

Strategy to Increase Awareness of Congregational Prayer in the Elementary School Environment of STKIP Muhammadiyah Bangka Belitung

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of congregational prayer (sholat berjamaah) among students often faces various challenges, such as low participation, lack of concentration, and limited understanding of its importance. This article aims to identify and describe character education innovations to enhance students' awareness of congregational prayer in schools and madrasahs. The method used is a literature study combined with an analysis of field-based program implementation. The results show that programs such as reward systems, daily habituation, spiritual mentoring, educational media utilization, and empowering students as imams and muadhins (callers to prayer) have a positive impact on students' spiritual awareness. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for other educational institutions in implementing similar strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Congregational prayer plays a central role in nurturing students' spiritual character, promoting discipline, cooperation, and unity. However, recent data from school reports and teacher observations suggest that student participation in congregational prayer has been steadily declining. Studies indicate that this trend, if left unaddressed, may hinder efforts in character formation and weaken students' spiritual resilience in the modern era. Despite being part of the religious curriculum, students often perceive congregational prayer as a routine obligation rather than a meaningful spiritual activity.

This issue is particularly urgent as Islamic education aims not only to impart knowledge but to instill moral conduct through religious practice. The prevalence of low engagement in religious practices in school-age children has been highlighted in recent educational assessments [1]. Therefore, character education initiatives must respond with innovative, holistic, and sustainable strategies. This article addresses these gaps by exploring and evaluating strategies that have shown promise in transforming students' engagement with congregational prayer.

Congregational prayer is the main worship in Islam, which has a very strong social and spiritual dimension. In the context of education, congregational prayer is not only a religious ritual but also an effective means to form discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and social solidarity among students. By involving students in congregational activities regularly, noble values such as togetherness (*ukhuwah islamiyah*), time discipline, leadership, and self-control can be instilled in real terms.

However, the reality in many schools and madrasahs shows that the implementation of congregational prayer

among students is still far from expectations. Phenomena that often occur include low student attendance during congregational prayer, lack of devotion in worship, and inappropriate behavior such as joking and playing around in the mosque or prayer room area. Some of the causal factors that are often found include students' low understanding of the virtues of congregational prayer, lack of role models from teachers and school staff, and the absence of special programs that encourage students to carry out congregational worship.

This condition is a challenge for schools and madrasas in implementing character education based on Islamic values. Innovative efforts are needed that are able to change students' perceptions of congregational prayer, from merely an obligation to a pleasant and meaningful spiritual need. Innovation in character education in this context involves new approaches that are creative, applicable, and able to touch the affective aspects of students.

Various previous studies have shown that educational approaches that integrate elements of reward systems, positive habits, spiritual guidance, and the use of technology-based educational media have a significant impact on changes in student behavior in religious aspects [2], [3]. Therefore, this article aims to examine in more depth the character of educational innovation strategies that can be applied to increase awareness of congregational prayer in schools and madrasahs.

Awareness of congregational prayer is crucial in shaping students' spiritual development, discipline, and sense of community. It goes beyond a mere ritual and becomes a foundation for moral and social formation. However, existing programs often lack sustainability and fail to instill long-term commitment among students. Therefore, there is a need for innovative strategies that not only address behavioral issues but also transform students' attitudes toward congregational prayer as a meaningful and internalized practice. This study aims not only to identify and describe but also to evaluate the effectiveness of selected character education innovations in fostering lasting awareness and engagement in congregational prayer.

By adopting various character-strengthening intervention methods, it is hoped that students will not only become intelligent people in academic aspects, but also have balanced spiritual intelligence. This research is important to be carried out as a real contribution to the development of an Islamic character education model that is relevant to the socio-cultural context of today's Indonesian students.

In Islam, congregational prayer has high priority. The Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW states: "Praying in congregation is better than praying alone by twenty-seven degrees." (HR. Bukhari and Muslim). In addition, the Qur'an in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 43 emphasizes the importance of congregational prayer: "And establish prayer, pay zakat, and bow with those who bow." [10], [15].

