

Learning Strategies of Aqidah Akhlaq in Character Formation among Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Azhar Barito Kuala

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the learning strategies of Aqidah Akhlaq in shaping students' character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Azhar Barito Kuala and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting their implementation. This study employed a field research design with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through direct observation, interviews with the principal, Aqidah Akhlaq teacher, and students, and documentation, followed by qualitative data analysis and source triangulation. The findings indicate that character formation is supported by teacher role modeling, habituation, advice, motivation, lectures, group discussions, question-and-answer activities, and religious routines. The characters developed include discipline, politeness, responsibility, and religiosity. Supporting factors include teacher-school cooperation, a religious school environment, parental support, and routine religious activities, while inhibiting factors include students' limited self-awareness, external social influences, and excessive social-media use. The novelty of this study lies in its contextual integration of instructional strategies, religious habituation, teacher modeling, and environmental factors within the specific setting of MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala.

Keywords: Aqidah Akhlaq, Learning Strategies, Character Formation.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi pembelajaran Akidah Akhlak dalam membentuk karakter siswa di Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Azhar Barito Kuala serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor pendukung dan penghambat yang memengaruhi pelaksanaannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian lapangan dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung, wawancara dengan kepala madrasah, guru Akidah Akhlak, dan siswa, serta dokumentasi, yang selanjutnya dianalisis secara kualitatif dan melalui triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembentukan karakter didukung oleh keteladanan guru, pembiasaan, pemberian nasihat, motivasi, metode ceramah, diskusi kelompok, kegiatan tanya jawab, dan kegiatan keagamaan rutin. Karakter yang dikembangkan meliputi disiplin, kesopanan, tanggung jawab, dan religiusitas. Faktor pendukung meliputi kerja sama antara guru dan madrasah, lingkungan madrasah yang religius, dukungan orang tua, serta kegiatan keagamaan yang dilaksanakan secara rutin, sedangkan faktor penghambat meliputi keterbatasan kesadaran diri siswa, pengaruh lingkungan sosial eksternal, dan penggunaan media sosial yang berlebihan. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi kontekstual antara strategi pembelajaran, pembiasaan

keagamaan, keteladanan guru, dan faktor lingkungan dalam konteks spesifik MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala.

Kata Kunci: Akidah Akhlak, Strategi Pembelajaran, Pembentukan Karakter.

Introduction

Education is fundamentally concerned not only with the transmission of knowledge but also with the development of students as morally responsible human beings. In Islamic education, intellectual development is expected to proceed together with spiritual, emotional, and behavioral development.(Fahriah et al., 2026) Students therefore need learning experiences that enable them to understand values and translate those values into everyday conduct. Recent studies indicate that Islamic Religious Education has an important position in developing honesty, responsibility, empathy, discipline, and other moral qualities among students (Azzaky et al., 2024; Munawir et al., 2024). Character formation consequently represents an essential dimension of educational quality rather than an additional activity outside the learning process.

The development of students' character is particularly important during adolescence because students experience significant changes in identity, social relationships, emotional development, and moral reasoning. At the junior secondary level, students increasingly interact with peers and digital environments that can influence their attitudes and behavior.(Nurdi et al., 2026) Religious education can provide a normative framework that helps students distinguish constructive behavior from behavior that conflicts with Islamic values. Studies of Islamic education in Indonesia demonstrate that character development requires more than the delivery of religious concepts because students need opportunities to internalize and practice those concepts (Mubarak & Fauzi, 2024; Krishnawati et al., 2023). This condition places teachers in a strategic position in the process of moral development.

Islamic education emphasizes the unity between faith and conduct. Aqidah provides the foundation of belief, whereas akhlaq concerns the manifestation of belief through appropriate behavior toward Allah, other human beings, and the surrounding environment. Consequently, Aqidah Akhlaq learning should not stop at students' ability to recall definitions, religious concepts, or moral classifications. It should encourage students to develop consistent habits that demonstrate the values learned during instruction. Recent research similarly emphasizes that religious learning becomes more meaningful when religious knowledge is connected with students' everyday experiences and character development (Aldiansyah et al., 2024; Ningsih et al., 2025).

The significance of Aqidah Akhlaq becomes increasingly evident when schools seek to respond to contemporary moral challenges.(Hasnan et al., 2026) Students are exposed to diverse information through social media and digital communication, and these environments may provide both positive educational opportunities and negative behavioral influences. Research on Islamic Religious Education identifies social media influence, limited parental involvement, and disconnection between religious instruction and students' everyday realities as challenges to character formation (Azzaky et al., 2024; Mubarak & Fauzi, 2024). Therefore, schools need instructional strategies that allow religious values to become visible, practiced, reinforced, and evaluated within students' daily lives.

