

Contextual Strategies for Prayer Learning in Islamic Religious Education: A Comparative Study of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Elementary Schools

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Abstract. This study explores the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strategies in teaching prayer worship across elementary schools in three different geographical contexts: urban, suburban, and rural areas of East Java, Indonesia. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis using a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach. The findings reveal that each geographical setting adopts contextually adaptive strategies shaped by environmental conditions, available resources, and cultural norms. Integrating technology—such as LCD projectors and interactive media—in urban schools enhances student engagement despite spatial constraints. Suburban schools emphasize collaboration between schools and families, particularly through liaison books to monitor prayer activities at school and home. Rural schools rely on strong community involvement and familial supervision, using control books to ensure prayer consistency amid limited resources. The results highlight the importance of contextual learning theory in religious education, where strategies tailored to local realities contribute to character formation and effective spiritual development. This research underscores the need for flexible, environment-specific pedagogical models to optimize religious learning outcomes in diverse settings.

Keywords: Learning Strategy; Prayer Worship; Contextual Learning; Islamic Education; Geographical Environment

1 Introduction

Religious education plays a pivotal role in shaping the character and moral development of elementary school students in Indonesia—a predominantly Muslim nation. The effectiveness of religious instruction is closely linked to the geographic context in which it is delivered; varied environments present unique challenges and opportunities for educational strategies[1]. Schools generally benefit from superior resources and robust community support in urban areas, which facilitate structured learning[2]. However, these institutions must also contend with distractions associated with fast-paced lifestyles[3] that may diminish students' focus on spiritual practices[4], [5]. In contrast, suburban and rural settings often struggle with limited access to educational resources and community engagement[6]. In these regions, integrating local cultural practices into religious instruction can enhance its relevance and introduce complexities in curriculum development[7].

Contemporary educational strategies emphasize the importance of contextual learning[8], which connects academic material to students' daily experiences[9] and thereby motivates deeper engagement with the subject matter[10], [11]. Moreover, family involvement is crucial; parental modeling of religious practices significantly influences children's religious education[12], [13]. Despite these advantages, regional disparities in educational access and community support may result in uneven character development among students, underscoring the need for a cohesive yet adaptable framework for religious education.

Recent research in Islamic religious education at the elementary level has identified several critical trends. First, practice-based teaching methods—such as the contextual learning model introduced by Parhan et al.—demonstrate that linking prayer instruction to daily life enhances students' understanding and retention[14]. In addition, integrating structured activities, including Holy Book recitation sessions, congregational prayers[15], [16], and interactive educational games[17], has been shown to make learning more dynamic and enjoyable[14]. Tailoring pedagogical methods to the specific needs of students further contributes to improved learning outcomes[18], [19]. Second, the geographic context significantly influences educational performance[20]. Urban schools generally have greater access to resources and funding, which can lead to superior learning outcomes[21]; meanwhile, rural schools often face chronic challenges such as inadequate investment, a shortage of qualified teachers, and insufficient learning materials[22]. Moreover, the physical environment plays a role, as urban conditions are frequently more conducive to learning than rural settings[23]. Third, while digital media and tools like LCD projectors can enhance student engagement in religious education[24], [25], there remains a paucity of comparative studies on how religious learning strategies are implemented across different geographical contexts. For instance, stakeholder perceptions have impeded the adoption of educational technology in Christian Religious Education in Kenya[26], suggesting that further exploration is necessary to understand these variations and their implications.

Given these considerations, the present study aimed to address the existing research gap by examining how religious education, especially prayer learning, strategies are implemented in elementary schools situated in urban, suburban, and rural environments. This research seeks to compare the effectiveness of these strategies across diverse contexts and identify the specific contextual factors that influence implementation and learning outcomes. Ultimately, this study aspires to offer comprehensive insights that will inform the adaptation of religious education to the distinct needs of each geographical setting, thereby contributing to the development of more effective and contextually responsive educational strategies.

