

Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Improving Students' Discipline of Fardhu Prayers at State Elementary School UPT 158 Mundan, Enrekang District

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze in depth: (1) the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in improving students' obligatory prayer (fardhu prayer) discipline; (2) the effectiveness of those strategies; and (3) the supporting and inhibiting factors at UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan, Enrekang Regency. A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted, with data gathered through participatory observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Eight informants participated: the school principal, one PAI teacher, five class teachers (grades II–VI), and student representatives. Data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data credibility was ensured through source, method, and instrument triangulation. Findings reveal: (1) Applied strategies encompass six main components: habituating congregational prayer, teacher role modeling, positive reinforcement through rewards, personal approaches and intensive parental communication, integrating prayer values into instruction, and continuous evaluation/monitoring; (2) These strategies proved effective, proven by improved prayer punctuality, active congregational participation, and the growth of intrinsic worship awareness among students; (3) Supporting factors include institutional commitment, synergy between the PAI teacher and class teacher, parental support, and a conducive religious environment; Inhibiting factors include limited student awareness, insufficient prayer habituation at home, peer influence, dense activity schedules, and limited prayer room capacity. The study concludes that obligatory prayer, within the elementary education context, functions not only as a ritual obligation but also as a medium for character formation—cultivating discipline, responsibility, and peace of mind—which positively influences students' learning attitudes and social life.

Keywords

PAI Teacher Strategies; Obligatory Prayer Discipline; Religious Character Education; Elementary School; Enrekang



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INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for the development of human character and personality as a whole. It encompasses not only cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor dimensions that are integrated into students' daily lives (Munawir et al., 2020). Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 3, emphasizes that national education aims to develop students' potential to become people who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a very strategic role as a compulsory subject aimed at shaping students into people who are faithful, pious, have noble character, and have a strong commitment to Islamic teachings (Dewi et al., 2023). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not solely oriented towards the transfer of religious knowledge. Furthermore, it emphasizes the development of religious attitudes and behaviors that can be implemented in real life. One of the most concrete manifestations of these values is discipline in performing obligatory prayers, which is the second pillar of Islam and a pillar of the Islamic faith. Allah SWT states in Surah An-Nisa'/4:103 that prayer is an obligation with specified times for the believers. This verse emphasizes that discipline in prayer is not an option, but rather an obligation with both spiritual and character dimensions (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

Obligatory prayer is not merely a mechanical ritual. It is a means of spiritual communication between a servant and Allah SWT, encompassing character building, time discipline, personal responsibility, and peace of mind (Saihu, 2020). Imam Al-Qurtubi, in his commentary on *Al-Jami' li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, explains that the command to observe prayer perfectly, fulfilling all its pillars and requirements, maintaining its times, and being consistent in its performance. This demonstrates that Islam places prayer discipline as a reflection of holistic and sustainable piety. In the context of formal education, fostering prayer discipline in students presents a unique challenge for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Various studies have identified factors such as a lack of role models, monotonous learning methods, minimal family support, and the influence of the digital era as major obstacles to fostering students' prayer discipline (Ridwan et al., 2024; Sintasari et al., 2024). Empirical data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2023 showed that the level of student participation in religious activities at school, including congregational prayer, remains at a level that requires significant improvement.

Initial empirical data at the UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan, Enrekang Regency, indicates a similar situation. Of the 105 students enrolled in the 2025/2026 academic year, initial observations indicate that only around 60% consistently attend congregational Dzuhur prayers at school. More worryingly, observations of student behavior outside of school hours indicate that the majority of students lack optimal discipline in performing the five daily prayers independently. This situation raises fundamental questions about the most appropriate and effective strategies for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to improve students' prayer discipline, given the complex factors that influence it. Several previous studies have examined similar themes from various perspectives. Ridwan et al. (2024) examined Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' strategies at the elementary school level and found that congregational prayer, integrative guidance, varied methods, and regular evaluations were proven to improve prayer discipline. Sintasari et al. (2024) concluded through evaluative research that habituation, role modeling, supervision, and advice had a positive effect, although they still require more intensive involvement from all parties. Khoiruddin (2021) found from

the high school context that habituation and teacher role modeling were consistently effective strategies. However, comprehensive studies integrating strategy, effectiveness, and contextual factors at the elementary school level in rural South Sulawesi are still limited. This study aims to fill this gap.

