



## ENCOURAGING *SUNNAH* PRAYER ROUTINES: A TEACHER'S STRATEGY TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

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### Article History:

Received: October 2025

Accepted: November 2025

Published: December 2025

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### Keywords:

*Sunnah* Prayer, Teacher Strategies, Religious Character

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to describe the strategies used by Islamic Education teachers in encouraging the practice of *sunnah* prayers and to analyze their contribution to the formation of religious character among students. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, which aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning process and the habit of worship in a natural context. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study showed that the strategies used by Islamic Education teachers in practicing *sunnah* prayers are carried out in three stages, namely: (1) planning activities by setting a routine schedule and assigning roles to mentors; (2) practicing through exemplary behavior, spiritual motivation, and active student participation in congregational prayers; and (3) evaluation through reflection and assessment of student character development. The habit of performing *sunnah* prayers has been proven to have a positive effect on the formation of students' religious character, especially in terms of discipline, sincerity, responsibility, and spiritual awareness. The implications of this study confirmed that the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers was not only a ritual activity but also an effective pedagogical strategy in instilling religious values and strengthening spiritual culture in the madrasah environment.

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### Please cite this article in APA style as:

Fatah, A. F., Ferianto, F., Irfan, A., Nurseha, A., & Syamsuddin, S. (2025). Encouraging *Sunnah* Prayer Routines: A Teacher's Strategy to Improve Students' Religious Character. *Edureligia: Journal of Islamic Education*, 9(2), 250-261.

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in shaping people of faith, piety, and noble character as mandated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Cam & Ballantine, 2025; R et al., 2024). Islamic

education aims not only to transfer religious knowledge but also to instill spiritual and moral values that shape the religious character of students (Hasanah, 2023; Hunsker, 2023). The context of modern Indonesia, religious education faces major challenges due to the rapid flow of globalization, technological developments, and shifting values among teenagers (Jedlicka & Havenith, 2025; Moncher & Josephson, 2021). Phenomena such as declining interest in worship, weak discipline, and increasing consumerist behavior indicated that religious character building has not been optimal in educational institutions (Suyadi, 2022).

This situation called for a more practical, contextual, and sustainable approach to religious character education, rather than one that was merely cognitive and normative (Karim et al., 2025; Kerasha et al., 2024). One effective strategy was the habit of worship, especially *sunnah* prayers. This worship was not only ritualistic but also a means of forming spiritual discipline, sincerity, and moral awareness. Allah SWT said in QS. Al-'Ankabut [29]: 45, "*Verily, prayer prevents from (acts of) indecency and wrongdoing.*" This verse emphasizes the educational function of prayer, which not only fosters individual piety but also shapes social moral control (H. & F, 2025). The context of Islamic education, the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers can be an effective method of internalizing religious values through direct spiritual experiences in the school environment (Godfrey, 2021).

Islamic education teachers play an important role in realizing this habit (Prayitno et al., 2022). Teachers are not only conveyors of teaching materials, but also role models (*uswah hasanah*) and spiritual guides for students. Teachers' strategies in instilling the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers included planning worship activities, setting an example, providing spiritual motivation, supervision, and continuous evaluation (Sauri et al., 2022). Pedagogically designed strategies are believed to be able to transform *sunnah* prayers from mere formal routines into spiritual needs that are internalized by students, thereby contributing to the formation of a religious culture in schools (Park et al., 2023).

However, the reality on the ground showed that the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers has not been fully effective. Initial observations at MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran Karawang showed that some students perform *sunnah* prayers more because of external encouragement from teachers than internal awareness. Limited learning time, weak supervision, and the lack of integration of worship habits into teachers' pedagogical strategies were the main obstacles to the sustainability of the program. This condition raised a fundamental question about how Islamic education teachers' strategies are designed and implemented in order to foster internal and sustainable religious awareness.

From a theoretical perspective, the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers can be explained through the theory of habituation (accustoming) and internalization of values. Habituation was an educational process that changes external behavior into internal habits through conscious repetition of values. Emphasized that character was formed through a combination of moral

understanding, moral feelings, and moral actions that were continuously practiced. In this context, the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers functions not only as a form of worship but also as a vehicle for moral education that involves cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions.