Further, investigations into religious learning strategies in varied environments have demonstrated that contextual factors are key determinants of learning outcomes. Incorporating a contextual learning approach, which ties religious teachings to everyday experiences, has effectively boosted student motivation and character development[27]. In addition, the model enhances theoretical understanding and facilitates practical application, thereby encouraging active student participation[14]. Complementary practices—such as creating conducive school environments and involving parents in congregational prayer—further support effective learning[28]–[30]. Nevertheless, discrepancies in student engagement and external influences continue to pose challenges that must be addressed to optimize these strategies.

2 Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the strategies used in teaching prayer worship across three distinct geographical settings: urban, suburban, and rural elementary schools in a regency of East Java, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow a rich, in-depth understanding of the dynamics, variations, and contextual influences surrounding prayer instruction in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). A case study approach was utilized to examine specific schools in each geographical category, facilitating a comparative analysis of the strategies applied and the contextual factors that shape their implementation.

The unit of analysis included both institutional and individual levels. At the institutional level, the research focused on three public elementary schools, each representing a different geographical environment. At the individual level, participants comprised Islamic Religious Education teachers, school principals, and students actively involved in prayer worship learning activities. The goal was to understand how each school implemented prayer instruction and how contextual factors influenced the effectiveness and adaptability of the strategies employed.

Data collection was conducted using multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage and triangulation. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with IRE teachers and school leaders to gather nuanced insights into teaching strategies, challenges, and innovations. Second, direct observations of classroom and prayer activities provided a real-time understanding of instructional methods and student engagement. Third, document analysis was done by reviewing school policies, instructional materials, liaison books, and other relevant artifacts. A desk review of existing literature was also conducted to establish a theoretical framework and contextualize the findings.

The data analysis followed a systematic qualitative procedure using descriptive and interpretative techniques. Descriptive analysis was applied to identify and document the specific learning strategies in each school setting. Interpretative analysis sought to uncover deeper meanings and contextual relationships, particularly how environmental and socio-cultural conditions shaped the implementation and outcomes of the religious education process. Data were organized through coding and thematic categorization based on central aspects such as pedagogical methods, teacher roles, environmental influences, technological integration, and student engagement.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employed triangulation by cross-verifying data from different sources—interviews, observations, documents, and literature. This method helped mitigate bias and provided a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Each phase of the research process—from data collection to analysis—was carefully documented, enabling transparency and reproducibility. The approach taken in this study offers an in-depth and contextually sensitive perspective on how prayer worship education is adapted across diverse geographical environments.

3 Result

3.1 Islamic Religious Learning Strategy in Urban Environment School

In a dynamic and often dense urban environment, learning to pray faces unique challenges that require a tailored approach. Learning strategies must address differences in lifestyle and daily activities and provide relevant and effective methods for teaching prayer. Given this context, it is essential to explore and understand how these strategies are implemented in practice and identify ways to adapt learning methods best to suit the needs and realities of urban life. The following are the results of the study:



Table 1 Interview Results in Urban Environment School

| No | Informants | Statement Descriptions |
|----|---------------------|---|
| 1 | MH (IRE Teacher) | "Learning to pray starts from grade 1 by teaching how to perform ablution and ablution readings. We use an LCD projector to display the material as a PowerPoint so students can understand it more easily." |
| 2 | MH | "Dhuha prayer is mandatory for grades 4, 5, and 6 and is carried out every morning before the Religious Education lesson begins. The implementation usually takes place in the prayer room or religious laboratory. Prayer practices are also carried out in the religious laboratory." |
| 3 | MH | "We often use interactive learning media, such as snakes and ladders, to motivate students. This media helps students learn cooperatively in groups to avoid boredom." |
| 5 | AR (IRE Teacher) | "We ensure that the implementation of Dhuha prayer and other prayer practices continue to run well, even though they must be done alternately due to space limitations. We also involve Islamic Religious Education teachers as imams to guide students." |