Based on the description above, this study aims to: (1) describe and analyze the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers in improving students' obligatory prayer discipline at the UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan, Enrekang Regency; (2) analyze the effectiveness of these strategies; and (3) identify supporting and inhibiting factors in their implementation. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of effective Islamic Religious Education learning strategies, as well as provide practical solutions for educators in facing the challenges of forming students' religious character in the contemporary era.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at in-depth description and analysis of phenomena within a natural context (Sukmadinata, 2023). This approach was chosen based on the characteristics of the study focus, which is contextual, complex, and cannot be reduced to numbers alone. Qualitative research allows researchers to capture the nuances, meanings, and dynamics of processes occurring in real-world practice (Moleong, 2021). The research was conducted at the UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi Province (Postal Code 91754; NPSN 40313165). This school was established on December 31, 1982, with state status under the auspices of the Enrekang Regency Government. The location selection was based on: (1) the availability of initial data indicating prayer discipline problems that needed to be studied; (2) the existence of real efforts from Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing various strategies; and (3) the characteristics of schools in rural areas that have not been widely represented in academic studies. The research was conducted from October 2025 to January 2026.

The research subjects were determined by purposive sampling based on the criteria of relevance, direct involvement, and willingness to be researched. The research subjects consisted of eight people: (1) Head of UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan; (2) Mr. Tajuddin, Islamic Religious Education teacher; (3) Mr. Ansar, homeroom teacher of class II; (4) Mrs. Nora, homeroom teacher of class III; (5) Mrs. Usnul Lestari, homeroom teacher of class IV; (6) Mr. Abd. Rahman Saleh, homeroom teacher of class V; (7) Mr. Laharis, homeroom teacher of class VI; and (8) student representatives from various levels. Data about the school were also obtained from official documents, including data showing the school has 105 students (55 boys and 50 girls) with 12 teaching and administrative staff. Data collection was conducted through three complementary techniques. First, participant observation, conducted from October to December 2025, included direct observation of congregational prayer, teacher-student interactions, and the general religious atmosphere of the school. Second, repeated in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants from December 2025 to January 2026, using an open-ended interview guide to capture each informant's unique perspective. Third, a documentation study included analysis of Islamic Religious Education curriculum documents, Lesson Plans (RPPs), prayer attendance records, parent reports, and school profiles.

Data analysis was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process, following the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (Hardani, et al., 2020): (1) Data reduction, namely the process of selecting, focusing, and transforming raw data into structured field notes; (2) Data presentation, namely organizing structured information to enable drawing conclusions; and (3) Conclusion drawing and verification, namely interpreting the presented data with cross-confirmation from various

sources. Data validity was guaranteed through four criteria: credibility (triangulation of sources, methods, and tools; observation persistence; peer discussion), transferability (detailed contextual description), dependability (consistency of repeated observations), and confirmability (audit by the promoter and co-promoter).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan, Enrekang Regency

The school's administrative unit (UPT) for State Elementary School 158 Mundan is located in Mundan Village, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi Province. Geographically, the school is located at latitude -3.3071 and longitude 119.7501, in a mountainous region characterized by a community that still maintains strong Islamic values and local wisdom. The school has been operating since 1982, implementing School-Based Management (SBM) and is tuition-free for all students. In the 2025/2026 academic year, the school had 105 students, consisting of 55 boys and 50 girls, spread across six grade levels. The teaching staff consisted of 12 people, consisting of one principal, five male teachers, and six female teachers. The available prayer facilities included a prayer room that actively functioned as a center for student religious activities, although its capacity was not yet sufficient to accommodate all students simultaneously. This situation presented one of the logistical challenges that had to be overcome in implementing the congregational prayer strategy.

Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Improving Discipline in Obligatory Prayers

The research identified six key strategies consistently and systematically implemented by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and all homeroom teachers at the UPT of Mundan 158 Public Elementary School. These six strategies complement each other and form a holistic development ecosystem, aligning with the principle that character building requires a multidimensional approach involving all school components. The first strategy is to cultivate the habit of regular congregational prayer. Congregational Dzuhur prayer is held daily as a mandatory school activity involving all students. The congregational prayer schedule is integrated into the school's daily agenda so that it does not conflict with learning activities. Mr. Tajuddin, a PAI teacher, stated: "We hold daily congregational prayer activities to get students used to performing obligatory prayers on time. In addition, we also hold competitions or awards for students who are disciplined in performing congregational prayers, and we regularly hold religious study activities or lectures discussing the virtues of obligatory prayers in daily life." This consistent habituation is a direct implementation of Skinner's operant conditioning theory, where positive responses that are regularly reinforced will form permanent habits (Az-Zahra & Rizal, 2024).