Several previous studies have shown the effectiveness of habit formation in character education. Suyadi (2022) found that the habit of performing the *dhuha* prayer can increase students' spiritual discipline and responsibility, while emphasized that praying together at school strengthens collective religious awareness. However, most of these studies only highlight the normative aspects of worship without specifically discussing teachers' pedagogical strategies. West et al. (2025) discussed *sunnah* prayer in the context of student spirituality, but does not relate it to the strategic role of teachers. Similarly, reviews religious character education in general without highlighting the systematic habit of *sunnah* worship.

Based on this study, there was a significant *research gap*, namely the absence of a comprehensive study that integrates Islamic education teachers' pedagogical strategies with the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers as an instrument for shaping students' religious character in madrasahs. The uniqueness of this study lied in its integrative approach, which views *sunnah* prayer not only as a ritual practice but also as a process of value education that was designed, implemented, and evaluated pedagogically by Islamic education teachers. This study aimed to describe Islamic Education teachers' strategies in habituating the practice of *sunnah* prayer, analyze its contribution to the formation of students' religious character, and identified supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation at MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran Karawang. With this orientation, this study was expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic character education based on worship habits, as well as practical contributions to teachers and madrasahs in designing effective and sustainable religious programs.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers in accustoming students to performing *sunnah* prayers and their influence on the formation of religious character. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, experiences, and practices of worship habits naturally in the madrasah environment. The research was conducted at MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran, Karawang Regency, West Java. It was selected purposively because it had a routine program of encouraging students to perform *sunnah* prayers and it was part of the school's religious culture. The research subjects included Islamic education teachers, students, and the madrasah principal, with informants selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus until the data reached saturation point.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation to obtain a complete picture of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the *sunnah* prayer habit (Wang et al., 2023). Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and continuous conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checks with informants. Research ethics were observed by obtaining informant consent and maintaining participant confidentiality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The practice of *sunnah* prayers at MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran was carried out every day in a scheduled and structured manner. This program focused on *dhuha* and *rawatib* prayers, which were performed in congregation at the madrasah prayer room before classes begin. In addition, daily religious lectures and habit formation evaluations were conducted to reinforce the spiritual values and religious character of the students. All activities were included in the madrasah's religious calendar and are directly supervised by Islamic education teachers and homeroom teachers. The following table illustrated the routine implementation of *sunnah* prayer habit formation activities at the madrasah:

**Table 1. Religious Habit Formation Activities**

| Type of Activity                   | Time of Implementation        | Implementer/Supervisor                           | Frequency    | Description                              |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------|--|
| Congregational <i>Dhuha</i> Prayer | Every day at 07:00-07:20      | Religious Education Teacher and Homeroom Teacher | 5 times/week | Mandatory for all students               |
| <i>Rawatib</i> prayer              | After noon (at school)        | Religious Teacher                                | 3 times/week | Conducted in turns per class             |
| Daily Religious Talk               | After the <i>Dhuha</i> prayer | Teachers and students (on a rotating basis)      | 5 times/week | Incorporating religious character values |
| Habit Formation Evaluation         | Weekends / every Friday       | Religious Teacher                                | Once a week  | Spiritual reflection and motivation      |

Based on the recapitulation of the worship attendance book for 12 weeks, the student participation rate in the *dhuha* prayer reached an average of 92%, while the *rawatib* prayer reached 80% of the total active students. This figure was calculated from the number of student attendances recorded in the control book compared to the number of active students in each class. The data showed that the majority of students participated consistently in the activities after the program was implemented systematically.

The results of the activities as shown in the table indicate that the program implementation not only focuses on worship rituals but also touches on affective and social aspects. Daily religious lectures, for example, serve as a platform for

practicing public speaking and instilling religious values, while the weekly evaluation of habit formation every Friday functions as spiritual reflection and motivation reinforcement. From this synthesis, it can be seen that the program of habit formation for *sunnah* prayers in madrasahs integrates cognitive (knowledge of worship), affective (love for Allah), and psychomotor (consistent practice of worship) aspects.