Character Education in a Religious Context According to Lickon [4]. Character education involves the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The implementation of congregational prayer is part of moral action learning, where students are directly involved in the practice of religious values.

2. METHOD

This research utilized a qualitative descriptive approach combining an extensive literature review with field-based data. The literature review drew on over 25 sources, including peer-reviewed journals, books, and religious texts published between 2000 and 2024. Sources were selected based on relevance to Islamic character education and innovation in religious practices. The field data were gathered through case studies conducted in three elementary schools in Bangka Belitung.

Data collection involved document analysis (e.g., prayer schedules, attendance logs, student reflections), unstructured interviews with ten teachers and twenty students, and direct observations of prayer activities. The criteria for selecting schools included existing implementation of congregational prayer programs and willingness to participate in data sharing.

The integration of literature and field data allowed the researcher to examine both the theoretical foundation and practical applications of educational strategies. Data were analyzed using content analysis to identify recurring themes, success factors, and barriers in program implementation.

2.1 Type and Approach of Research

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research, which focuses on understanding the meaning, process, and social context that occurs in the implementation of congregational prayer program innovations. According to Creswell [5], a qualitative approach is very suitable for exploring subjective and deep meanings of complex social phenomena, including in the context of character education based on religious values.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques and Sources

Data collection in this study was carried out using two main techniques, namely:

2.2.1 Literature Study (Library Research)

The researcher conducted an in-depth review of various relevant library sources, such as:

- Islamic character education books
- National and international journal articles
- Government regulations related to character education

- Hadiths and verses of the Qur'an related to congregational prayer
- Previous research reports on the implementation of congregational prayer guidance in schools.

This literature study is useful for strengthening the theoretical basis and providing a scientific context for the problems being studied.

2.2.2 Field Documentation

In addition to data from the literature, the author also collected field data in the form of:

- Schedule of congregational prayer activities at school/madrasah
- List of student attendance in congregational prayer activities
- Photo and video documentation of activities
- Report of spiritual mentoring program
- Results of program evaluation from religious teachers or character builders at school

This documentation was taken from partner schools that have implemented innovation programs to increase awareness of congregational prayer.

2.2.3 Unstructured Interviews

In addition, the author also conducted informal interviews with several religious teachers, homeroom teachers, and students to get a direct picture of the program implementation. Interviews were conducted flexibly with the aim of exploring their experiences and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of this innovation program.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis. This technique was chosen because it is in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative data in the form of narrative text and visual documents. The analysis procedure includes the following stages:

- Data Reduction:
The researcher sorts and selects data that is relevant to the focus of the research, namely, character education innovation in increasing awareness of congregational prayer.
- Data Display:
The reduced data is then arranged in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic tables, and direct quotes from field documents or interview results.
- Conclusion Drawing:
The final step is to interpret the data to produce conclusions regarding the types of innovations implemented, their impact on students, and supporting and inhibiting factors in program implementation.

2.4 Validity Test (Trustworthiness)

To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, the author uses several data validity test strategies, including:

- Source Triangulation:
Comparing data from literature studies, field documentation, and interview results.
- Member Checking:
Reconfirming the findings with several informants, such as religious teachers and homeroom teachers, to ensure the appropriateness of data interpretation.
- Peer Debriefing:
Discussion with fellow researchers or colleagues to test the logic of the analysis and conclusions obtained.

2.5 Research Limitations

This research has several limitations, including:

- The research location is limited to schools and madrasahs that are willing to provide data and already have a congregational prayer coaching program.
- The data obtained are descriptive and are not accompanied by quantitative statistical measurements.
- The focus of the research is more on the process of implementing character education innovations, not on the analysis of long-term changes in student behavior.

These innovations are examined through the lens of character education theories, particularly Lickona's moral education framework, Bandura's social learning theory, and Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective. This theoretical foundation helps to assess not just the behavioral outcomes, but also the psychological and social dynamics of the implemented strategies. While the study highlights qualitative findings, further research is needed to quantify long-term impacts and refine intervention models.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study produced a number of important findings related to the implementation of character education

innovations in increasing awareness of congregational prayer in schools and madrasahs. These results were obtained from document analysis, field observations, interviews with supervising teachers, and related literature reviews.

