

Surau-Empowered Islamic Character Formation for Children: Darussalam's Model in Sumedang, Indonesia

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Abstract:

Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang Regency empowers local surau (prayer houses) to cultivate noble morals in children, preparing them for religious, national, and civic roles. Inappropriate guidance risks impeding comprehension and character formation; thus, drawing on Muhammad Utsman Khusyah's framework, efforts target personality development, monotheism, worship, muamalah, and Islamic culture, with surau as hubs for activity and internalization. Employing Participatory Action Research (PAR), the author co-designed and evaluated surau empowerment programs. Primary data derive from empowered surau teachers and child mentors. Findings reveal: (1) extensive surau development led by boarding school alumni trained as local educators; (2) multifaceted strategies, including Islamic Character Classes (honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, politeness via lectures, discussions, games, modeling, simulations), integrated worship, moral fostering, social initiatives, and administrator training; and (3) enhanced surau functions yielding stronger Islamic character in children, revitalizing surau as centers for worship, ethics, and community engagement.

Keywords: children's character; empowerment; function of surau; Islamic-based education; strengthening character.

INTRODUCTION

Children are the next generation who will bear the responsibility for the nation's future (TPKP3B, 1997), and they are rational beings. Therefore, children do not only play a role as individuals who live a physical life, but also as beings with a deep spiritual and intellectual life. The most important aspect of a child is the spirit, which is the spiritual essence of humans (Bagus, 1996). A child's spiritual life is the main foundation in character formation, because through this dimension, children can develop moral awareness, self-control, and value orientation that guide their behavior. This spiritual dimension also reflects children as bio-social beings with a dual role: as individuals who develop biologically and as part of a community that interacts with its environment. As thinking beings, humans have the ability to reflect, ask critical questions, and search for meaning, which distinguishes them from other creatures (Anshari, 1987). This ability to think is an important foundation for education and development from an early age, because children can reason, understand, and

absorb the values taught through interactions with family, teachers, and society. Thus, spiritually based character education emphasizes not only ritual and worship but also moral, social, and intellectual learning. Balanced spiritual development with social interaction enables children to become individuals with noble character, critical thinking, and the ability to make responsible decisions. Therefore, strengthening the spiritual dimension must be a primary focus in children's education, as it forms the foundation for character, thought patterns, and behavior that align with the purpose of human life as servants of God and caliphs on earth (Ahmadi & Nuruhbyati, 1991).

The nature of children as human beings also reflects humans as creatures with a high level of friendliness and knowledge, or in other words, as cultural and social beings (Salim, 1994). This uniqueness is reflected in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Nahl verse 78, which emphasizes that humans are equipped with the means of knowledge in the form of hearing, sight, and reason so that they can acquire knowledge even though they are born completely ignorant. The uniqueness of humans compared to other creatures is not only physical, but also in personality and character. Because of this uniqueness, humans have different duties and obligations from other creatures, namely to be 'abdullâh (servants of Allah) and khalîfah Allah on earth. The Islamic view emphasizes that humans are creatures who learn and teach, and this process continues throughout life, from birth to death, driven by the abilities and potential of each individual.

The family plays a central role in a child's early development, with the mother as the primary figure providing the child's first spiritual and moral guidance. Children view their mother as the center of their spiritual world and the source of their initial knowledge, introducing them to the secrets of nature and the norms of life around them. Through daily interactions with their mother, children form understandings, perceptions, and representations of the world, while internalizing moral values, both positive and negative. In addition to the mother, the father and other family members also influence them through experiences, advice, and role models, which serve as guidelines for the child's actions in daily life. This process fosters critical thinking skills, moral awareness, and social attitudes, which serve as the foundation for character formation. Therefore, the family is not simply a place of birth and growth, but also the first educational institution that equips children with a foundation of knowledge, values, and ethics before they enter formal or non-formal educational environments. The family's role in instilling these values is strategic because the habits and interactions that occur within the family will shape the child's behavioral patterns, build moral integrity, and prepare the child for effective learning at school, a surau (Islamic prayer house), or an Islamic boarding school (Al-Attas, 1988). Thus, the family becomes the main foundation for the development of children's spiritual, intellectual, and social potential.

Beyond the family, formal and non-formal education play a crucial role in strengthening children's character. Educators in schools and communities are responsible for educating children holistically. One non-formal educational institution that plays a strategic role is the surau (prayer house) or mushala (small mosque). The surau has a long history as a center of traditional Islamic education in the Minangkabau community, including in Sumedang Regency. At the surau, children not only learn to read the Quran and learn the basics of worship, but are also taught social and moral values that form the foundation of Islamic character. Strengthening the faith and values of monotheism, cultivating habits of worship, and learning social values based on Islamic teachings are at the heart of character education at the surau.