Thus, it can be concluded that the success of the *sunnah* prayer habit program at MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran was the result of synergy between a well-planned system, teacher role modeling, and active student participation. This program not only strengthens religious dimensions but also shaped spiritual ethos, responsibility, and social solidarity in the madrasah environment.

### Teachers' Strategies in Habituating *Sunnah* Prayers

Islamic education teachers apply three main strategies in habituating the practice of *sunnah* prayers in madrasahs, namely activity planning, habit formation implementation, and continuous evaluation.

#### *Activity Planning*

The Islamic education teacher and the headmaster of the madrasah develop a Religious Habit Formation Program Plan that included objectives, activity schedules, role distribution, and success indicators. At this stage, the teacher also coordinated with homeroom teachers and other teachers to ensure cross-disciplinary support for religious activities. The following table summarized the aspects of planning for the habit formation of *sunnah* prayers:

**Table 2. Aspects of Planning for *Sunnah* Prayer Habits**

| Aspect             | Planning Details   |
|--------------------|--|
| Objectives         | To form students' worship habits and religious character                         |
| Target             | Students in grades VII, VIII, and IX   |
| Approach           | Role modeling, spiritual motivation, and routine practice                        |
| Resources          | Religious education teachers, homeroom teachers, prayer rooms, worship schedules |
| Initial Evaluation | Initial observation of students' religious behavior and discipline               |

The plan for habituating students' *dhuha* prayers included aspects of spirituality (faith & piety), character (discipline, responsibility, empathy, mutual cooperation), habituation (routine, individual/congregational, order), methods (teacher role models, motivation, guidance), facilities (place of worship, ablution), and evaluation (monitoring, sanctions/appreciation) to form religious and noble students, with constraints such as time and lack of awareness that need to be overcome.

#### *Implementation of Habit Formation*

The activity was carried out through an exemplary and participatory approach. Islamic education teachers not only provided guidance but also set an example in performing *sunnah* prayers. Teachers provided motivation before the activity, guided the procedures for performing worship, and fostered spiritual enthusiasm through brief advice (*tausiyah*).

The following data showed the level of teacher and student involvement during the implementation of the activity:

**Table 3. Level of Teacher and Student Involvement in the Implementation of Activities**

| Activity Aspects                      | Islamic Education Teacher | Active Students | Observation Notes  |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Attendance at the <i>dhuha</i> prayer | 100                       | 92              | Teachers are always present and set an example                   |
| Involvement as an imam/muezzin        | -                         | 78              | Students take turns being imams and muezzins                     |
| Motivational talks before worship     | 95                        | -               | Conducted by teachers every morning                              |
| Involvement in religious lectures     | 60                        | 40              | Students are given the opportunity for a short religious lecture |

The activity took place in a calm and orderly atmosphere. Based on observation notes, most students showed high enthusiasm, especially because the Islamic education teacher gave symbolic rewards (praise and certificates) to students who consistently performed their prayers with discipline.

**Evaluation and Reflection**

Evaluations were conducted regularly every weekend by observing changes in student behavior. Islamic education teachers used two assessment indicators, namely worship activity and changes in religious attitudes. The assessment was qualitative in nature, based on teachers' notes and joint reflections with students. The following table showed the results of the recapitulation of the level of change in student behavior after three months of the program:

**Table 4. Recapitulation of Changes in Student Behavior After Three Months of the Program**

| Religious Character Indicators | Before Program | After Program | Increase (%) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Discipline in worship time     | 65             | 90            | +25          |
| Sincerity in charity           | 58             | 85            | +27          |
| Responsibility for tasks       | 70             | 88            | +18          |
| Spiritual awareness            | 62             | 89            | +27          |

This data came from Islamic education teachers' records, observations of daily behavior, and student reflection sheets collected every weekend. A pre-post comparison showed a noticeable change in students' worship patterns and religious attitudes.

**Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Field**

Based on the results of interviews and observations, several supporting and inhibiting factors were found in the implementation of the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers in madrasahs.