The second strategy is teacher role modelling (*uswah hasanah*). All informants, without exception, emphasized the role model as the most fundamental and irreplaceable strategy. Ms. Usnul Lestari, the fourth-grade homeroom teacher, stated: "I try to be a role model for my students by praying on time, both in class and outside. Furthermore, I explain the values inherent in prayer, such as patience and responsibility." Mr. Laharis, the sixth-grade homeroom teacher, added: "I always remind my students to view prayer as an activity that not only increases their closeness to God but also helps them in their daily lives." This role model aligns with the modeling principle in Bandura's theory (Mutholingah, 2021) and with Al-Ghazali's teachings on the teacher's obligation to practice their knowledge and not deviate from what they teach (Mursidin, 2021).

The third strategy is providing positive reinforcement. Rewards are given to students who

demonstrate consistency in maintaining prayer discipline, either in the form of verbal praise, additional credit, or inter-class competitions with meaningful prizes. Mr. Abd. Rahman Saleh, the fifth-grade homeroom teacher, stated: "The approach I use is to reward students who are disciplined in performing obligatory prayers. I hold congregational prayers together, both in the school mosque and in the prayer room, and provide motivation so that they can pray on time." Ms. Nora, the third-grade homeroom teacher, added: "We also hold congregational prayer competitions that award awards to students who demonstrate discipline in performing prayers on time, which aims to provide positive motivation to students." This positive reinforcement creates a positive emotional association between disciplined prayer behavior and a sense of pride and appreciation.

The fourth strategy is a personal approach and intensive communication with parents. Teachers provide individual guidance to students who are having difficulty maintaining prayer discipline. Simultaneously, proactive communication with parents is established through face-to-face meetings, monitoring notes, and text messages to create continuity of guidance between school and home. Mr. Tajuddin stated: "To integrate the teachings of obligatory prayer into the students' daily lives, I try to relate each prayer lesson to their lives outside of school... applying the values taught in prayer, such as patience, calmness, and a sense of responsibility, in daily activities." This approach recognizes the reality that religious character formation is not solely the responsibility of the school, but requires ecological synergy between the school, family, and community.

The fifth strategy is the integration of prayer values into the learning process. Islamic Religious Education teachers consistently link prayer material to broader life values, including time management, responsibility, patience, and peace of mind. Mr. Ansar, the second-grade homeroom teacher, stated: "I often explain to students how disciplined prayer can provide peace of mind and emotional stability. I encourage students to reflect on how timely prayer can provide benefits beyond school, such as improving concentration and patience." This cross-domain integration helps students understand prayer not as an isolated ritual, but as a value system that permeates all aspects of life, aligning with Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyah* (religious devotion) (Mutholingah, 2021). The sixth strategy is ongoing evaluation and monitoring. Teachers conduct systematic monitoring through direct observation of congregational prayer attendance, individual monitoring notes, reflective discussions with students, and communication with parents regarding the development of prayer habits at home. Evaluations are conducted periodically—daily, weekly, and monthly—to detect weaknesses, provide constructive feedback, and adjust strategies as needed. Mr. Laharis, the sixth-grade homeroom teacher, explains: "We hold congregational prayers every day, and afterward we have a short reflection activity on how discipline in prayer affects daily life. We also hold an inter-class congregational prayer competition with an award for the most disciplined class."

Effectiveness of Strategies in Increasing Discipline in Obligatory Prayers

The implementation of the six strategies above resulted in significant and measurable changes in students' obligatory prayer discipline. Based on data triangulation from direct observation, in-depth interviews, and parent reports, the strategy's effectiveness can be identified through three main interrelated indicators. The first indicator is an increase in prayer punctuality. Before the strategy was systematically implemented, many students were late or missed prayer times, especially outside of school hours. After implementation, almost all students who attended performed the Dzuhur prayer on time at school. Mr. Tajuddin stated: "I saw a significant improvement in students' discipline in performing obligatory prayers. Previously, many students were late or less interested in performing

prayers on time, but now they are more routine and consistent. In fact, there has been an increase in the number of students actively participating in congregational prayers at school." Ms. Nora confirmed: "Many students who previously did not care much about prayer have now started to pray on time. Even some students who used to be often late are now role models for their friends in maintaining prayer discipline."

The second indicator is increased participation in congregational prayer. The level of participation in congregational prayer has increased dramatically from around 60% to almost universal. Mr. Ansar reported: "Students who were previously often late or even missed prayers are now more aware of the importance of performing prayers on time. They also seem to value time and other activities outside of prayer more, such as studying and interacting with friends." Ms. Usnul Lestari added: "Since the congregational prayer activities began, I see students who were previously not very serious about maintaining prayer times are now more regular. They care more about prayer times and are starting to show discipline in other aspects, such as completing schoolwork on time." These findings indicate a positive transfer of learning from prayer discipline to other aspects of life.