The teacher represents one of the most important elements in this process because students often learn moral behavior not only from explicit explanations but also from what they observe.(Nabriz et al., 2026) Teacher behavior can function as a practical representation of the values communicated during Aqidah Akhlaq lessons. Recent qualitative research has found that role modeling and habituation are central mechanisms through which Islamic education contributes to students' character formation (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Mukhtar et al., 2024). Thus, the credibility of Aqidah Akhlaq instruction is strengthened when teachers demonstrate consistency between religious messages and their own behavior.

Learning strategies are equally important because the same learning content may produce different outcomes depending on how it is delivered. A teacher who relies exclusively on lectures may provide students with conceptual information without necessarily creating opportunities for students to practice cooperation, responsibility, discipline, or respect. Active strategies such as discussion, collaborative learning, reflection, and contextual activities can involve students more directly in the learning process.(Hushin et al., 2025; Mohammed Abu Bakr et al., 2025) Research on cooperative learning indicates that structured group interaction can provide opportunities for students to practice social values while simultaneously developing academic understanding (Baehaqi, 2020; Agustiani, 2020).

Cooperative learning is particularly relevant to Aqidah Akhlaq because character values are inherently social and behavioral. When students work together, they need to listen to others, communicate ideas, accept differences, divide responsibilities, and complete shared tasks. These activities can transform abstract moral principles into concrete social experiences. Research has demonstrated that cooperative learning can support character development by encouraging participation, cooperation, responsibility, and respect for others (Baehaqi, 2020; Harianto et al., 2020). Consequently, collaborative activities can complement more conventional strategies such as lectures and question-and-answer sessions.

Nevertheless, character formation cannot depend exclusively on classroom activities. Students spend substantial time outside the classroom, and their behavior is shaped by family, peer groups, community environments, and digital media.(Mukhlis, Knudstad, et al., 2025; Yilmaz et al., 2025) A school may successfully teach discipline and politeness during formal instruction while students simultaneously receive contradictory messages outside school. Research on character education therefore emphasizes the importance of school-based, classroom-based, and community-based approaches working together (Krishnawati et al., 2023). Character formation is consequently better understood as an ecological process rather than as the responsibility of one subject or one teacher.

The school environment is an important component of this educational ecology. Rules, routines, interpersonal relationships, religious activities, and institutional expectations collectively communicate what the school considers appropriate behavior. When students repeatedly experience consistent expectations, values such as discipline and responsibility can become habitual. Research on Islamic education has identified the school environment and institutional culture as important components in strengthening students' religious character (Muhtarom et al., 2021; Maulana & Purba, 2024). Therefore, Aqidah Akhlaq learning needs to be connected with broader school practices.

Madrasahs have a distinctive educational context because religious knowledge and general knowledge are intentionally integrated. The mission of the madrasah is not merely to produce academically capable students but also to cultivate individuals who demonstrate faith, piety, noble character, and social responsibility. The profile of MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala reflects this orientation through its emphasis on Islamic values, religious activities, and moral conduct. The source study identifies the school's vision as developing religious students with noble character and balancing general and religious knowledge (Sapriah, 2026).

MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala provides a relevant context for examining the relationship between Aqidah Akhlaq instruction and character formation. The school was established in 1984 and has developed into a madrasah serving students in Pulau Sugara, Alalak District, Barito Kuala Regency. In the 2025/2026 academic year, the school had 212 students distributed across nine learning groups and was supported by teachers and educational personnel. Such a context provides an opportunity to examine how character-oriented religious learning is implemented in an actual madrasah setting rather than only at a conceptual level (Sapriah, 2026).

The preliminary observations documented in the source study indicate that Aqidah Akhlaq instruction at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala already involves several instructional strategies. Teachers use lectures, group discussions, question-and-answer activities, religious habituation, advice, and motivation. The school also habituates students to praying before learning, reciting the Qur'an, and performing congregational prayer. These practices suggest that character formation is integrated into both formal instruction and the broader religious culture of the school (Sapriah, 2026).

The character values identified in the research are discipline, politeness, responsibility, and religiosity. These values are not presented as isolated concepts but are cultivated through repeated activities and interactions. Students are expected to demonstrate respectful behavior toward teachers and peers, follow school regulations, participate in religious activities, and assume responsibility for their conduct. Such practices correspond with contemporary character education research emphasizing that moral values become meaningful when students repeatedly enact them in authentic contexts (Munawir et al., 2024; Mukhtar et al., 2024).

However, the implementation of character education is not free from obstacles. The source study identifies students' limited awareness, external social influences, and excessive social-media use as important challenges. Different student backgrounds also require teachers to employ flexible approaches rather than a single uniform strategy. Recent research confirms that Islamic education may face challenges related to student interest, limited instructional time, family involvement, and environmental influences (Mubarak & Fauzi, 2024; Azzaky et al., 2024). These challenges make strategic pedagogical planning particularly important.

Parental involvement represents another significant dimension of character formation. Students' behavior cannot be effectively shaped when school messages are disconnected from family expectations. The source study identifies parental support as one factor that assists students in maintaining positive behavior both at school and at home. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that character development becomes stronger when school and family environments communicate complementary expectations concerning students' moral development (Krishnawati et al., 2023; Azzaky et al., 2024).