Darussalam Islamic Boarding School plays an active role in empowering the function of surrounding prayer rooms (surau). The surau serves not only as a place of worship but also as a center for education and character development for children. This Islamic boarding school fosters surau through alumni who return to the community with the mission of teaching and developing prayer rooms in their respective areas. This empowerment strategy ensures the continuity of Islamic education and the formation of children's character from an early age, so they can grow into individuals with noble morals, discipline, and a social spirit. In surau empowerment, Islamic character education materials are provided in an integrated manner, covering honesty, discipline, responsibility, mutual assistance, and good manners. The teaching methods used are diverse, including interactive lectures, advice, discussions, educational games, role models, and simulations, so children can understand the teachings in an age-appropriate and engaging manner. Integrated worship activities, such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and daily prayer memorization, strengthen children's spiritual dimension. The development of manners and etiquette is also a focus, including maintaining cleanliness, order, and time discipline. In addition, social and mutual cooperation activities, such as cleaning the prayer room and the surrounding area, and collecting donations from children for social activities, foster concern for the community and the surrounding environment. Training for prayer room administrators also

strengthens the capacity of prayer room managers so that educational activities and character building for children can continue (I. al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi, 1996).

The empowerment of the surau function by the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School has had a significant impact. The surau has once again functioned as a center of worship, moral education, and social awareness. Children studying at the surau have demonstrated an increased understanding of Islamic values, more disciplined behavior, and a high level of social awareness. This success has also strengthened Islamic brotherhood and the spirit of mutual cooperation in the community, while strengthening the institutional function of the Islamic boarding school in the socio-religious field. Thus, strengthening children's character based on Islam through the empowerment of the surau becomes a holistic educational model capable of forming a generation with noble character, competitiveness, and the ability to continue religious, social, and national responsibilities in the future. The background of this study emphasizes the importance of synergy between the family, surau, and Islamic boarding school in shaping children's Islamic character. The surau, as a non-formal educational institution, plays a strategic role in instilling spiritual, moral, and social values that will shape children into the next generation capable of carrying out their mandate as servants of God and caliphs on earth. This effort also confirms that Islamic character education is not only carried out in formal schools, but also through empowering the surau as an integral center for education, morals, social and culture (A. Al-Baghdadi, 1969).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is based on the understanding that children are the next generation who play a vital role in the moral, social, and religious development of society. Islamic character education emphasizes not only the theoretical teaching of religious values, but also the consistent practice of moral, social, and spiritual practices, which can be achieved through families, schools, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and surau (prayer houses) as non-formal institutions. Various literature shows that surau have a strategic role as centers for Islamic character development, where children learn discipline, honesty, responsibility, mutual assistance, and social etiquette. Islamic boarding schools serve as reinforcement and facilitators, while community involvement ensures the sustainability of these values. The author hopes that this study can make a real contribution to the development of Islamic character education, while also serving as a reference for Islamic educational institutions and the community in shaping a generation of children with noble morals, religious, and social values.

Strengthening children's character based on Islam is a systematic effort to develop moral, spiritual, social, and intellectual values in children from an early age. Islamic character education is not only related to theoretical learning, but also to the habituation of the values of the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah in everyday life. According to the results of a literature review, Islamic character education is rooted in the understanding that humans are thinking and inquiring creatures seeking to discover the essence of truth (Anshari, 1987). This process does not begin suddenly.-arrives, but through interaction between the child and his social environment so that the values-Religious values are internalized in their behavior. Character education in Islamic boarding schools emphasizes Islamic moral and ethical values, starting from the students' daily activities, from waking up to going to bed. Character education is taught comprehensively through moral habits, instilling good character, and raising awareness of responsibility as faithful and pious individuals, encompassing both cognitive and behavioral dimensions (Muniroh, 2021). Another conceptual study confirms that Islamic character education shapes individuals who not only understand religious values intellectually but also apply them in their social and cultural lives. This demonstrates that Islamic character education serves as the foundation for developing a generation with noble morals, discipline, and responsibility.

The family is the primary institution that shapes a child's character. Islamic character education must begin in early childhood through the active role of parents, based on a "life mission" and an effective communication approach in everyday life (Sapitri et al., 2022). Literatur ini menunjukkan bahwa keluarga berfungsi sebagai first learning environment, di mana nilai-nilai agama ditanamkan melalui teladan dan komunikasi kontinu. Pendidikan karakter yang bermakna tidak hanya terjadi di sekolah ataupun lembaga formal, tapi juga melalui interaksi keluarga, terutama ibu, yang menjadi simbol kasih sayang pertama dalam hidup anak.

A recent study found that non-formal educational institutions such as surau (prayer rooms), mushalla (prayer rooms), and Qur'anic education centers (TPQ) play a strategic role in shaping children's character in Indonesian Muslim communities. Surau play a significant role in shaping the character of school-age children

through routine activities such as book discussions, Qur'anic recitation, and *wirid* (recitation of the Qur'an) (Remiswal et al., 2021). The surau also serves as a space for social interaction, strengthening a sense of togetherness, discipline, and moral responsibility in children. This aligns with historical studies that demonstrate the role of the surau in shaping the Islamic character of the Minangkabau people through a holistic approach involving customary norms, traditions, and religion (Agustinus et al., 2025). Furthermore, TPQ has been studied as an important tool in developing religious character from an early age. For example, a study in Bedeng Village showed that TPQ was able to foster an understanding of the Quran and the application of strong Islamic values in children.