3.1 Reward Program: Increasing Extrinsic Motivation of Students

One of the main innovations found in this study is the implementation of a reward program for students who are active and disciplined in performing congregational prayers. Schools provide appreciation in the form of award certificates, class points, and symbolic gifts such as stationery or Islamic reading books.

The results of the observation showed that this program was able to increase students' extrinsic motivation. Students became more enthusiastic about being on time at the mosque or prayer room. They also competed to improve their attitudes during prayer in order to get an award at the end of the month. This finding is in line with the motivation theory put forward by Skinner [6], which states that positive reinforcement can increase the frequency of certain behaviors.

It was found that several schools implemented a reward system to encourage student participation in congregational prayer. Awards in the form of certificates, class points, or symbolic gifts such as stationery are given to students or classes that show the best attendance and the most disciplined attitude during congregational prayers. The results of documentation and interviews show a significant increase in student attendance at the mosque as well as a more serious change in attitude during worship.

3.2 Habituation and Fixed Scheduling: Forming Positive Discipline and Routines

The school that was the subject of the study has included congregational prayer as part of the daily routine schedule. Dzuhur and Ashar prayers are performed collectively by involving all students, teachers, and staff.

According to interviews with homeroom teachers, the implementation of this fixed schedule has a positive impact on students' time discipline. Students begin to understand the importance of managing their time for studying, playing, and worshiping. This condition shows that the habituation strategy is effective in forming students' religious behavior [7].

Congregational prayers, especially Dzuhur and Ashar, are scheduled regularly in the school's daily activities. This scheduling forms an effective routine pattern in educating students about the importance of time management, discipline, and responsibility for worship. Teachers and staff participate in the implementation of worship, strengthening the role model for students. Attendance data shows a consistent increase in student attendance throughout the semester.

3.3 Spiritual Mentoring: Increasing Social Awareness and Concern

The school also implemented a spiritual mentoring program, where students were divided into small groups guided by religious teachers or homeroom teachers. Every week, these groups held light discussions about their morals, worship, and spiritual experiences, including evaluating their participation in congregational prayer. Interview results showed that through this mentoring, there was an increase in students' awareness of individual and social spiritual responsibilities. Students began to realize that their absence from congregational prayer was not only a personal matter, but also had an impact on class togetherness and cohesiveness.

This mentoring approach is in line with the concepts of peer learning and social modeling proposed by Vygotsky [8], where social interaction between peers and mentoring from teachers are very effective in influencing changes in student behavior. The spiritual mentoring program was also found to be a significant innovation. Each student was included in a small group guided by a homeroom teacher or a religious teacher. Light discussions about Islamic values, the virtues of prayer, and reflections on worship were held weekly.

The findings show that students are becoming more aware and responsible in their attendance at congregational prayers. Social interactions in mentoring groups strengthen solidarity and mutual reminders among peers.

3.4 Utilization of Educational Media: Improving Conceptual Understanding

The school also innovates by providing visual and digital educational media such as:

- Posters and infographics about the virtues of congregational prayer
- Islamic motivational videos
- Short sermons delivered through school speakers before prayer time

Based on documentation and interview analysis, these educational media provide reinforcement to students' conceptual understanding of the importance of congregational prayer. Students who previously did not understand the theological basis of congregational prayer began to show more positive changes in attitude after being exposed to various educational media.

The schools that were the subjects of the study also utilized educational media such as posters, infographics, and screenings of motivational videos and short sermons. These media were placed in prayer rooms, classrooms, and broadcast through speakers before prayer. Observations showed that exposure to these media increased students' understanding of the virtues of congregational prayer and encouraged positive changes in attitude. This is in accordance with Mayer's [9]. Multimedia learning theory emphasizes that visual and audio information can

improve students' understanding and retention of the material presented.

3.5 Empowering Students as Imams, Bilals, and Preachers

Another innovation that has had a big impact is actively involving students as imams, bilals, or short sermons before or after congregational prayers. Field findings show that students who are given this responsibility show significant improvements in self-confidence, communication skills, and understanding of prayer readings and procedures. In addition, students who become imams or preachers also become role models for their friends. This model strengthens the concept of student leadership in character education, which teaches that every student has leadership potential, especially in terms of spirituality.