The present study is therefore important because it examines Aqidah Akhlaq learning as a multidimensional process involving instructional techniques, teacher behavior, religious habituation, school culture, and environmental factors. Rather than treating character education simply as a learning outcome, the study examines how character is cultivated through everyday educational practices. This perspective is consistent with contemporary studies that emphasize the integration of classroom, school, and community dimensions in character education (Krishnawati et al., 2023; Ningsih et al., 2025). The study consequently contributes contextual evidence from a madrasah in Barito Kuala. The objective of this study is to analyze the strategies used in Aqidah Akhlaq learning to shape students' character at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala. The study also examines the forms of character developed through these strategies and identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing their implementation. Its novelty lies in connecting specific instructional practices with religious habituation, teacher role modeling, and the school environment in one contextual framework. The study therefore extends previous research that has frequently emphasized either teacher roles or general implementation of Islamic education without examining the interaction of these components in this particular madrasah context (Sapriah, 2026; Ningsih et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Aqidah Akhlaq Learning and Islamic Character Education

Aqidah Akhlaq is an important component of Islamic education because it connects theological understanding with moral practice. Aqidah concerns fundamental beliefs, while akhlaq concerns the behavioral manifestation of those beliefs. (Norhaliza et al., 2026; Yahya et al., 2025) In educational practice, the two dimensions should not be separated because religious belief is expected to influence students' decisions, attitudes, and interpersonal conduct. Contemporary Islamic education research similarly argues that religious education should facilitate the internalization of moral values rather than simply transmit religious information (Azzaky et al., 2024; Munawir et al., 2024).

Character education within Islamic education encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Students need to understand why honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, and empathy are important, but understanding alone does not guarantee practice. Character emerges through repeated decisions and behaviors that gradually become part of an individual's disposition. (Abdullah et al., 2025; Husna et al., 2026; Mukhlis, Yazid, et al., 2025) This explains why current research emphasizes the importance of integrating character values into learning objectives, teaching activities, school culture, and assessment practices (Hidayati et al., 2026; Krishnawati et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship indicates that Islamic Religious Education has a strong potential to support character development because religious values provide students with a moral framework. (Ghuni et al., 2026; Husna et al., 2025) However, the effectiveness of this potential depends on how teachers interpret and implement the curriculum. Religious concepts need to be contextualized so that students can recognize their relevance to contemporary problems and everyday relationships. Alhamuddin and Asikin (2025) emphasize that character values such as honesty,

responsibility, empathy, and discipline need to be connected with students' real-life experiences rather than remaining normative statements.

Aqidah Akhlaq learning should consequently facilitate internalization rather than memorization. Internalization occurs when students repeatedly encounter values, reflect on their meaning, practice them, receive feedback, and observe their application by significant adults. This process is consistent with findings from qualitative studies showing that role modeling and habituation are central mechanisms of character formation in Islamic education (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Munawir et al., 2024). The instructional process therefore needs to create meaningful opportunities for students to practice the values discussed in class.

Learning Strategies

Learning strategies refer to planned ways through which teachers organize instructional activities to achieve learning objectives. In character-oriented Islamic education, the strategy should accommodate both academic understanding and moral development. (Nurhidayah & Handayani, 2025) A strategy is therefore not limited to a teaching method but may include classroom interaction, learning environment, habituation, feedback, teacher modeling, and assessment. Recent research on active learning in madrasahs emphasizes the need for instructional strategies that actively involve students rather than treating them merely as recipients of information (Yuni et al., 2024).

Lecture-based instruction continues to have a place in Aqidah Akhlaq learning because teachers sometimes need to introduce concepts, principles, and religious arguments systematically. Nevertheless, lectures become more effective for character development when combined with interactive activities. Students need opportunities to discuss cases, ask questions, express opinions, and relate concepts to everyday situations. The source study demonstrates this combination through the use of lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and religious habituation (Sapriah, 2026).

Discussion is particularly useful because moral issues frequently involve interpretation, judgment, and consideration of consequences. Through discussion, students can examine situations from different perspectives while learning to communicate respectfully. Such activities can reinforce both cognitive understanding and social character. Research on cooperative learning shows that collaborative interaction can cultivate responsibility, participation, respect, and cooperation when activities are appropriately structured (Baehaqi, 2020; Agustiani, 2020).

Cooperative learning provides a particularly relevant framework for Aqidah Akhlaq because its procedures require students to practice social behavior. Students learn to share tasks, listen to peers, provide assistance, and accept collective responsibility. These behaviors correspond closely with Islamic teachings concerning mutual assistance and social responsibility. Research on collaborative-cooperative learning has also demonstrated its potential for improving students' character through structured social interaction (Harianto et al., 2020).