The statement shows that the learning strategy for praying in an urban environment involves several adaptive and innovative approaches. Learning begins in grade 1, emphasizing how to perform ablution, using technology such as an LCD projector to present the material so students can understand it more easily. Praying Dhuha is mandatory for grades 4, 5, and 6, carried out in a prayer room or religious laboratory, showing an effort to provide an appropriate environment. Interactive learning media, such as the game "Snake and Ladder," motivate students and create a cooperative learning atmosphere. Although space constraints require prayers to be carried out in turns, the involvement of Islamic Religious Education teachers as imams and adjusting the schedule are solutions to ensure that worship continues to run smoothly. This approach reflects integrating technology, interactive methods, and adaptation to space constraints to support learning to pray in an urban environment. The following observations support this statement:

Table 2 Observation Result in Urban Environment School

| Observed Evidences | Observed Aspects | Descriptions |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| | Prayer Room and Supporting Facilities | The prayer room is in the middle of the school building and has a display case for <i>sarongs</i> , <i>mukena</i> , and prayer mats. The atmosphere is calm and comfortable, but students must bring their prayer equipment. |

| Observed Evidences | Observed Aspects | Descriptions |
|---|---|--|
|  | Implementation of Dhuha Prayer and Dhuhr Prayer | Dhuha prayer is performed alternately in the prayer room for grades 4, 5, and 6. Dhuhr prayer in congregation is only for grade 6, with the Religious Education teacher as the imam to guide the movements and readings of the prayer. |
| | Praying Habits and Strengthening Discipline | Praying Dhuha is routinely carried out for grades 4, 5, and 6. Grades 1, 2, and 3 focus on reading and prayer movements. Skill assessments are given to show appreciation for disciplined students. |
|  | Games to improve students' understanding | Snake and Ladder learning media is an interactive tool for teaching Islamic Religious Education. It uses a game approach to improve student understanding. |

The school's prayer room facility is in the middle of the school building. It is equipped with a display case for *sarongs*, *mukena*, and prayer mats, creating a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for worship. However, students are expected to bring their prayer equipment, indicating a need for adjustments in the provision of prayer equipment. The implementation of the Dhuha prayer is carried out alternately for grades 4, 5, and 6 in the prayer room, while the dhuhr prayer in congregation is only for grade 6 with the guidance of the religious education teacher as the imam, ensuring that worship is carried out with proper supervision. Dhuha prayers are habituated routinely for grades 4, 5, and 6, while grades 1, 2, and 3 focus on introducing prayer readings and movements. Skill assessments are given as a form of appreciation for students who demonstrate discipline, underscoring the school's efforts to strengthen prayer habits and discipline among students.

In addition to the prayer room, the teacher uses Snake and Ladder learning media as an interactive tool in Islamic Religious Education learning, which aims to improve students' understanding through game methods. According to the Ustaz, this media makes it easier for students to understand prayer and the pillars of Islam in a fun and exciting way. Through this game, students can collaborate in small groups, answer questions, or complete challenges related to Religious Education material in each game box. Snake and Ladder has proven effective in increasing students' learning motivation, making them more enthusiastic and active during the learning process.

3.2 Islamic Religious Learning Strategies in Sub-Urban Environment School



In a suburban environment, prayer worship learning strategies require special adjustments considering the quieter atmosphere and wider accessibility compared to urban environments. This approach must adjust teaching methods to local characteristics, including worship facilities, community involvement, and flexible time management. With a relevant and adaptive approach, religious learning is likely to be more effective and build strong worship habits among students. Below is a statement related to the Religious Strategy in the Suburban Environment, as in the following interview table:

Table 3 Interview Results in Suburban Environment School

| No | Informants | Statement Descriptions |
|----|-----------------|---|
| 1 | A (IRE Teacher) | "The Dhuha prayer was implemented for class 6 only due to limited space and face-to-face meeting policies. For classes 1-5, we focus on teaching theory." |
| 2 | A (IRE Teacher) | " The habit of praying Dhuha is not a new program; this program has existed since 2015, and we continue it because it positively impacts fostering students' religiosity." |
| 3 | KS (Principal) | "We work with Islamic Religious Education teachers to develop policies related to student discipline in carrying out religious rituals at school. Guidance and counseling are provided for certain violations." |

The statement shows that the implementation of Dhuha prayer is only for grade 6 due to limited space, while grades 1-5 focus on theory. The Dhuha prayer program, which has been in place since 2015, is continued because of its positive impact on students' religiosity. Cooperation between the principal and Islamic Religious Education teachers in developing disciplinary policies and providing guidance and counseling also supports the implementation of worship in schools. The following observations also support the statement:

Table 4. Observation Result in Sub-Urban Environment School

| Documentation / Evidences | Observed Situations |
|---|---|
|  | <p>The second school is located in a suburban environment with a relaxed and comfortable school atmosphere surrounded by views of dunes. This environment has a positive impact on students' psyches.</p> <p>The school prayer room has a place for ablution, a display case for mukena, <i>sarongs</i>, prayer mats, and the Noble Quran. The prayer room is used for congregational Dhuha prayers, dhuhr prayers for grade 6, and other activities such as competition training.</p> <p>Dhuha prayer is performed in the congregation for class 6 before the lesson begins, led by the Religious Education teacher. Dhuhr prayer is also conducted in the congregation, with students bringing prayer equipment from home.</p> <p>Prayer is supervised using a liaison book, where students record prayers performed at school and home. Religious Education teachers and homeroom teachers supervise and guide implementation.</p> |
|  | <p>This book monitors daily prayer attendance, which is reported monthly to religious teachers. The goal is to accustom students to performing worship and ensure better mastery of worship.</p> |

Dhuha prayer in congregation at the second school shows that the school utilizes a calm suburban environment to support worship activities. The school prayer room, equipped with facilities such as a place for ablution, *mukena*, *sarong*, prayer mats, and the Noble Quran, functions as a location for Dhuha prayer in congregation, Dhuhr prayer for grade 6, and other activities. Dhuha prayer is performed in the congregation for grade 6 before lessons, with guidance from the Islamic Religious Education teacher. Worship supervision is carried out through a liaison book that records prayers at school and home, with the active role of the Islamic Religious Education teacher and homeroom teacher in providing guidance and ensuring

consistent implementation of worship. This approach demonstrates the integration of facilities, environment, and control systems to support effective learning of prayer worship in a suburban environment.

In the context of prayer worship learning strategies in suburban environments, the school applies an approach involving a liaison book as a control medium to ensure the implementation of prayer worship by students. This book allows daily monitoring of prayer attendance, which is submitted monthly to the religious teacher, aiming to get students used to it and achieve mastery of worship. This control model is strengthened by the involvement of parents, who supervise the practice of the five daily prayers at home and use a liaison book to record signed attendance. This approach reflects an adaptive learning strategy for suburban environments, where supervision at home and cooperation between schools and families play an essential role in effectively supporting the implementation of prayer worship.

3.3 Islamic Religious Learning Strategy in Rural Environment



The strategy for religious learning in rural areas requires specific adjustments considering the different contexts and conditions compared to urban environments. In rural areas, this strategy must consider the accessibility of worship facilities that may be limited, as well as the importance of the role of the community and parents in supporting the learning process. A practical approach must integrate existing facilities, utilize teaching methods relevant to the local context, and involve the community and family in forming consistent worship habits. Below is a statement related to religious learning in rural areas.