Another innovation that is implemented is empowering students to become imams, bilals, and sermons. This not only increases a sense of responsibility and self-confidence, but also creates role models from within the student group itself. Students who act as worship leaders show increased spiritual competence and become motivators for their peers.

3.6 Challenges in Implementation

Although these innovations have had positive impacts, this study also found several challenges, including:

- Lack of Initial Student Awareness: In the early stages of the program, some students showed resistance or reluctance.
- Limited Facilities and Infrastructure: Some schools still face limitations in adequate prayer rooms.
- The Role of Teachers is Not Yet Maximized: Not all teachers are actively involved in guiding students, so further training is needed for non-religious teachers.

However, these challenges can be gradually overcome through intensive socialization, teacher training, and improved school facilities.

3.7 Short-Term and Long-Term Impacts

In the short term, this innovation program has shown increased student participation and changes in attitudes toward congregational prayer. In the long term, it is hoped that this habit will shape students' character to be religious, disciplined, and highly socially aware. Further research is recommended using quantitative methods to statistically measure the extent of changes in student behavior after participating in this innovation program.

Each of the five main strategies was found to influence student engagement, yet in varying degrees and through different mechanisms. For instance, empowering students to act as imams and preachers encouraged leadership and responsibility [11]. One religious teacher stated, "When students become imams, they start taking prayer more seriously. They feel they're setting an example." Similarly, a student shared, "At first I was nervous, but now I feel proud when I lead the prayer."

The reward program, while effective in the short term, primarily targeted extrinsic motivation. Over time, some students expressed dependency on the rewards. A shift toward intrinsic motivation was observed when spiritual mentoring and media exposure deepened their understanding of the value of prayer. Educational posters and motivational videos helped convey the significance of prayer in a format relatable to students [12].

Fixed daily scheduling was critical in creating consistency. Teachers' active participation reinforced modeling behaviors. Observations revealed that classes with teacher involvement had higher attendance and more respectful behavior during prayer.

The results of this study confirm Lickona's [4] view on the importance of the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in character education. The implementation of congregational prayer activates these three dimensions:

- Moral knowing through learning the values and arguments about prayer
- Moral feeling through daily spiritual habits
- Moral action through active participation in congregational worship

Reward programs, habituation, mentoring, and educational media all complement each other to create a meaningful worship experience emotionally and socially for students. Reward programs provide positive reinforcement for students' religious behavior, in accordance with Skinner's behaviorist theory [6]. Although extrinsic, this motivation is effective in forming habits that can eventually become intrinsic motivation. However, it is important to create a transition from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation through ongoing coaching, so that students continue to perform congregational prayer even without rewards.

The implementation of a fixed schedule and routine of worship encourages the formation of spiritual discipline. This is in line with Bandura's [7] habituation principle, where behavior that is repeated continuously in a positive context will be embedded as a character. The involvement of teachers as role models strengthens the formation of consistent habits among students.

The mentoring program allows for a personal and dialogical approach that increases students' awareness of the meaning of worship. This model is relevant to Vygotsky's [8] theory of scaffolding and the importance of social guidance in children's moral development. Interaction in the mentoring group not only strengthens spiritual values but also strengthens social relations and the sense of togetherness in religious practice. The use of visual and audio

media as concept reinforcement has a significant impact on students' understanding, in line with Mayer's [9] cognitive theory of multimedia learning. Exposure to information through multiple channels (visual, audio, text) strengthens students' retention of Islamic values and teachings, especially about congregational prayer [13].

Student involvement as imams and preachers fosters leadership skills, public speaking, and builds self-confidence. This is important capital in the formation of religious leaders' characters from an early age. This model supports a character education approach based on direct experience, not just theory [14].