Teacher questioning is another useful strategy because it encourages students to think about the practical consequences of moral decisions. Instead of simply telling students what is right or wrong, teachers can present situations that require students to explain why a particular action reflects an Islamic value. This approach allows students to develop moral reasoning while connecting religious principles to practical

situations. Active-learning literature suggests that student participation is important for developing meaningful learning experiences (Yuni et al., 2024).

Role Modeling and Habituation

Role modeling is a central component of character education because students observe and imitate significant adults. Teachers who consistently demonstrate politeness, discipline, responsibility, and religious commitment make abstract values visible. In this sense, the teacher becomes part of the learning material itself. Recent research on Islamic education confirms that teacher modeling is an important mechanism through which students acquire moral behavior (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Mukhtar et al., 2024).

Habituation complements role modeling by providing repeated opportunities to perform desired behaviors. A student may understand the importance of discipline after a single explanation, but regular routines are needed for discipline to become habitual. Religious activities such as prayer, Qur'anic recitation, greetings, and respectful interactions can therefore function as character-building practices. Studies of character formation through Islamic education have reported the importance of habituation and routine religious activities in developing students' behavior (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Munawir et al., 2024).

Habituation also creates consistency between formal lessons and the school environment. If students learn about responsibility during Aqidah Akhlaq lessons and then experience responsibility through classroom duties, school regulations, and collaborative assignments, the value becomes reinforced. The source study identifies school routines such as prayer, Qur'anic recitation, cleanliness, respectful behavior, and compliance with school regulations as mechanisms for character development (Sapriah, 2026).

School Environment and Character Formation

Character education requires a supportive school environment because students interpret values partly through institutional practices. A school that consistently rewards responsibility and addresses violations fairly communicates that character has practical consequences. Conversely, inconsistent rules may weaken the credibility of character education. Research on Islamic character education has identified school-based character education as one of the principal dimensions of effective moral development (Krishnawati et al., 2023).

The school environment also provides opportunities for students to practice values beyond the classroom. Religious activities, student organizations, extracurricular programs, cleanliness routines, and interactions with teachers can all become sites of character formation. This means that character education should not be isolated within the Aqidah Akhlaq timetable. Rather, Aqidah Akhlaq can provide the conceptual foundation while the entire school environment provides opportunities for practice.

The relationship between school and family is equally important. Students encounter different expectations at home, school, and in peer groups, and these expectations may reinforce or contradict each other. Cooperation between teachers and parents can help establish consistent behavioral expectations. The source study specifically identifies parental support as a factor that assists students in implementing positive behavior both at home and at school (Sapriah, 2026).

Contemporary Challenges

Digital media constitutes an important contemporary challenge for character education. Social media can facilitate religious learning and positive communication, but excessive or uncontrolled use can also influence students' habits and interpersonal behavior. Islamic education therefore needs to develop students' capacity for responsible digital behavior rather than simply restricting technology. Recent studies identify social media influence as one factor that can complicate moral education among young people (Azzaky et al., 2024).

Another challenge is variation among students. Students enter madrasahs with different family backgrounds, experiences, levels of religious understanding, and behavioral patterns. A single pedagogical approach may therefore not produce the same response from every student. The source study emphasizes that teachers recognize differences in student character and background and consequently provide guidance according to individual needs (Sapriah, 2026).

Previous Studies

Previous studies provide evidence that Islamic education contributes to character development. Maulana and Purba (2024), for example, found that character formation through Islamic Religious Education can involve habituation and teacher role modeling. Their study is relevant because it demonstrates the importance of connecting formal religious learning with daily school practices. The present study extends this perspective by focusing specifically on Aqidah Akhlaq strategies in a madrasah context and by examining supporting and inhibiting factors.

Munawir et al. (2024) examined character development through Islamic education using observation, interviews, and documentation. Their findings emphasized character development, supporting and inhibiting factors, and possible solutions. The methodological similarity is important because the present research also employs qualitative field research. The difference lies primarily in the institutional context and the specific focus on Aqidah Akhlaq strategies at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala.

Krishnawati et al. (2023) identified three interconnected models of character education through Islamic Religious Education: classroom-based, school-based, and community-based character education. Their findings provide a useful conceptual framework for interpreting the present study because the observed practices at MTs Al Azhar involve classroom instruction, school routines, and parental or environmental influences. The present research provides a more localized illustration of how these dimensions interact within a specific madrasah.

Ningsih et al. (2025) examined Aqidah Akhlaq learning under the Merdeka Curriculum and highlighted the potential of interactive and experiential learning for character development. This study is relevant because contemporary madrasah learning increasingly emphasizes flexibility and meaningful student participation. The present research similarly identifies discussion and student participation as important elements of the learning process. The contextual distinction is that the present study focuses on MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala and is based on field observations, interviews, and documentation.

Aldiansyah et al. (2024) investigated the influence of Aqidah Akhlaq learning on student character at MTs Humaira Bojonggede Bogor. Their quantitative study provides evidence of the relationship between Aqidah Akhlaq learning and character development. The present study differs methodologically because it uses qualitative

field research to investigate the strategies and contextual processes through which character formation occurs. Thus, the two studies complement each other by approaching the relationship from different methodological perspectives.