Tabel.4 Interview Result in Rural Environment School

| No | Informant | Statement Description |
|----|------------------|---|
| 1 | AR (IRE Teacher) | "We make Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers mandatory for grades 4, 5, and 6 in the school prayer room. Because most students are used to praying in the prayer room where they live, we feel helped by supervision." |
| 2 | AR (IRE Teacher) | "We teach prayer using lecture and hands-on methods. LCD projectors are only used for significant events, so teaching is mainly done directly in front of the class." |
| 3 | AR (IRE Teacher) | " Islamic Religious Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and duty teachers control the implementation of congregational prayer. We also provide educational sanctions for students who must arrive on time or attend congregational prayers." |
| 4 | AR (IRE Teacher) | " To strengthen supervision, we provide a control book that parents or religious teachers must fill in to evaluate whether students have performed the five daily prayers at home." |

Islamic Religious Education Teacher At the rural school, the learning strategy for praying in a rural environment involves implementing Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers for grades 4 to 6 in the school prayer room, utilizing the habits of students who are used to praying in the prayer room at home. Teaching is done through lectures and direct practice. At the same time, supervision of congregational prayers is carried out by Islamic Religious Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and on-duty teachers with educational sanctions for students who do not obey. The control book is filled in by parents or religious teachers as an additional evaluation to ensure the consistency of implementing the five daily prayers at home, reflecting the integration between teaching methods, supervision, and family involvement in learning to pray.

Table 5 Observation Result in Rural Environment School

| Documentation/Evidences | Observation Descriptions |
|---|--|
| <p>Musalla</p>  | <p>The third school is located at the foot of a mountain in a rural area. Most of the surrounding community work as farmers and farm laborers. The calm and quiet school environment supports a conducive learning atmosphere.</p> <p>The school prayer room is used for congregational Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers for students in grades 4, 5, and 6. It is also equipped with a place for ablution and a display case for students wearing <i>sarongs</i>, <i>mukena</i>, and the Al-Quran.</p> <p>Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers are performed in the congregation for grades 4, 5, and 6, led by the Islamic Religious Education teacher. Students are led directly by the Islamic Religious Education teacher and supervised by the homeroom teacher and the on-duty teacher.</p> <p>Supervision is carried out strictly, using a control book filled out by parents or religious teachers to ensure that students perform the five daily prayers at home. Educational sanctions are given to students who violate them.</p> <p>Religious Education learning in schools is integrated with Koran-reading activities in the surrounding environment, where Religious Education teachers also act as Koran-reading teachers. That strengthens students' understanding of readings and prayer movements.</p> |
| <p>The Control Book</p>  | <p>Parents and religious teachers fill the Ramadhan activity control book as those responsible for helping to monitor students' worship at home. That creates cooperation between schools, parents, and religious teachers to get used to and ensure students' mastery in performing prayers, readings, movements, and meanings.</p> |

On March 15, 2022, observations at the third school, located at the foot of a mountain with a calm and quiet rural environment, showed that the school prayer room functions as a place for congregational Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers for students in grades 4, 5, and 6. The prayer room has facilities such as a place for ablution, *sarong*, *mukena*, and the Noble Quran. Prayers are led by Religious Education teachers and supervised by homeroom teachers and on-duty teachers. Supervision is carried out strictly using a control book filled out by parents or religious teachers, with educational sanctions for students who do not attend prayers. Islamic Religious Learning is also integrated with religious recitation activities in the surrounding environment, where Islamic Religious.

Furthermore, the control book during Ramadan is filled out by parents and religious teachers responsible for students' spiritual activities at home. So, praying activities become a habit, as well as mastery of students in practicing prayer readings, prayer movements, and the meaning of prayers that have been done so far. That illustrates the cooperation between schools, parents, and religious teachers to supervise children while performing religious rituals at home.

3.4 Comparative Analysis of Islamic Religious Learning Strategies in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Environments

In urban environments, learning strategies show more intensive use of technology, such as LCD projectors and interactive learning media (e.g., the game "Snake and Ladder"). The primary

focus on using technology aims to make learning more interactive and exciting for students. In addition, space limitations are overcome by arranging for prayer to be carried out in turns, involving Islamic Religious Education teachers as imams to ensure that prayer practices are carried out correctly. This approach reflects an adaptation to the physical and time constraints often faced in dense urban environments.

