at first, but now it feels strange if I don't pray," (Grade VIII student, interview).

Students also acknowledged the influential role of teachers in encouraging regular religious observance, especially during prayer times.

"Teachers direct us to the *mushalla* at every call to prayer. They also give us advice after praying," (Grade VII student, interview).

3.5. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Challenges in developing religious discipline included students' lack of awareness about the importance of worship, peer influence, and the limited capacity of the *mushalla*.

"Many students still need constant motivation. Their awareness is not yet fully developed," (IRE Teacher, interview).

"Sometimes students follow their peers more than their teachers. If their friends skip prayer, they follow," (Principal, interview).

"The *mushalla* is too small, so students have to take turns. That makes some of them uncomfortable," (IRE Teacher, observation).

Supporting factors included collaboration among teachers and staff, administrative backing from the principal, and the availability of worship facilities, albeit limited.

"We help each other, coordinate who supervises and who directs the students," (IRE Teacher, interview).

"We fully support religious activities. All teachers are instructed to assist," (Principal, interview).

Based on field observations and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that the leadership of IRE teachers at SMPN 2 Sintoga plays a crucial role in fostering students' religious discipline. The implementation of *Dhuhr* congregational prayer and Qur'anic reading programs was not only structurally organized but also driven by collaborative efforts, motivational systems, and personalized engagement with students.

Moreover, IRE teachers demonstrated leadership competencies encompassing strategic program management, cross-role communication, and spiritual role modeling. The impact of this approach was evident not only in students' behavioral changes regarding worship but also in their internalization of religious values such as accountability to God, spiritual awareness, and love for worship.

"After getting used to praying and reading the Qur'an at school, it feels empty if I don't do it at home. Like something's missing," (Grade VII student, interview).

Thus, the religious guidance implemented by IRE teachers contributes not only to behavioral discipline but also to the holistic formation of students' religious character, which is the ultimate aim of Islamic education.

4. Discussion

4.1. Leadership of Islamic Religious Education Teachers

Teacher leadership competence is a foundational element in the implementation of quality education, as outlined in Law No. 14 of 2005 of the Republic of Indonesia and further articulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 16 of 2010. These regulations affirm that teachers—particularly Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers—must demonstrate competencies across pedagogical, personal, social, professional, and leadership domains. In the context of Islamic schools, leadership is not only administrative but also spiritual in nature, facilitating the internalization of Islamic values in students' daily lives.

This study reveals that IRE teachers at SMPN 2 Sintoga play a strategic leadership role in shaping students' worship discipline. Their responsibilities extend beyond instructional delivery to include initiating worship routines, facilitating Qur'anic literacy, organizing congregational prayer discipline, and providing spiritual guidance. These practices exemplify the broader dimensions of leadership competence, including innovation, coordination, time management, and relationship management—both among educators and between teachers and students.

The IRE teacher has adopted a value-based leadership approach, in which worship is framed not merely as a ritual obligation but as a vehicle for character and personality formation rooted in Islamic principles. The observed transformation of students—from initial reluctance to habitual and conscious engagement in religious practices—indicates that the teacher's approach has gradually fostered a sense of spiritual awareness.

Moreover, this transformation signifies a shift from external compliance to deeper internalization of values, wherein religious discipline becomes a foundation for the development of religious character encompassing spiritual responsibility, honesty, and sincerity in adhering to Islamic teachings.

4.2. Students' Worship Discipline

In Islamic education, worship discipline is not simply formal compliance but is regarded as an expression of one's moral and spiritual commitment to God. The findings affirm that students' religious discipline at SMPN 2 Sintoga developed through sustained habituation, framed by an educational and non-coercive approach. The school's monitoring system—involving teachers, the

principal, and security personnel—alongside reward mechanisms for disciplined behavior, demonstrates that discipline is not solely the result of external enforcement but emerges from a school culture that nurtures positive habits.

Consistency in congregational prayer and Qur'anic recitation has cultivated a strong religious atmosphere within the school. Students do not merely understand their worship obligations; they also experience them as spiritual needs. This outcome is closely linked to the success of IRE teachers in instilling values through exemplary conduct, spiritual communication, and systematic habituation. From the perspective of Islamic character education, such practices are consistent with the principles of *ta'dib* and *tazkiyah*, which emphasize comprehensive spiritual and moral development.