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are among the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, teaching not only religious knowledge but also the development of manners, morals, and character. They are seen as ideal centers of Islamic character education because their teaching model is based on exemplary behavior, routines, and the integration of daily life with religious values. Pesantren can strengthen character education through a consistent integration of theoretical and practical values, not just purely theoretical ones (Saparwadi, 2024). The Islamic boarding school model is also relevant for developing children's character because it allows for learning by doing, where children directly practice the values of honesty, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility in Islamic boarding school life. This education occurs not only in the classroom but also in the daily life of the Islamic boarding school community.

Based on empirical studies, the most effective strengthening of Islamic character occurs when formal, informal, and Islamic boarding school (pesantren) education channels synergize. Formal education in schools equips children with academic knowledge and a structural understanding of religion, while informal education through families and institutions such as TPQ (Islamic boarding schools) or surau (Islamic prayer houses) emphasizes the inculcation of everyday values. Pesantrens act as facilitators of resources and in-depth methodologies, so the integration of the three results in the comprehensive formation of children's character, encompassing spiritual, moral, social, and intellectual aspects. The model of empowering surau (Islamic boarding school) by Islamic boarding schools, as implemented at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang Regency, exemplifies the integration of holistic Islamic education. The surau serves as a center for religious and ethical learning, the Islamic boarding school provides teachers and supportive methods, and the family and community help instill values in daily life.

A participatory approach that actively involves children in internalizing Islamic character values has been proven to strengthen learning effectiveness. A literature review confirms the role of the surau (Islamic prayer house) in line with international findings on learning by interaction and value-based socialization. Furthermore, the integration of local cultural values and community involvement demonstrates that character education must be contextual, adapting to the cultural and social context in which children grow up. Therefore, synergy between schools, Islamic boarding schools, surau (Islamic prayer houses), and families not only optimizes Islamic character formation but also instills social and cultural values relevant to children's development.

METHOD

This community service program applies the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, a research method that emphasizes the active participation of both researchers and the communities that are the subjects of the research. The PAR process is carried out through several interrelated stages, namely preparation through observation and inculcation, research planning, data collection, analysis, and action or intervention based on the findings obtained. The main characteristic of this method is the direct involvement of researchers in designing the research design, determining methods, and analyzing data together with stakeholders. Thus, this research is not only focused on understanding the phenomenon, but also oriented towards creating real actions that can bring about positive change and improve the quality of life of the community (Creswell, n.d.). Furthermore, PAR encourages the involvement of various stakeholders so that the resulting solutions are relevant and effective for specific social contexts. The location of this research is a prayer room on Jalan Serma Mukhtar, Situ Village, North Sumedang District, Sumedang Regency, with the core activities carried out at Surau Pondok Darussalam during the period of September to October 2025. The main targets of the community service are children aged 7–15 years who live around Pondok Darussalam, as well as the surau administrators and the local community, so that strengthening children's character can be done through an integrated approach between formal education and the social environment.

Theoretically, this activity is based on the ideas of Muhammad Utsman Khusyah in his work *Al-Mar'ah al-Mitsâliyyah fi A'yûn Al-Rijâl wa 'Alâqah Al-Zuwâj Al-Sâkînah* (Maktabah Ibn Sina: Kairo, 1990), which emphasizes the principle of strengthening children's character from an Islamic perspective. Khusyah's theory states that the formation of children's character encompasses several important dimensions. First, guidance of thought, namely helping children to recognize themselves and their spiritual relationship with the Creator. Second, cultural guidance, which emphasizes children's understanding of Islamic culture in the archipelago, Islamic art, and their application in daily life. Third, social guidance, namely instilling an understanding of social interaction with other humans and social principles in accordance with Islamic teachings. Fourth, moral guidance, which focuses on instilling noble behavior towards parents, teachers, elders, and the wider community. Fifth, religious guidance, in the form of strengthening monotheism, performing prayers, giving blessings, and doing good deeds consistently (Khusyah, 1988).

The surau (prayer room) or mushalla (mosque hall) is seen as a highly strategic place for instilling religious values and strengthening children's character. Children can deepen their Islamic religious education through various regularly held activities, so the surau serves not only as a learning tool for reading the Quran or memorizing prayers, but also as a medium for internalizing Islamic character values. To this day, the surau serves a dual role, serving as a center for Islamic education and a center for traditional guidance, making it a crucial institution in developing children's morals and character (Nurhasnah et al., 2024).