In a suburban environment, school learning strategies rely more on traditional methods with little use of technology. The primary focus is on the habit of praying Dhuha for grade 6, while grades 1-5 emphasize theory. Supervision is carried out through a liaison book that records the implementation of prayers at school and home, with parents' involvement in monitoring their children's worship. This approach shows the importance of collaboration between schools and families in forming strong worship habits, even with limited facilities.

The strategy in rural environments emphasizes integration between learning at school and home, with the community's and parents' active involvement. Although facilities may be limited, the habit of praying already embedded in the community environment helps strengthen learning at school. Supervision is carried out strictly through control books filled out by parents or religious teachers, ensuring consistency in prayer practices. This approach reflects an adaptation to limited facilities by utilizing community and family support to support solid religious education.

Overall, the learning strategies in the three environments demonstrate a contextual and adaptive approach to their respective conditions. Technology and innovation are critical in urban environments, while collaboration between schools and families is the determinant in suburban environments. Despite limited resources, community and family involvement has ensured that worship is carried out correctly in rural environments. This comparison emphasizes the importance of adjusting learning strategies to the specific conditions of each environment to achieve optimal effectiveness in religious education. Such a flexible and adaptive approach is essential to addressing the challenges faced in each environment so that learning to pray can be carried out correctly and contribute to developing students' overall character. The following is a comparative table of learning strategies for praying in urban, suburban, and rural environments.

Tabel.6 Comparison of Islamic Religious Learning Strategies in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Environments Schools

| Aspect | Urban Environment School | Suburban Environment School | Rural Environment School |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Use of Technology | Intensive use of technology such as LCD projectors and interactive media (Snake and Ladder). | Minimal use of technology, focus on traditional methods. | The use of technology is minimal, relying more on lectures and direct practice. |
| Worship Facilities | The prayer room is in the middle of the building, equipped with a display case for prayer equipment. | The prayer room has an ablution area, <i>sarong</i> , <i>mukena</i> , and Al-Quran. | The prayer room has basic facilities such as a place for ablution and prayer equipment. |
| Learning methods | A combination of visual and practical methods, Dhuha prayer | Focus on theory for grades 1-5 and | Lectures and hands-on practice for grades 4-6, |

| Aspect | Urban Environment School | Suburban Environment School | Rural Environment School |
|---|--|---|---|
| | is mandatory for grades 4-6. | congregational Dhuha prayer for grade 6. | integrated with local Koran reading activities. |
| Supervision and Assessment | Dhuha prayers are performed alternately due to space limitations and monitored by the Islamic Religious Education teacher. | Supervision through a liaison book that records the implementation of prayers at school and home. | Strict supervision with control books filled in by parents or religious teachers and educational sanctions for those who do not comply. |
| Community and Family Involvement | Minimal family involvement, focus on school supervision. | Parental involvement in supervising prayer at home through a liaison book. | High involvement of the community and family in supporting the implementation of prayer services. |
| Challenge | Limited space and time for performing prayers simultaneously. | Space limitations hamper the implementation of congregational prayers for all classes. | Limited facilities, but helped by praying in a community environment. |
| Superiority | Interactive and engaging learning with the use of technology. | Combination of theory and practice with strong support from the family. | Strong integration between schools, families, and communities to support learning. |

4 Discussion

4.1 Islamic Religious Learning Strategy in Urban Environment Schools

The data from urban schools reveal a nuanced implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), emphasizing adaptive pedagogy and technological integration to meet the needs of students in fast-paced urban environments. The use of visual aids such as LCD projectors and PowerPoint presentations reflects the adoption of contextual learning theory[31], wherein religious concepts are embedded within familiar, accessible media to foster deeper student understanding. That aligns with the previous view that when religious education is delivered through relatable contexts, it enhances students' engagement and motivation[14], [25]. Students are introduced to foundational rituals, such as ablution, from grade 1 to establish early familiarity with prayer practices in a structured and visual manner.