This further reinforces the view that the ultimate outcome of religious guidance is not only reflected in behavioral regularity, but also in the formation of a deeply rooted religious identity, where students emerge as spiritually accountable and faithful individuals.

4.3. The Urgency of IRE Teacher Leadership Competence in Instilling Worship Discipline

The leadership of IRE teachers is a critical determinant in fostering a sustainable and disciplined culture of worship. Teachers are not merely curriculum implementers; they serve as moral educators who shape the students' religious *habitus*. At SMPN 2 Sintoga, the IRE teacher's approach includes planning daily worship activities, coordinating with school stakeholders, conducting inclusive spiritual mentoring, and regularly evaluating student participation. These actions represent a concrete enactment of leadership competencies as outlined in PMA No. 16 of 2010.

Globally, the leadership role of religious education teachers in promoting worship discipline has also gained attention in international research. In Malaysia, Islamic education teachers serve as key figures in shaping students' moral character through the habituation of Islamic values in both curriculum and daily practice (Adam & Hussien, 2018). Teachers act as central moral agents who shield students from secular influences by fostering spiritual internalization.

A similar observation was made in a study of Muslim schools in the United Kingdom, where educators face significant challenges in maintaining students' Islamic identities within secular societies (Hammad & Shah, 2019). School principals and teachers are tasked with balancing Islamic values and the demands of a religiously neutral national curriculum. They strive to uphold religious discipline and identity through inclusive and morally grounded leadership.

In the Indonesian context, Islamic schools have developed innovative pedagogical approaches to shape a generation that is both religious and socially just (Susanti et al., 2024). Teachers are not solely focused on academic achievement but also actively nurture students' spiritual leadership through worship habituation, values-based dialogue, and active involvement in the school community.

These findings suggest that while this study is rooted in the local context of SMPN 2 Sintoga, the leadership practices of IRE teachers in fostering religious discipline are consistent with comparable efforts in other national contexts. This reinforces the external validity of the study and positions it as part of a broader global contribution to character-based Islamic education.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the leadership competence of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers at SMPN 2 Sintoga plays a central role in cultivating students' worship discipline through the habituation of *Dhuhr* congregational prayer and Qur'anic learning. The strategies employed—comprising motivational systems, non-coercive approaches, cross-role

collaboration within the school, and the spiritual exemplarity of teachers—have proven effective in fostering internalized and sustainable religious consciousness. The IRE teacher functions not only as an instructor but also as a value-oriented leader, capable of managing interpersonal relationships, fostering a religious school culture, and creating a supportive and transformative environment for spiritual development.

The study successfully addressed the research question with empirical clarity and contributes to the academic discourse by presenting context-specific findings from a local setting that remains underexplored in the literature on Islamic educational leadership. The results affirm that a spirituality-based value leadership approach can make a tangible contribution to religious character education among students.

Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study's focus on a single school and its relatively short observation period (two weeks) may constrain the external validity of the findings, particularly in terms of generalizability to schools with differing socio-cultural dynamics and resource conditions. Although data triangulation and member checking were employed to ensure credibility, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory and contextually situated.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for educators and policymakers. Other schools may replicate the value-based leadership approach to religious mentoring by embedding it into daily activities and the broader school curriculum. Character education policies should also emphasize the role of teachers as moral agents with the capacity to shape students' religious *habitus*.

For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the sustained impact of teacher leadership on students' religious character transformation over an extended period. Additionally, comparative-quantitative studies across diverse socio-cultural contexts would enhance external validity and allow for a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between specific leadership dimensions (e.g., spiritual leadership, instructional leadership) and affective or moral discipline. Furthermore, the development of a theoretical model of "transformative religious leadership" in the context of Islamic education represents a promising area of inquiry to address existing conceptual gaps.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Muaddyl Akhyar served as the main and corresponding author, leading the research and writing. Iipi Zukdi contributed to data collection and analysis. Nurfarida Deliani assisted in the literature review and preparation of research materials.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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