The theory of strengthening children's character in Islamic families and developing the function of the surau (Islamic prayer house) provides a framework for understanding the importance of instilling noble morals from an early age. Children who are guided with a holistic approach combining religious education, cultural guidance, social interaction, and the internalization of morals have a greater opportunity to develop into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess spiritual and moral depth. This model aligns with Marzuki's view of the urgency of Islamic character education, where strengthening morals and developing positive behaviors are the main foundations in the lives of children, families, and communities (Marzuki, 2022). Thus, this community service is not merely a learning activity for children but also serves as a concrete experiment in applying participatory methods to strengthen Islamic character. The synergy between the surau, family, and community creates a contextual, holistic, and sustainable learning environment, enabling local religious and cultural values to be effectively instilled in the younger generation. Through the PAR approach, children not only learn about religion theoretically but also internalize morals and social values through direct experience, active participation, and meaningful interactions within their communities.

RESULTS

In 1980, one of the students of the Pagelaran Sumedang Islamic Boarding School, namely KH. Thalib Abdulrahman, founded the Bhakti Muslim Assalam Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang. Learning activities still used the salaffiyah method, only in 1986 was the Bhakti Muslim Assalam Foundation established with a notarial deed of Cristy S. Sutadikusumah, SH. No. 15 of 1986 to become the administrator of the Islamic boarding school. The Bhakti Muslim Assalam Islamic Boarding School was renamed the Persatuan Islam 44 Darussalam Islamic Boarding School along with the change of the foundation that oversees it, namely the Darussalam Foundation which was established on October 1, 1999 in Sumedang.

Table I
Suraus under the guidance of Darussalam Islamic Boarding School

No	Mosque	Caretaker	Address
1.	As-Salam Mosque	Mr. Haris	Sumedang
2.	Al-Ikhlas Mosque	Ustaz Helmi Fauzan	Sumedang
3.	Al-Furqon	Ustaz Eko Aryadi	South Sumedang
4.	Masjid Umar bin Khotob	Mr. Budi Hermawan	Pilar
5.	Masjid Al-Furqon	Ust. Riki Bahtiar	Haur Lawang
6.	Al-Muhajirin Mosque	Ust. Mugofar	grog
7.	Al-Muhajirin Mosque	Ust. Ahmad Sholeh	grog
8.	Masjid Al-Furqon	Ust. Eka Jesi	Waiting for Cikoneng
9.	Masjid Al-Furqon	Ustadzah Enok Herlina	Waiting for Cikoneng
10.	Masjid Al-Furqon	Ustadzah Ineu Aryani	Paseh
11.	Al-Ikhlas Mosque	Ustadzah Lina Karlina	Paseh

Source: Darussalam Islamic Boarding School 2025

The table shows that there are 11 prayer rooms managed by the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang Regency, with all the teachers and supervisors being alumni of the Islamic boarding school.

Some basic principles that serve as a reference in empowering surau include: (1) Building a principle of balance between the education sector implemented in the children's madrasah with the surau education sector (outside the madrasah), and with other sectors. The presence of an education system in a surau or mushala must always be interpreted as a necessity to work together with other systems to realize the ideals of society. The essence of existence is co-existence. Surau education is not something that is exclusively separate from its social system. Surau education as a system is an open system that constantly interacts with its environment; (2) The principle of surau education planning is progressive, not resistant to change, but is able to control the direction of changes in the lifestyle of children educated in the surau; (3) Reconstructionist principle. In the changing conditions of the times, children's daily behavior is formed, especially in speaking politely, getting used to living cleanly, being able to practice the prayers recommended by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and so on (J et al., 2021).

In addition to being guided by the basic principles above, the development of a surau also requires a foundation of educational values that will serve as the basic character of students. In achieving this, a conducive situation is needed during the learning process. For this reason, the surau is designed to be able to create dimensions of learning effectively. The surau must be built on a shared desire to meditate on the innermost thoughts of God. This desire is the core value that underlies the life of the surau world. It is able to transform potential and make the surau a model for the formation of Islamic character in children. The six values are: a) Understanding Faith and piety to Allah SWT. By performing the five daily prayers in congregation; 2) Learning to recite the Qur'an and memorizing the correct prayer readings; 3) Mutual respect for fellow friends; 4) Devoting parents and being active in religious studies consistently; 5) Getting used to speaking politely to parents, teachers, friends, and others in everyday life; 6) Able to practice a clean lifestyle, disposing of trash properly, wearing clean and neat clothing, being able to mop dirty floors, and cleaning body parts during various activities (Saebani, 2022). Certain conditions in a surau determine a child's learning performance. Consistency of the surau teacher, a structured lesson schedule, maximum communication between teachers and children, keeping individual child data (record-keeping), parental involvement, and a positive atmosphere are conditional factors that influence the formation of a child's character. Four other factors that are no less important are the child's sense of enjoyment of the surau, high expectations, the attention and fairness of a surau teacher, and positive relationships with peers. Empowering surau or mushala is an important part of developing early childhood education (Saebani & Rahman, 2025).

The Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang Regency has systematically developed surau (Islamic prayer room) development programs using a structured functional development strategy. This strategy encompasses five key, interconnected principles to shape children's Islamic character holistically. First, improving Islamic values learning services is the primary focus, so that children not only learn the teachings textually but also internalize these values in their daily behavior. Second, expanding and equalizing opportunities for Islamic religious learning across all surau ensures that children from all locations have equal access to religious education, eliminating gaps in knowledge and morals. Third, improving the quality and relevance of education is a priority, with an emphasis on delivering material that is appropriate to children's development, social context, and contemporary demands, so that learning remains relevant and applicable. Fourth, the surau empowerment system is being developed so that each surau can function optimally as a non-formal education center that supports Islamic character development, strengthens the independence of its administrators, and improves the quality of interactions between teachers and children. Fifth, empowering informal Islamic institutions is carried out through coordination between the surau (Islamic prayer house), parents, the community, and related institutions, thereby creating consistent social support for children's education. Furthermore, the strategy for improving informal education services is more focused on efforts to eradicate Qur'anic illiteracy, strengthen morals, and eliminate laziness in learning, which are important foundations for children to be able to understand and practice Islamic teachings consistently from an early age (Wibowo & Darodjat, 2025). Through these five strategies, the surau becomes an effective, relevant, and sustainable educational vehicle in shaping children's Islamic character.

The main policies implemented include maintaining parental participation to ensure children remain actively engaged in learning in prayer rooms (mushala) or surau (prayer rooms), adjusting educational participation growth targets at all levels and types of non-formal institutions, and continuing educational assistance programs for children from an early age. Furthermore, alternative learning programs are being developed conceptually and sustainably, particularly for children aged 7 to 15, along with efforts to increase community involvement in educational decision-making that shape children's Islamic character. This policy also emphasizes the effective procurement and utilization of surau facilities and infrastructure, as well as the development of surau management so that these institutions can develop institutionally, becoming a vehicle for initiative and creativity in managing Islamic character education, while remaining in line with the vision, mission, and goals of Islamic institutions (Bisri, 2020).

The strategy for developing children's character in an Islamic way also involves empowering non-formal institutions such as surau (Islamic prayer rooms) or mushala (prayer rooms), emphasizing the empowerment of madrasah institutions as centers of non-formal learning, education, and culture. This is achieved by actively increasing, developing, and expanding the potential of the community in fostering and developing mushala or surau, which encompasses internal-external, horizontal-vertical, and formal-informal coordination. Based on all of this, coordination, or more popularly known as cooperation, is carried out between teachers and parents of surau students, as well as community leaders (informal leaders), government and private institutions, non-governmental organizations, and potential donors. Empowerment and optimization of the function of learning resource components in surau are followed up by the empowerment of each component functionally and sustainably (Salim, 1994).

The results of the Islamic character-building program for children through the surau empowerment program were implemented in several structured stages. During the implementation phase, Islamic character-building classes were held, emphasizing values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, mutual assistance, and courtesy. Learning was conducted using interactive lectures, discussions, educational games, and simulations, enabling children to actively and contextually understand concepts. Furthermore, integrated worship activities in the surau are an important part of internalizing Islamic values. Children regularly perform congregational prayers, recite the Quran, and memorize daily prayers. At the same time, etiquette development in the surau is implemented, such as maintaining cleanliness, order, and time discipline. These activities aim to ensure children not only understand worship theoretically but also implement it in their daily behavior (Sapitri et al., 2022).

The program also includes social and mutual cooperation activities, including cleaning the surau (prayer hall) and the surrounding area, collecting donations from children for social activities, and participating in helping others. Furthermore, training was conducted for surau administrators, aimed at strengthening the administrators' capacity to manage Islamic character-based children's activities, including planning programs, guiding children, and monitoring their character development. A comprehensive evaluation phase was conducted through observation, interviews with children and parents, and assessments of changes in children's behavior. The results of the community service showed that Surau Pondok Darussalam was once again active as a center for child development, becoming a place for Islamic learning and interaction. Children demonstrated improved discipline in worship and manners, and their involvement in social and worship activities increased. Furthermore, the community began to participate regularly in religious activities at the surau, supporting the program's implementation and ensuring its sustainability. A small group of surau youth was formed to assist the administrators in worship and social activities, strengthening their sense of responsibility and concern for the community. Parents of students also welcomed and provided support for the development of the surau's function, particularly related to Islamic religious education and the formation of children's Islamic character. Overall, this activity succeeded in revitalizing the surau as a center for Islamic character development, increasing the participation of children and the community, and fostering a culture of sustainable learning and worship (Srikandi et al., 2025).

Fostering children's mental attitudes in living a noble life is an effort to utilize the surau so that students can emulate the characteristics found in the attitude of the Prophet Muhammad in all aspects of their lives. Religious attitudes are a strong attitude in embracing and practicing religious teachings and as a reflection of one's obedience to the teachings of Islam. Religious attitudes are conditions that exist within students that encourage them to behave according to the level of their obedience to religion, these religious attitudes may be consistent between belief in religion as an effective element and behavior towards religion

as a conative element. For example, children are guided to avoid lying, arrogance, stubbornness and hostility towards each other with their friends. Instead, children's morals are formed with an honest, trustworthy, polite, clean, friendly personality, and are able to implement them in everyday life (Saebani et al., 2024). To strengthen children's faith, there are several approaches that can be applied consistently from an early age.