The third and most significant indicator is the growth of intrinsic awareness of worship. The most fundamental change observed is the transition from obedience driven by external pressure (teachers/schools) to awareness that stems from within. Mr. Abd. Rahman Saleh observed: "I see a significant change in students' prayer discipline. Many students who used to be frequently late are now more consistent in performing prayers on time. In fact, they now remind their friends more often to perform prayers, indicating an increase in self-awareness." Reports from parents also confirm that some students have begun to perform prayers independently at home, even participating in voluntary prayers. This phenomenon indicates a successful process of internalization of values, as targeted in Al-Ghazali's tazkiyah approach. The effectiveness of this strategy is also influenced by the cohesion between the Islamic Religious Education teacher and all homeroom teachers. The active involvement of all homeroom teachers—not just the Islamic Religious Education teacher—creates consistent messaging and behavioral modeling throughout the school day. This aligns with the findings of Sintasari et al. (2024) who emphasized the importance of involving all stakeholders in efforts to improve discipline. Furthermore, a comparison between students who actively participate in religious activities and those who do not shows a striking difference: students who actively participate in religious study, congregational prayer, and Quran recitation consistently demonstrate significantly higher levels of prayer discipline, confirming that the intensity of involvement in the school's religious ecosystem is a strong predictor of prayer discipline.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Successes and obstacles in implementing strategies are not singular, but rather are the result of complex interactions between various factors at the individual, institutional, family, and community levels. The identified supporting factors include: First, the principal's commitment and leadership. The principal made religious character development an institutional priority, providing the time, space, and supportive policies. Mr. Tajuddin stated: "One of the main factors supporting the successful implementation of this strategy is the strong commitment of the school, especially the principal and other teachers, to supporting religious activities." Second, synergy between teachers. The active involvement of all homeroom teachers creates consistency in guidance throughout the day and sends a clear message to students that prayer is considered important by all teachers, not just Islamic Religious Education teachers. Third, parental support. Most parents responded positively to

school communications and helped strengthen the habit of praying at home. Ms. Nora stated: "The success of this strategy is greatly influenced by the collaboration between teachers, parents, and the students themselves. Teachers at the school provide good examples, and parents also support religious activities at home." Fourth, a conducive religious environment. The school's Islamic-infused culture, the availability of an active prayer room, and its geographic location within a strong Muslim community create a social ecosystem that normalizes and supports religious practices. Fifth, teacher consistency and creativity. A teacher's ability to adapt, be creative in conveying the value of prayer, and maintain a spirit of development amidst various limitations are human factors that are crucial to success.

The inhibiting factors identified include: First, low awareness among some students. Some students still view prayer solely as an external obligation separate from their real lives. Mr. Tajuddin identified: "One of the main obstacles I encountered was a lack of self-awareness among some students about the importance of prayer discipline. Some students sometimes still feel that prayer is only a religious obligation separate from their daily lives." Second, a lack of habituation in the family environment. Students who do not receive role models and support for prayer at home face a much greater challenge in building consistency. Mr. Laharis observed: "Some of the challenges I encountered were some students who were irregular in maintaining prayer times due to the many activities they had to do after school and the influence of their surroundings, such as friends who did not have a habit of praying." Third, peer influence. Peer group dynamics have a strong influence on students' motivation to worship, especially among students who associate with friends who are less concerned about prayer. Fourth, limited facilities. The limited capacity of the prayer room means that not all students can perform congregational prayers simultaneously, requiring more complex schedule management. Fifth, a busy schedule of activities. Academic pressure and busy extracurricular activities sometimes cause students to feel rushed and unable to perform prayers devoutly and on time.

In the face of these obstacles, teachers have developed creative, adaptive solutions. To address the limited capacity of the prayer room, congregational prayers are held in rotation per class or per grade. To counteract negative peer influence, a peer education strategy is implemented, empowering disciplined students to serve as role models and reminders for their peers. To build continuity between school and home, proactive communication with parents is conducted through various channels, including parent-teacher meetings, prayer monitoring books, and text messages. Ms. Usnul Lestari summarizes this adaptive philosophy: "I apply a direct, example-based approach and habituation... explaining the values inherent in prayer, such as patience and responsibility, so that students realize the importance of discipline in prayer as part of everyday life." This flexible yet consistent adaptation is key to successful implementation amidst various limitations.