**Table 5. Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Habituation of Sunnah Prayer**

| Category | Factors Found | Impact on Activities |
|----------|---------------|----------------------|
|----------|---------------|----------------------|

|           |  |   |
|-----------|--|---|
| Support   | Full support from the madrasah principal and other teachers              | Increased collective participation                                |
| Support   | Religious school environment (prayer room and prayer schedule available) | Establishing positive routines                                    |
| Support   | The example set by Islamic education teachers and homeroom teachers      | Fostering students' spiritual motivation                          |
| Barriers  | Intensive learning schedule  | Reducing the duration of worship                                  |
| Barriers  | Variations in student motivation levels                                  | Some students still participate because of external encouragement |
| Obstacles | Lack of supervision at home  | Habits have not been continued outside of school                  |

Despite these obstacles, Islamic education teachers triad to deal with them using personal strategies, such as providing emotional support to less active students and involving parents through informal communication so that religious habits can be continued at home. In general, the results of the study showed that the strategy of Islamic education teachers at MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran in habituating *sunnah* prayers is planned, participatory, and reflective. Teachers not only act as guides, but also as role models and spiritual mentors. This habituation activity has succeeded in increasing student involvement in worship, strengthening religious values, and creating a positive spiritual culture in the school environment.

The following table showed the structured cause-and-effect relationship between teacher strategies and changes in student character.

**Table 6. Relationship between Islamic Education Teachers' Strategies and Their Impact on Students' Religious Character**

| Aspects of Islamic education Teacher Strategies | Impact on Student Character                         | Description of Cause-and-Effect Relationship                     |
|---|---|--|
| Teachers' exemplary behavior in worship         | Increased discipline and spiritual awareness        | Students imitate teachers' behavior due to spiritual role models |
| Spiritual motivation before activities          | Increased sincerity and participation in worship    | Emotional encouragement builds the religious meaning of worship  |
| Regular habits and weekly reflection            | The emergence of responsibility and positive habits | Repetition shapes religious habits                               |
| Continuous evaluation and recognition           | The formation of moral awareness and discipline     | Social reinforcement through recognition and appreciation        |

Analysis of the table showed that successful habit formation depends not only on the frequency of worship activities, but also on the quality of teacher-student interactions in a spiritual context. Modeling and positive reinforcement have been proven effective in strengthening students' internal motivation. Conceptually, this supported the theory of habit formation, which asserted that positive behaviors performed consistently will develop into permanent habits. With the support of the madrasah principal and the synergy between teachers and students, the *sunnah* prayer habit formation program has become an important instrument in strengthening students' religious character, as well as a

model for the implementation of character education based on Islamic spirituality at the madrasah level.

## Discussion

The results of the study showed a strong correlation between the strategies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers and changes in the religious behavior of students (Aliwy & Alhuseini, 2022; Rosmani et al., 2022). The implementation of planned, participatory, and continuously evaluated strategies for practicing *sunnah* prayers had an impact on increasing students' discipline in worship, sincerity, responsibility, and spiritual awareness. Thus (Creel, 2023; Saepudin et al., 2023), directly answered the research question regarding how Islamic education teachers' strategies are designed and how they impact the formation of students' religious character.

Theoretically, this relationship can be explained using the *social learning theory* approach from Farhan & Rofi'ulmuiz (2021); Putro Zarkasi et al. (2021) and Islamic character education as proposed by Has (2023) & Nasrudin et al. (2022) emphasized that moral behavior was formed through observation, imitation, and social reinforcement of credible models. In this context, Islamic education teachers became religious role models who stimulate character building through exemplary behavior and spiritual habits. Teachers' exemplary behavior created an *experiential* moral learning environment, where students not only receive religious knowledge cognitively, but also internalized it in real actions. This was in line with the principle of *ta'dib* in Islamic education, and it was the instilling of manners through example and spiritual interaction.