First, children are guided to read the Quran and understand its meaning, not merely memorizing the text but also reflecting on its teachings and wisdom. Quranic learning that emphasizes understanding its meaning is crucial for developing spiritual awareness and internalizing Islamic values for daily life. Research shows that Islamic educational interventions based on the Quran and Hadith can provide a strong foundation for the development of children's morals, ethics, and personality through structured educational methods, allowing for holistic spiritual, moral, and character development (Ritonga et al., 2024). Second, children are introduced to the hadiths of the Prophet with an emphasis on understanding their meaning, so that the moral messages and practical teachings contained in the hadiths can serve as guidelines for daily behavior. The hadith learning approach in childhood education has been identified as a crucial component in developing Islamic character from an early age, as understanding the hadiths allows children to emulate the Prophet's morals, distinguish between good and bad behavior, and develop lifestyle habits aligned with Islamic principles (Pratiwi, 2023).

Third, children are consistently taught and accustomed to fulfilling religious obligations from an early age, including prayer, fasting, and other Islamic social etiquette. The habit of worship from an early age has been proven to play a significant role in developing spiritual discipline, self-discipline, and a consistent religious life, making it easier for worship to become a natural part of a child's routine. Through such habits, the bonds of faith become stronger and children are able to internalize Islamic values in various aspects of their lives (Suwanto & Zainudin, 2025). By implementing these three approaches: meaningful Qur'anic learning, understanding the hadith as a moral guide, and habituating worship from an early age in an integrated manner in children's education, the spiritual foundation of their faith will be increasingly solidified, forming a strong foundation of faith. This supports the formation of a generation with faith, noble morals, and the ability to consistently apply Islamic values in their daily lives. It also demonstrates that structured religious education can make a fundamental contribution to children's character and morals from an early age.

The impact of empowering the surau in shaping the character of children based on Islam in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school environment, Sumedang is on morals or character, character, morality, ethical and moral awareness, namely good behavior that is the result of the right attitude of the soul towards its Creator and towards other human beings. Children of the surau emotionally internalize behavior in accordance with the teachings of Islam and national culture (and can sense what is good and bad). The formation of children's religious attitudes, preparing them morally, psychologically and socially. This is done through the method of advice. As for the exemplary approach, namely making the figure of the religious teacher as a reflection of a person with a religious personality. Role models in education are very important and more effective, especially in efforts to form religious attitudes, a child will more easily understand or comprehend if there is someone to imitate. Role models are an excellent medium for optimal formation of children's religious souls. The exemplary behavior of the surau teacher towards his students is the key to success in preparing and shaping the spiritual and social morals of children (Tarsono et al., 2025).

In the process of shaping children's attitudes, educators must recognize that personal development requires habits and exercises appropriate to the child's stage of mental development. These habits and exercises gradually shape certain behaviors, which over time become an integral part of their personality. Children's religious attitudes, for example, are clearly evident through their interactions with friends, family members, and the community. Children learn to recite prayers before and after daily activities, such as prayers before and after meals, before bed, upon waking, entering and leaving the toilet or mosque, going to school, and upon beginning lessons. These activities can be directly monitored and evaluated by teachers at the surau (prayer house), so that the development of religious values can be measured and consistent. At certain stages of development, children often experience confusion about the opinions and actions of those around them. They also have various desires and tendencies that are not yet stable, making it difficult for them to make choices or understand what is most preferred (Astutik et al., 2024). In this context, educators play a crucial role in illuminating children's thinking and guiding them systematically in the areas of thought, culture, social, moral, and religion. Guiding a child's thinking is a sensitive and strategic responsibility, as

misdirection can have long-term consequences. The primary goal of guidance is to set children on the right path, enabling them to recognize themselves, take firm steps, and act with wisdom and reason in every decision.

Parents, especially mothers, must also gradually provide spiritual education, emphasizing that true human beauty lies not in outward appearance, but in thought, reason, and behavior. Human values and nobility must be understood as the source of true beauty, even though clothing or jewelry can be deceptive. The role of surau educators is to guide children's thinking, freeing them from constraints that limit creativity and logic, providing freedom of thought, and instilling the principle that success can only be achieved through effort and hard work. Children are also taught to face difficulties without fear of failure, to understand their responsibilities to society, and to avoid isolating themselves from their environment. Educators must cleanse children's minds of negative thoughts, fallacious arguments, and illogical biases, while still valuing curiosity and emerging ideas, however limited or simple. Language is a child's primary tool for understanding the world and interacting with others. Children learn their first words from their mothers and educators, acquiring culture, experience, and ethical values through these interactions (Rora et al., 2022). In this way, children become familiar with cultural heritage and social norms, while also understanding the value of actions.