Alhabsyi et al. (2025) investigated character education implementation in Aqidah Akhlaq learning at MTs Negeri 3 Bolaang Mongondow Timur using qualitative methods. Their focus on teachers, students, observation, interviews, documentation, and character formation demonstrates strong methodological relevance to the present research. The present study adds contextual evidence from a different geographical and institutional setting.

Wasyiah et al. (2026) recently examined strategies used by Aqidah Akhlaq teachers to develop character among junior secondary students. Their study demonstrates the continuing relevance of teacher strategies, observation, interviews, documentation, and qualitative analysis in this field. The present research similarly examines Aqidah Akhlaq teacher strategies but contributes evidence from MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala and specifically integrates classroom strategies with religious habituation and environmental factors.

The literature indicates a clear pattern: Islamic education and Aqidah Akhlaq can contribute to character development when values are integrated into teaching, modeling, habituation, school culture, and social relationships. However, there remains a need for contextual studies that document how these elements operate together in specific madrasahs. The present study addresses that need by examining MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala as a localized case. Its novelty lies in presenting an integrated description of instructional strategies and the supporting and inhibiting conditions surrounding their implementation.

Method

This study employed **field research with a descriptive qualitative approach**. Field research was selected because the research sought to understand directly how Aqidah Akhlaq learning strategies were implemented in the natural educational environment of MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on experiences, behaviors, interactions, and educational practices rather than numerical measurement. Contemporary qualitative studies of Islamic character education similarly employ observation, interviews, and documentation to understand character formation in authentic school contexts (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Munawir et al., 2024).

The research was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Azhar Barito Kuala, located on Jalan Karya Bersama, RT 06, Pulau Sugara Village, Alalak District, Barito Kuala Regency, South Kalimantan. The research subjects included the principal, the Aqidah Akhlaq teacher, and several students, while supporting information was obtained from relevant school documents. The object of the research was the strategy of Aqidah Akhlaq learning in forming students' character, including the strategies employed, forms of character formation, and supporting and inhibiting factors. This design corresponds with qualitative case-oriented studies of Islamic education that investigate educational practices through multiple sources of information (Krishnawati et al., 2023; Alhabsyi et al., 2025). The source thesis identifies the school as the research location and specifies the principal, teachers, students, and administrative personnel as relevant research subjects.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine the implementation of Aqidah Akhlaq learning, teacher activities, student behavior, religious routines, and classroom interactions. Interviews were conducted with the Aqidah Akhlaq teacher, principal, and students to obtain deeper information concerning instructional strategies and character development. Documentation was used to complement the primary data through school profiles, teacher and student information, lesson plans, regulations, photographs, and relevant educational documents. The use of multiple data-collection techniques is consistent with recent qualitative research on Islamic character education (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Munawir et al., 2024).

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The researcher organized information according to the research focus and compared information obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, allowing information from teachers, school leaders, and students to be compared. The research also included orientation, exploration, and member-checking stages to strengthen the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings. These procedures are compatible with recent qualitative studies of Islamic education that use triangulation and systematic qualitative analysis to interpret character-development processes (Munawir et al., 2024; Alhabsyi et al., 2025).

Results and Discussion

Research Results

The research findings demonstrate that Aqidah Akhlaq learning at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala is implemented through a combination of instructional and character-oriented strategies. The teacher uses lectures to explain religious concepts, group discussions to encourage participation, question-and-answer activities to check understanding, and religious habituation to translate learning into daily practice. The teacher also provides advice and motivation and demonstrates appropriate behavior in the school environment. These findings show that character formation is integrated into the instructional process rather than treated as a separate program (Sapriah, 2026).

The lecture strategy is primarily used to provide students with systematic explanations concerning Aqidah Akhlaq content. Through direct explanation, the teacher can introduce concepts and provide religious foundations before students engage in other activities. However, the findings indicate that lectures are not used in isolation. They are followed or complemented by discussion, questions, advice, motivation, and practical religious activities. This combination helps prevent the learning process from being restricted to memorization and creates opportunities for students to connect knowledge with conduct (Yuni et al., 2024; Ningsih et al., 2025).

Group discussion is another important strategy observed in the study. Students are provided with opportunities to discuss learning materials and express their opinions. Some students were observed to participate actively and demonstrate confidence in communicating their ideas. From a character perspective, discussion provides opportunities to practice respect for others' opinions, cooperation, responsibility, and communication. These findings correspond with research showing

that cooperative learning can support character development through structured student interaction (Baehaqi, 2020; Harianto et al., 2020).

Question-and-answer activities function as an interactive mechanism between teacher and students. Through questions, the teacher can identify students' understanding while students can clarify concepts that they do not yet understand. More importantly, questions can encourage students to reflect on how moral principles should be applied in daily situations. Such interaction strengthens the relationship between cognitive learning and moral reasoning. Active learning research supports the importance of student participation in creating meaningful learning experiences (Yuni et al., 2024).