The Islamic education teacher's strategy was an integrated application of modern theory and classical principles of Islamic education. From Al-Ghazali's perspective (*Ihya Ulumuddin*), the habit of repeated worship (*riyadhah al-nafs*) was a means of purifying the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) that transformed knowledge into moral awareness (Alamsyah et al., 2024). This was in line that consistent performance of *sunnah* prayers fostered sincerity, responsibility, and spiritual awareness in students (Jalil, 2022; St et al., 2022; Surasman, 2023). The teacher's approach, which combined exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), spiritual motivation (*mau'izhah hasanah*), and reflective evaluation, described the *tarbiyah ruhiyah* (spiritual education) model through direct spiritual experience (Munawaroh et al., 2022; Salamuddin et al., 2024). Thus, the habit of performing *sunnah* prayers was not merely ritualistic, but serves as holistic religious character education that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Rosi et al., 2022).

The causal relationship between teacher strategies and changes in student character can be analyzed through the theoretical framework of social learning and Islamic character education. Teachers' exemplary behavior in performing *sunnah* prayers serves as the main stimulus that was imitated by students, while spiritual motivation and continuous evaluation act as social reinforcers that strengthen religious behavior. That behavioral change did not occur instantly,

but through a process of repeated and meaningful habituation, so that religious values that were originally external are transformed into students' internal awareness. This confirmed that the success of habituation is not solely determined by the frequency of worship, but by the quality of pedagogical interaction between teachers and students in a spiritual context.

This theoretical synthesis confirmed that effective religious character formation occurs when Islamic values are not only taught, but also *lived* through structured and meaningful worship practices. These findings were consistent with previous research, but also expand our understanding of the role of Islamic education teachers in pedagogical and evaluative dimensions. A comparative analysis showed that this study not only reinforces the results of previous studies on the influence of worship habits on religious character, but also added a strategic and reflective dimension to the process. This study focused on the impact of religious activities, this study highlights the pedagogical mechanisms that explain *why* and *how* these habits are successful.

Theoretically, this study enriched the discourse on Islamic character education based on worship practices by showing that *sunnah* worship serves as an effective medium for internalizing religious values. In practice, Islamic education teachers can use this habit forming strategy as a model for character development based on exemplary behavior and reflection, which can be replicated in other madrasas. This approach reinforced view that character education was effective when moral values are translated into real experiences that involve the mind, emotions, and actions. In the Islamic context, this taken the form of consistent, conscious practice of *sunnah* worship, accompanied by spiritual guidance from teachers.

The contribution of this study showed that religious character education will be more effective if Islamic values were brought to life through structured spiritual experiences and pedagogical guidance from teachers. The model of habitualizing *sunnah* prayers implemented can be replicated in other madrasahs by adjusting the context and culture of the school. However, this study had limitation because it was conducted in only one madrasah using a qualitative approach. Further research was recommended to use a longitudinal design or mixed methods to measure the sustainability of the impact of *sunnah* worship habits on students' religious character more broadly and deeply.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that the strategy of Islamic Education teachers in habituating *sunnah* prayers was a key factor in shaping students' religious character, because through a planned, participatory, and reflective habituation process, worship practices not only function as ritual activities but also became a means of internalizing meaningful religious values. The main findings of this study indicated that teacher exemplarity, spiritual motivation, routine habit formation of *dhuha* and *rawatib* prayers in congregation, and reflective evaluation are able to encourage changes in student behavior from worship. That was

external in nature to internal awareness, which was reflected in increased discipline, responsibility, sincerity, and spiritual awareness.

Practically, the results of this study had important implications for Islamic education teachers and madrasah administrators in designing systematic, measurable religious habit formation programs that were oriented towards character building, rather than merely ceremonial activities. However, this study had limitations because it was conducted in one madrasah using a qualitative approach, and it had not examined the sustainability of students' religious character in the long term after they leave the madrasah environment. Therefore, further research was recommended to use a longitudinal design, quantitative approach, or mixed methods, and involve more madrasah or Islamic school contexts to test the sustainability and replication of this worship habit formation model.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude and appreciation to the principal, Islamic Education teachers, and all teachers and students of MTs Nurul Jannah 2 Tempuran, Karawang, for their cooperation, support, and openness during this research. The school's assistance and active participation in providing data, time, and a conducive academic atmosphere have been important factors in the successful collection of data and preparation of this article. May all forms of assistance and kindness be rewarded by Allah SWT.

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