The role of surau educators is to teach social relationships, social patterns, rules, and principles that apply in society, so that children grow into realistic individuals, sensitive to the nature of life, and able to distinguish truth from deception. Ultimately, the instilling of moral and religious values is strongly influenced by the example of surau educators. Children learn to connect with the Creator through the behavior, prayers, and good deeds performed by educators. The surau is the first place for children to directly observe, imitate, and internalize religious values, so that religious education takes place not only in theory but also through real-life experiences in everyday life. Guidance for children should be carried out indirectly and using methods appropriate to the child's developmental stage and character (Rahman et al., 2024). First, through the question-and-answer method. Children tend to always ask questions and seek explanations when learning to speak, not because they want to know other people's business, but because of a strong sense of curiosity. Therefore, surau educators need to answer children's questions adequately and satisfactorily, so that children's curiosity is facilitated. Sometimes, children can also be taught to ask questions indirectly and find their own answers, thus fostering independent thinking. Second, by encouraging children to explore. Children often tend to take the easy route and avoid deep thought. This is where educators play a role in strengthening their thinking skills. Children have a natural urge to seek information, interpret events around them, and understand the world they experience. Educators simply need to provide a little encouragement to encourage children to think critically and actively uncover the relationships between phenomena around them.

Third, through guidance through action. This method emphasizes that children learn most effectively through behavioral examples. Rather than simply giving verbal commands or explanations, educators demonstrate appropriate actions in front of children so that they imitate and understand the values being taught. This principle is an important foundation in education, because real experiences are more easily internalized than mere words. Fourth, by bringing children's minds to life. Surau educators must untangle the bonds that limit children's thinking, liberate their minds, and prepare them for critical thinking. This is done through observation exercises, encouraging children to make careful assessments, and understanding the interconnections between various phenomena. Learning, observing, and thinking become routine activities that train children to understand the world logically and systematically, while simultaneously fostering mature analytical skills. Fifth, through language learning. Mastering a language requires patience and a long time. Not everyone achieves the same level of mastery, even after many years. Therefore, educators should not demand that children immediately express their thoughts perfectly. Children need continuous guidance to understand the meaning of words and their correct use, without pressure that can lead to stuttering or fear of speaking. Pronunciation errors should be patiently corrected, while encouraging children to understand words as tools for observing and interpreting the world around them. Repetition of words is important to reinforce children's understanding, and children are encouraged to explore vocabulary to become more proficient in language.

Language is not merely a means of communication, but also a reflection of a society's cultural and moral level. Therefore, educators must emphasize precision and ethics in language, avoid harsh language, and create an atmosphere conducive to moral education through language. By consistently applying these

five methods—questions and answers, encouragement to inquire, guidance through action, activating the mind, and language learning—children can develop their thinking, understanding, and communication skills effectively, while simultaneously forming strong Islamic morals and character.

DISCUSSION

Since its inception, the Bhakti Muslim Assalam Islamic Boarding School, founded by KH. Thalib Abdulrahman in 1980 in Sumedang, has emphasized salafiyah-based Islamic education. The institution's transformation through the establishment of the Bhakti Muslim Assalam Foundation in 1986 and subsequent name change to the Persatuan Islam 44 Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in 1999 reflects the development of an increasingly modern and structured educational organization, while still maintaining traditional values. This development provides an important context for the empowerment of surau (Islamic prayer rooms) as a strategic non-formal educational vehicle in shaping the Islamic character of children in Sumedang. Data from the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School shows that there are 11 surau under its guidance across the Sumedang region, with all caretakers and teachers alumni of the boarding school. This condition confirms the sustainability of the boarding school's educational values and culture by regenerating teachers who understand the philosophy and practice of Islamic education in depth. These prayer rooms (surau) are formal and informal spaces that function not only as places of worship, but also as centers for character education, social interaction, and the instilling of Islamic behavior (Fajrul, 2022).

The empowerment of surau (Islamic prayer houses) is based on several fundamental principles. First, the principle of balance between educational sectors, which emphasizes the integration of formal education in madrasas with non-formal education in surau and the child's social environment. This principle emphasizes that surau do not stand alone, but are open systems that constantly interact with their environment, so that the goals of Islamic education can be realized holistically. Second, the principle of progressive surau educational planning, where education adapts to changing times while still guiding children's lifestyles to align with Islamic values. Third, the principle of reconstructionism, which emphasizes the formation of children's behavior through the habituation of good manners, cleanliness, daily prayers, and religious practices, so that children are able to adapt to social and cultural developments without losing their moral and spiritual foundations (Nuryahman & Majeed, 2024).