Advice and motivation are also used as direct character-building mechanisms. The teacher encourages students to behave well, respect teachers and peers, maintain discipline, and accept responsibility. Advice provides students with explicit moral direction, while motivation encourages them to develop an internal willingness to practice positive behavior. The combination is particularly important because character formation involves both understanding appropriate behavior and developing commitment to perform it. Similar findings have been reported in Islamic education studies emphasizing teacher guidance and motivational support (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Mukhtar et al., 2024).

Teacher role modeling constitutes another major finding. The teacher does not merely explain Islamic moral values but also attempts to demonstrate appropriate behavior in everyday school interactions. This is important because students can observe whether the values presented during lessons correspond with the teacher's actual conduct. Character education becomes more credible when teachers embody the values they expect students to demonstrate. Recent research similarly identifies role modeling as a central element of character formation through Islamic education (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Munawir et al., 2024).

Religious habituation represents a particularly visible dimension of the character-building process. Students participate in activities such as reciting prayers before learning, Qur'anic recitation, and congregational prayer. These activities provide repeated opportunities to practice religious behavior in a structured environment. The purpose is not merely to complete religious routines but to cultivate consistency, discipline, and religious awareness. Similar findings have been reported in studies of Islamic education that identify religious habituation as an important mechanism for strengthening student character (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Krishnawati et al., 2023).

The character values observed in the research include discipline, politeness, responsibility, and religiosity. Discipline is cultivated through school routines, attendance expectations, classroom rules, and participation in religious activities. Politeness is expressed through respectful communication and interactions with teachers and peers. Responsibility is developed through compliance with school duties and expectations, while religiosity is strengthened through prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and other religious practices. These findings are consistent with contemporary Islamic character education research emphasizing discipline, responsibility, honesty, empathy, and religious commitment (Azzaky et al., 2024; Alhamuddin & Asikin, 2025).

The school's regulations also contribute to character formation. Students are expected to respect teachers, follow school schedules, maintain appropriate appearance, participate in school activities, and comply with institutional rules. Such

regulations provide a behavioral framework that complements classroom instruction. When rules are consistently communicated and reinforced, they can provide students with concrete examples of how abstract values such as discipline and responsibility should be practiced. This corresponds with the school-based dimension of character education identified by Krishnawati et al. (2023).

Students' responses indicate that religious activities and habituation help them become more disciplined and understand the importance of good behavior. This is significant because students themselves perceive a connection between repeated school activities and their behavioral development. Although the qualitative design does not allow the finding to be interpreted as a statistical causal effect, it provides evidence of students' perceptions concerning the usefulness of religious routines. Similar qualitative research has found that students can recognize the contribution of religious activities and teacher modeling to character formation (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Munawir et al., 2024).

Table 1. Summary of Aqidah Akhlaq Learning Strategies and Character Outcomes

Learning strategy	Implementation at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala	Character values developed	Main educational function
Lecturing	Teacher explains Aqidah Akhlaq concepts systematically	Religiosity, discipline	Building conceptual understanding
Group discussion	Students discuss materials and exchange opinions	Cooperation, responsibility, respect	Developing active participation
Question and answer	Teacher and students interact through questions and responses	Confidence, responsibility	Strengthening understanding and reflection
Advice	Teacher provides moral guidance and correction	Politeness, discipline, responsibility	Directing student behavior
Motivation	Teacher encourages positive behavior and learning participation	Responsibility, persistence	Strengthening internal motivation
Teacher role modeling	Teacher demonstrates appropriate conduct	Politeness, religiosity, discipline	Providing concrete behavioral examples

Learning strategy	Implementation at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala	Character values developed	Main educational function
Religious habituation	Prayer, Qur'anic recitation, congregational prayer	Religiosity, discipline	Developing consistent religious practice
School regulations	Students follow rules concerning time, behavior, dress, and activities	Discipline, responsibility	Establishing behavioral expectations
Parental support	Parents supervise and guide students outside school	Responsibility, discipline	Extending character education to home
School–teacher cooperation	Teachers and school authorities coordinate character-building activities	Responsibility, religiosity	Creating institutional consistency

The findings indicate that the instructional strategies implemented in Aqidah Akhlaq learning should be understood as an integrated pedagogical system rather than as isolated techniques. Lectures provide students with foundational conceptual knowledge, discussions facilitate social interaction and intellectual engagement, questioning encourages reflection, while advice and motivation provide ethical direction and reinforce students' commitment to desirable behaviors. At the same time, teacher modeling and habituation translate abstract moral and religious values into repeated behavioral experiences. The interaction among these strategies facilitates a gradual transition from understanding values cognitively to internalizing and practicing them in everyday life. Such an integrated approach is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing that character education should be embedded within instructional objectives, pedagogical practices, school culture, and students' lived experiences (Hidayati et al., 2026; Alhamuddin & Asikin, 2025).