Challenges such as initial resistance, limited facilities, and uneven teacher participation are common in changing school culture. However, the success of implementation in partner schools shows that:

- Repeated and consistent socialization can change student perceptions
- Involvement of all teachers, including non-religious, increases the success of the program
- Structural support and school policies are the main determinants of sustainability

Among the strategies examined, habituation through fixed scheduling and student empowerment as imams showed the highest consistency in building intrinsic motivation. Reward systems were initially effective but required ongoing reinforcement to sustain results. Spiritual mentoring created the deepest emotional engagement, while educational media served as a critical tool for reinforcing cognitive understanding. These findings align with Bandura's concept of observational learning and Lickona's assertion that moral action must be preceded by moral knowledge and feeling [16].

Despite their benefits, some strategies, particularly rewards, showed limitations in promoting long-term behavioral change without accompanying affective support. This emphasizes the importance of combining extrinsic and intrinsic motivators within a coherent educational framework.

4. CONCLUSION

Character education innovation through a program to increase awareness of congregational prayer has proven effective in forming students' religious and socially responsible personalities. The success of this program is highly dependent on the support and consistency of all parties in the school. Further research can be conducted to measure the long-term impact of implementing this innovation on the formation of student character.

Congregational prayer is one of the main forms of worship in Islam, which has great virtue, both in terms of spirituality, social, and character formation of students. The implementation of congregational prayer in the school/madrasah environment is not only a ritual obligation, but also an integral part of moral development and character education of students.

However, the current reality shows that the awareness and participation of students in carrying out congregational prayer is still relatively low. Many negative phenomena are found, such as a lack of solemnity, late joining the rows, and non-serious behavior during worship. This is a serious challenge for educators, especially Islamic religious education teachers and schools, to create a more effective coaching strategy that touches on the psychological aspects of students.

In an effort to overcome this problem, various innovations were implemented that aimed to form a strong and enjoyable culture of congregational prayer among students. The innovative strategies developed include reward programs, habituation with a structured schedule, spiritual mentoring in small groups, the use of educational media (such as posters, videos, and podcasts), and actively involving students as imams, bilals, and kulture speakers. This approach not only fosters external motivation through rewards and social recognition but also builds students' internal motivation through a continuous process of fostering spiritual awareness.

In addition, the evidence from the Qur'an and hadith that emphasize the virtue of congregational prayer is a theological basis that strengthens the arguments and reasons for the importance of this fostering effort. The verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW are a strong foundation that congregational prayer is not an ordinary worship, but a social obligation that has a dimension of multiple rewards and high educational value.

The results of implementing these various innovations are expected to create significant changes in the religious behavior of students. Students who were initially indifferent to congregational prayer activities slowly began to show discipline, responsibility, and self-awareness in carrying out the worship. In addition, this innovation also forms the character of students to be more disciplined, cooperative, and have a strong sense of togetherness with fellow students.

Overall, fostering awareness of congregational prayer through an innovative approach in schools/madrasahs is a strategic step that not only improves the quality of students' worship but also makes a major contribution in forming a generation of Muslims who have a balance between intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence. The success of this program certainly requires the support of all parties, starting from teachers, homeroom teachers, principals, parents, and the students themselves. Thus, innovation in increasing awareness of congregational prayer is not only a temporary program, but is expected to become a positive culture that is internalized in the daily lives of students until they become adults.

These findings offer a practical framework for integrating spiritual mentoring, routine worship practices, and student leadership into school curricula. Rather than serving merely as a reference, this study provides a replicable model for schools seeking to embed spiritual practices into daily student life. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of these interventions to assess their sustainability and impact on broader character development.

This study concludes that integrating character education strategies such as reward programs, spiritual mentoring, educational media, and student empowerment significantly enhances awareness and engagement in congregational prayer. These approaches complement each other and form a layered model of intervention.

However, this study has limitations. It was based on descriptive data from selected schools with existing programs and did not include a large-scale or longitudinal evaluation. Additionally, cultural factors unique to each school may have influenced implementation effectiveness. Future research should include quantitative analysis, broader sampling, and focus on long-term behavior changes.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide a practical and adaptable framework for schools aiming to strengthen religious character through daily worship routines. These strategies should be viewed not as isolated efforts but as components of a comprehensive, sustainable religious education system.

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