In addition to these basic principles, the development of the surau also emphasizes educational values as the foundation of children's character. The six core values instilled include: understanding faith and piety through congregational prayer, the ability to read and memorize the Qur'an, mutual respect among friends, devotion to parents and active participation in religious studies, the habit of speaking politely, and practicing clean living. These values are structured in such a way that the surau can function as a medium for transforming children's potential, forming an integral and sustainable Islamic character. The condition of the surau's performance in shaping children's character is greatly influenced by conditional factors, such as teacher consistency, a structured lesson schedule, effective communication between teachers and children, recording children's individual development (record-keeping), parental involvement, and a positive atmosphere (Al-Abrasyi, 1970). In addition, children's enjoyment of the surau, high expectations, fairness of teachers, and positive relationships with peers are factors that strengthen the success of character development. Based on these findings, surau empowerment is not only instructional, but also emphasizes the emotional, social, and psychological aspects of children.

The surau development strategy is implemented through five main strategies, namely: improving Islamic values learning services, expanding and equalizing opportunities for religious learning in surau, improving the quality and relevance of education, developing a surau empowerment system, and empowering informal Islamic institutions. These strategies align with the goal of strengthening non-formal education, including efforts to eradicate Qur'anic illiteracy, moral illiteracy, and laziness in religious learning from an early age. The implementation of this strategy is linked to policies to maintain parental participation rates, adjust children's educational growth targets, early education assistance programs, develop alternative learning programs, involve the community in decision-making, and effectively procure and utilize surau facilities and infrastructure. The results of the surau empowerment initiative at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School have been highly successful. The surau is once again active as a center for child development, with Islamic character building classes that emphasize honesty, discipline, responsibility, mutual assistance, and politeness. Learning methods use interactive lectures, discussions, educational

games, and simulations, so that internalization of values can take place actively and contextually. Integrated worship activities, such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and daily prayer memorization, are consistently implemented (Ahmad & Ali, 1974). Fostering manners, cleanliness, and time discipline are also a primary focus so that children can implement Islamic values in their daily lives.

In addition to learning activities, the surau empowers children through social and mutual cooperation activities, such as environmental clean-ups, donation collections, and active participation in community activities. Training of surau administrators is also strengthened to ensure the quality of management and supervision of Islamic character-based activities. Evaluation is conducted through observation, interviews with children and parents, and assessment of behavioral changes. The evaluation results show increased discipline, children's involvement in social and religious activities, and active community support for the surau's sustainability. A youth group has also been formed to assist the administrators in religious and social activities, fostering a sense of responsibility and community awareness. The development of children's mental and religious attitudes emphasizes the role model of the surau teacher as a reflection of the Prophet Muhammad's morals, which serves as an effective medium for internalizing Islamic values. Children are also guided to read the Qur'an with an understanding of its meaning, study the hadith, and practice performing religious duties from an early age (Firdaus et al., 2023).

The guidance method is carried out indirectly, through five important approaches: first, the question-and-answer method to stimulate curiosity; second, encouragement to actively explore; third, guidance through teacher actions; fourth, enlivening children's minds through observation and critical analysis; and fifth, consistent language learning to shape effective communication, culture, and morals. The analysis of this discussion shows that the empowerment of the surau at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School is a comprehensive model of Islamic character education that integrates formal and non-formal education with socio-cultural values. The surau is not only a place of worship, but also a vehicle for the formation of morals, social skills, and spiritual obedience. The strategy of strengthening character through a participatory approach, teacher role models, and the habituation of Islamic values proves the effectiveness of the surau as a non-formal learning center that is able to shape individuals who are faithful, have noble character, and are ready to contribute to society (Febrianto et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang Regency has successfully effectively empowered prayer rooms (surau) as a means of Islamic education and character development for children. The number of prayer rooms under its management is quite large, and the administrators are alumni of the Islamic boarding school who have been trained from the outset as teachers and developers of prayer rooms in their respective communities. This system ensures the continuity of the development and implementation of Islamic values from an early age, while also preparing cadres with the competence to manage religious and social activities in the prayer rooms. The prayer room empowerment strategy is implemented through Islamic Character Development Classes that emphasize the values of honesty, discipline, responsibility, mutual assistance, and courtesy. Methods used include interactive lectures, counseling, discussions, educational games, role models, and simulations, so that children can understand the material in an age-appropriate and engaging manner. Integrated worship activities, such as congregational prayer, Quranic recitation, and daily prayer memorization, become routines that strengthen the belief in oneness of God and the practice of Islamic teachings. In addition, moral development is carried out through teaching about maintaining cleanliness, order, and time discipline, while social activities and mutual cooperation, including cleaning the surau and collecting children's donations for social activities, foster a sense of empathy and concern for the environment. Training for surau administrators also strengthens their capacity to manage children's activities sustainably. The implementation of this program shows that the surau is once again functioning as a center of worship, moral education, and social support that supports the strengthening of Islamic character. The children involved show an increased understanding of religious values, more disciplined behavior, and a higher social awareness. These positive impacts are felt not only by the children, but also by the surrounding community, making the surau a strategic institution in shaping a generation with noble character, competitiveness, and contributing to the sustainability of religious, cultural, and social values in the Minangkabau community.

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