Cooperative learning constitutes an important pedagogical mechanism through which character values can be experienced directly within the learning process. Group discussions provide students with opportunities to practice cooperation rather than merely receive theoretical explanations about its importance. Through collaborative activities, students are required to listen to their peers, exchange ideas, complete shared tasks, negotiate differences, and acknowledge alternative perspectives. These interactions position cooperative learning not only as an instructional approach for achieving academic objectives but also as a context for developing social and moral dispositions. The findings therefore reinforce previous research demonstrating that collaborative learning can contribute to character development by creating structured

opportunities for meaningful social interaction and shared responsibility (Baehaqi, 2020; Harianto et al., 2020).

Teacher modeling also occupies a central position in the formation of students' character because teachers function as behavioral references within the educational environment. Students can observe whether the values communicated through instruction are consistently reflected in the teacher's daily conduct. Demonstrations of respect, discipline, responsibility, and religious commitment provide students with concrete representations of abstract moral principles. Such modeling strengthens the educational message because students encounter values not only as curricular content but also as observable patterns of behavior. This finding supports the view that character education requires more than the transmission of moral concepts and must be accompanied by authentic examples demonstrated by educators in everyday interactions (Maulana & Purba, 2024; Mukhtar et al., 2024).

The formation of character is further reinforced through systematic habituation within the madrasah environment. Religious routines at MTs Al Azhar provide students with repeated opportunities to enact values associated with discipline, religiosity, and moral conduct. Activities such as prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and other religious practices establish recurring contexts in which students are encouraged to translate religious understanding into observable behavior. Repetition and consistency are particularly significant in character formation because moral dispositions develop through sustained practice rather than through occasional exposure to moral instruction. The findings consequently support contemporary Islamic education research that positions habituation as an important mechanism for connecting religious knowledge with behavioral practice (Munawir et al., 2024; Maulana & Purba, 2024).

Discipline emerges as a multidimensional character value that encompasses considerably more than punctuality or compliance with schedules. Within the context of MTs Al Azhar, discipline is reflected in students' adherence to school regulations, appropriate appearance, active participation in learning activities, completion of assigned responsibilities, and respect for institutional expectations. This broader conception positions discipline as a practical expression of both religious commitment and social responsibility. The development of such dispositions requires consistent reinforcement through everyday school practices so that disciplinary behavior becomes part of students' habitual conduct. This perspective corresponds with research on character-oriented Islamic education, which emphasizes that discipline is more effectively cultivated through sustained educational practices than through theoretical explanation alone (Azzaky et al., 2024; Alhamuddin & Asikin, 2025).

Politeness is likewise developed through the interaction between institutional expectations and exemplary teacher behavior. Students are encouraged to demonstrate respect toward teachers and peers, while teachers provide behavioral examples that illustrate how respectful communication and interpersonal conduct should be practiced. Within this environment, religious knowledge is connected directly to students' social behavior and interpersonal relationships. Politeness consequently functions as a practical manifestation of akhlaq rather than merely as compliance with a set of behavioral regulations. This interpretation is consistent with qualitative studies of Islamic Religious Education that identify politeness, honesty, responsibility, and discipline as important dimensions of students' character development (Mukhtar et al., 2024).

Responsibility develops through students' involvement in both individual and collective educational activities. Compliance with school regulations, participation in institutional programs, engagement in group discussions, and responsiveness to teacher guidance provide multiple contexts in which students are expected to demonstrate accountability. Cooperative learning is particularly relevant because it expands students' responsibility beyond the completion of individual assignments toward responsibility for collective learning outcomes. Students must contribute to group processes, fulfill their respective roles, and recognize the consequences of their participation for other members of the group. This finding is consistent with research indicating that structured cooperative learning can facilitate the development of responsibility and other social character dispositions through active participation and shared tasks (Baehaqi, 2020; Agustiani, 2020).

Religiosity is cultivated through the integration of formal Aqidah Akhlaq instruction with routine religious practices within the school environment. Classroom instruction provides students with conceptual and normative understanding of Islamic values, while daily religious activities create opportunities for these values to be enacted through observable practices. The interaction between cognitive understanding and behavioral practice enables religious values to become more closely associated with students' everyday experiences. Consequently, the development of religious character cannot be separated from the cultural and behavioral environment in which learning takes place. This finding is supported by research demonstrating that religious character becomes more effectively reinforced when Islamic instruction is accompanied by consistent school routines and a supportive religious culture (Muhtarom et al., 2021; Krishnawati et al., 2023).