The strategy reflects a constructivist approach, particularly by integrating interactive learning media such as the "Snake and Ladder" game[32]. This gamified model fosters collaborative learning and encourages active participation—a hallmark of student-centered education. Empirically, this approach has proven effective in mitigating student disengagement and reducing boredom, which can be prevalent in traditional didactic methods. These findings are consistent with studies that highlight the role of interactive and play-based religious education in improving students' conceptual grasp and positive attitudes toward religious practices[33], [34].

Another notable feature of the urban IRE strategy is its adaptation to spatial constraints, a common characteristic of dense metropolitan schools. The school ensures that all students receive adequate practice despite physical limitations by conducting prayers in shifts and employing rotational scheduling. The dual use of the prayer room and religious laboratory optimizes available space and underscores the school's effort to institutionalize worship as part of the daily routine. That reflects organizational flexibility, an essential factor for educational success in environments where infrastructure may not scale proportionally with student populations[35].

Lastly, the combination of routine prayer practices, supervision by IRE teachers, and formative assessments—such as skill-based evaluations and appreciation for discipline—contributes to a culture of religious habituation and accountability. The emphasis on building habits through daily *Dhuha* prayers for upper grades while gradually introducing prayer elements to younger students reveals a developmentally responsive strategy. This structured scaffolding of spiritual development aligns with research advocating for progressive, age-appropriate religious instruction[14], [36]. In conclusion, the urban school's strategy illustrates a sophisticated interplay between pedagogy, space management, and technological use, tailored to the urban context, and provides a model for integrating religious values.

4.2 Dynamics of Islamic Religious Learning Strategies in a Suburban School Environment

The data collected from the suburban school environment reveal a nuanced implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strategies shaped by spatial limitations and a community-oriented culture. A key empirical finding is the selective application of *Dhuha* prayer practices—restricted to grade 6 students due to infrastructural constraints. Meanwhile, theoretical instruction is prioritized for grades 1 to 5. This segmentation reflects a pragmatic adaptation to physical space and scheduling policies, aligning with the theory of contextual learning, which emphasizes the need to tailor instructional practices to each environment's specific conditions and capabilities. The continuation of the *Dhuha* prayer program since 2015 further highlights its perceived success in fostering religiosity among students, indicating that even minimal practical exposure to ritual worship can yield positive developmental outcomes when consistently integrated over time.

Integrating administrative and pedagogical roles through teacher-principal collaboration exemplifies a distributed leadership model within religious education[37]. The principal's involvement in crafting disciplinary policies, alongside the religious education teachers, indicates a school-wide commitment to instilling religious discipline[38]. It is further operationalized through guidance and counseling services, demonstrating the presence of supportive behavioral intervention frameworks. The role of school leadership in supporting religious routines institutionalizes prayer practices. It contributes to character development and behavioral regulation among students, reinforcing Islamic education's moral and spiritual goals in formal settings[39].

A critical feature of the suburban prayer strategy is using the liaison book as a monitoring tool that bridges school and home. This mechanism tracks student engagement with prayer practices and fosters accountability and consistency across learning environments. The involvement of IRE and homeroom teachers in overseeing the completion of these records suggests an interdisciplinary and multi-role approach to religious instruction. Moreover, by extending

supervision into the household domain, the liaison book operationalizes the theory of family-school partnership[40], affirming that educational effectiveness—particularly in moral and religious domains—is enhanced when parental engagement complements institutional efforts.

Finally, the prayer room's tranquil environment and supporting facilities, such as ablution areas and Qur'anic materials, underscore the significance of physical and emotional learning spaces in spiritual education. The suburban setting, marked by its calm and scenic backdrop, emerges as a contextual strength that supports focused worship and introspection[41]. This setting aligns with learning ecology theories, which recognize the role of environmental affordances in shaping student behavior and cognitive engagement[42], [43]. The school's ability to leverage this atmosphere to cultivate prayer habits illustrates that even without high-tech resources, effective religious instruction can be achieved through thoughtful adaptation, structural support, and a cohesive partnership between educators, administrators, and families.