Integrative Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and enrich a number of existing theoretical and empirical propositions. Overall, the results indicate that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategies in improving students' obligatory prayer discipline is multidimensional and cannot be explained by a single factor. Rather, this effectiveness is the result of a synergy between: (a) the quality and consistency of the strategies implemented; (b) the individual characteristics of the students; (c) the school's institutional support; (d) the role of the family; and (e) the religious environment of the community. From a behaviorist perspective, these findings confirm that practicing

congregational prayer and consistently rewarding students fosters a stable, positive response. However, this study also demonstrates that long-term effectiveness depends not only on external reinforcement but also on developing intrinsic motivation through understanding and appreciating the spiritual value of prayer. From a social learning perspective, the fact that all teachers, not just Islamic education teachers, serve as role models creates a comprehensive and consistent modeling environment, far more effective than if the role model came from a single figure.

This finding is also relevant to research by Amelia et al. (2019), which found a positive correlation between prayer discipline and decreased academic procrastination. Several informants reported that students who improved their prayer discipline also showed improvements in non-worship aspects, such as punctuality in assignment submission and compliance with school rules. This phenomenon indicates a generalization effect of prayer discipline to other life domains, strengthening the argument that fostering prayer discipline is a character investment with cross-domain returns. What distinguishes this research from previous studies is the discovery of a gradual dynamic of motivational transformation: from rule-driven compliance to comprehension-driven compliance, and finally to internalization-driven compliance. This transition does not occur automatically; it requires time, consistency, and an increasingly personal and reflective approach from teachers. This confirms Al-Ghazali's view in the concept of tazkiyah that the formation of a truly pious soul requires a gradual, iterative, and holistic process, one that cannot be accelerated solely through verbal instruction or coercive pressure (Mutholingah, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussions that have been presented, this study produces three main conclusions. First, the strategy implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers in improving the discipline of students' obligatory prayers at the UPT SD Negeri 158 Mundan, Enrekang Regency, forms a holistic and integrated coaching system, encompassing six components: (1) the habit of routine congregational prayers as a means of operant conditioning; (2) teacher role models as a basis for modeling; (3) providing positive reinforcement in the form of awards; (4) a personal approach and intensive communication with parents; (5) integration of prayer values into all dimensions of learning; and (6) continuous evaluation and monitoring. Prayer is positioned not only as a ritual obligation, but as a medium for forming the character of discipline, responsibility, peace of mind, and time management which have a positive impact on students' learning attitudes and social lives. Second, these strategies have proven effective in improving students' obligatory prayer discipline, as indicated by three verifiable changes: (a) a significant increase in the punctuality of prayer; (b) an increase in active participation in congregational prayer from approximately 60% to almost all students; and (c) most fundamentally, a growing awareness of worship originating from within the students, characterized by the behavior of reminding each other and the continuation of independent prayer practices at home. This effectiveness is reinforced by the fact that the positive impact is not only limited to the aspect of worship, but also generalized to other aspects of life such as academic punctuality and compliance with rules. Third, the strategy's success is underpinned by supporting factors such as: the school's institutional commitment, synergy between Islamic Religious Education teachers and all homeroom teachers, parental support, teacher consistency, and a conducive community religious environment. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors that must be addressed include: low awareness among some students, minimal religious practices within the family environment, negative peer influence, limited prayer room capacity, and a busy school schedule.

Adaptive solutions developed, including rotating prayer schedules, peer education, and proactive communication with parents, demonstrate the teachers' ability to respond to obstacles creatively and contextually.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations can be put forward. For schools: strengthening prayer-friendly policies by increasing the capacity and quality of prayer room facilities, integrating prayer guidance into formal school character education programs, and developing a more structured prayer monitoring system that is accessible to parents in real time. For Islamic Religious Education teachers and homeroom teachers: it is recommended to continue developing a variety of coaching methods to avoid boredom, strengthen the reflective dimension in prayer learning so that students can connect their spiritual experiences with real life, and utilize appropriate educational technology to reinforce messages about the value of prayer to the digital native generation. For parents: it is necessary to increase their role as role models and supervisors of worship at home, build more intensive communication with the school, and create a consistent family prayer routine at home. For further researchers: it is recommended to: (1) develop a valid and reliable quantitative measurement instrument to measure the level of elementary school students' prayer discipline in a more measurable manner; (2) explore a more structured school-family-community collaboration model in fostering student worship; (3) examine the comparative effectiveness of various prayer development strategies at different levels of education; and (4) examine the causal relationship between prayer discipline and various indicators of academic achievement and student character development longitudinally.

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