Character formation at MTs Al Azhar is also supported by the interaction of several institutional and social factors. Collaboration between teachers and school administrators contributes to consistency in the implementation of character-oriented practices, while the religious school environment reinforces the values introduced through classroom instruction. Regular religious activities provide students with recurring opportunities to practice these values, and parental involvement extends character supervision beyond the school setting. These interconnected factors indicate that character development cannot be attributed to a single instructional intervention but emerges through the interaction of multiple educational environments. Such an interpretation corresponds with the classroom-, school-, and community-based framework of character education, which emphasizes the importance of coordinated influences across different educational contexts (Krishnawati et al., 2023).

The implementation of character education is simultaneously influenced by several contextual constraints. Students' varying levels of awareness, external peer environments, and extensive engagement with social media may create behavioral influences that do not always correspond with the values promoted by the madrasah. These circumstances demonstrate that students encounter diverse sources of information, social interaction, and behavioral models beyond the formal educational environment. Consequently, the internalization of character values requires continuous reinforcement so that students are able to maintain the values acquired at school when interacting with external environments. Recent research similarly identifies social media, student interest, family involvement, and environmental influences as significant

challenges in the implementation of Islamic character education (Azzaky et al., 2024; Mubarak & Fauzi, 2024).

Differences in students' backgrounds and levels of character development further indicate the need for adaptive pedagogical approaches. The findings from the source research show that the Aqidah Akhlaq teacher recognizes variations among students and provides guidance and direction according to their respective needs. Such an approach suggests that character education cannot be implemented effectively through an entirely uniform instructional pattern because students may differ in their levels of understanding, behavioral tendencies, family backgrounds, and responsiveness to guidance. Differentiated attention enables teachers to address students' particular needs while maintaining common institutional expectations concerning moral and religious conduct. This perspective is compatible with recent curriculum research emphasizing contextual, student-centered, and adaptive approaches to facilitate the internalization of character values (Ningsih et al., 2025; Hidayati et al., 2026).

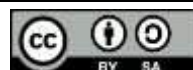
Taken together, the findings support an integrated conceptual model of Aqidah Akhlaq-based character formation at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala. The process may be represented as religious knowledge → interactive learning → teacher modeling → habituation → behavioral reinforcement → character development. This sequence illustrates that character formation is not produced by instructional content alone but develops through continuous interaction among knowledge, pedagogy, teacher behavior, student participation, habituated practices, and the broader school environment. Religious knowledge provides the cognitive foundation, interactive learning creates opportunities for students to engage with values, teacher modeling provides concrete behavioral references, and habituation facilitates repeated practice. Behavioral reinforcement then strengthens the consistency of these practices until they become increasingly integrated into students' character. This conceptualization is consistent with contemporary character education research emphasizing the systematic integration of values across curriculum, pedagogy, school culture, and students' everyday educational experiences (Krishnawati et al., 2023; Hidayati et al., 2026). The findings also reinforce the proposition that Aqidah Akhlaq learning should not be evaluated exclusively through cognitive achievement. A student may demonstrate strong knowledge of moral concepts while still requiring support in translating that knowledge into conduct. Therefore, assessment and teacher observation should consider behavioral indicators such as discipline, politeness, responsibility, cooperation, and religious practice. Contemporary character-based Islamic education research similarly recommends integrating values into learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment mechanisms (Hidayati et al., 2026).

The contextual significance of the study lies in its location at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala. The findings demonstrate how general principles of Islamic character education operate within a specific madrasah environment. The school's religious routines, regulations, teacher cooperation, and family involvement create an educational ecosystem that supports character formation. At the same time, environmental and digital challenges demonstrate that the school cannot control all influences affecting students. This contextual interaction constitutes an important contribution of the study. The novelty of this research therefore does not consist simply of identifying that Aqidah Akhlaq contributes to character formation. Previous studies have already demonstrated that relationship through qualitative and

quantitative approaches (Aldiansyah et al., 2024; Alhabsyi et al., 2025). The contribution of the present study is the identification of an integrated strategy involving lectures, group discussion, questioning, advice, motivation, teacher modeling, and religious habituation alongside school and parental support. The study also documents how external environmental influences and social-media use complicate the implementation of character education.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Aqidah Akhlaq learning at MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala employs a combination of lectures, group discussions, question-and-answer activities, advice, motivation, teacher role modeling, and religious habituation. These strategies are directed not only toward students' understanding of religious concepts but also toward the development of discipline, politeness, responsibility, and religiosity. Religious activities such as prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and congregational prayer strengthen the connection between classroom learning and everyday behavior. The findings indicate that character formation is most meaningful when instructional strategies are integrated with teacher modeling and continuous school routines. The study also concludes that character formation is supported by cooperation among teachers and school authorities, a supportive religious environment, routine religious activities, and parental involvement. In contrast, limited student awareness, external peer influences, and excessive social-media use constitute important challenges. The central implication is that Aqidah Akhlaq learning should be understood as an integrated character-formation process involving knowledge, interaction, example, habituation, and environmental reinforcement. The contextual novelty of this study is its identification of this integrated process within MTs Al Azhar Barito Kuala, providing a practical reference for developing character-oriented Aqidah Akhlaq learning in comparable madrasah settings.



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