3.3 Islamic Religious Learning Strategy in Rural Environment

Implementing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in rural environments is shaped by distinct contextual variables such as geography, cultural embeddedness, and infrastructural limitations. The findings strongly emphasize utilizing existing community practices—namely, students' familiarity with prayer rituals at home—as a foundation for school-based religious instruction. That aligns with the contextual learning theory, which posits that learning becomes more effective when closely connected to the learner's real-life experiences[44]. By making Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers mandatory for upper-grade students and integrating these practices within the school environment, teachers reinforce spiritual habits that are already socially and culturally ingrained. Such an approach reduces the pedagogical burden typically faced in less religiously active settings and fosters continuity between school and home religious practices[45].

Pedagogically, the teaching methods in rural schools rely heavily on direct instruction and practice-based learning, given the limited access to technology. Instruction is delivered primarily through lectures and practical demonstrations, supported occasionally by LCD projectors during special events. Despite the minimal use of digital media, prayer practices' consistent and embodied nature facilitates the internalization of religious knowledge. This strategy reflects experiential learning theory, emphasizing learning through action, reflection, and application[46]. Students are not merely recipients of doctrinal content but are actively involved in Islamic worship's physical and spiritual routines, which enhances retention and behavioral integration of religious values.

A critical feature of the rural IRE strategy is the integration of supervisory mechanisms involving school personnel and family members. Supervision is conducted collectively by IRE teachers, homeroom teachers, and on-duty staff, complemented by a control book monitored by parents and local religious teachers. This control book ensures accountability and fosters school-family-community partnerships—a key principle in holistic education frameworks. Such collaboration strengthens character formation and reinforces religious discipline beyond the classroom[47]. Moreover, including educational sanctions for students who neglect prayer practices introduces an element of behavioral conditioning aimed at instilling responsibility and reverence for religious obligations.

The data also highlight how the rural environment, with its tranquility and strong communal bonds, supports a conducive atmosphere for spiritual learning[48], [49]. The synergy between formal schooling and informal religious instruction—such as Qur'an reading conducted by the same teachers—demonstrates a culturally responsive pedagogy. This integration reflects a grassroots model of religious education that is deeply embedded in the socio-religious fabric of the community. As such, rural Islamic education is not merely compensating for material deficits but is effectively leveraging local cultural capital to sustain a robust model of religious character development. These insights underscore the importance of contextualizing educational strategies to the environmental realities of learners in order to optimize engagement, continuity, and long-term religious formation.

5 Conclusion

This research explored the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strategies, with a particular focus on prayer worship, across three geographically distinct elementary school environments—urban, suburban, and rural—in East Java, Indonesia. The study revealed that each setting applies a contextually adapted approach to religious learning shaped by local resources, cultural practices, and environmental conditions. Urban schools prioritized interactive learning facilitated by technology and adapted to spatial limitations through rotational scheduling. Suburban schools combined theoretical instruction with practical prayer experiences, relying heavily on structured collaboration with families through liaison books. Meanwhile, rural schools emphasized community integration, direct supervision, and familial participation in consistent prayer practices supported by locally embedded religious traditions.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings affirm the applicability of contextual learning theory across diverse educational settings. Each environment demonstrated that aligning instructional methods with students' lived experiences, familial involvement, and cultural values enhances religious engagement and character formation. Additionally, constructivist pedagogy and experiential learning theory elements were evident using interactive media, practical demonstrations, and consistent ritual practice. These pedagogical approaches not only deepened students' understanding of religious obligations but also fostered meaningful habituation of spiritual values, thereby supporting holistic character development.

In practical terms, the study emphasizes that effective Islamic religious education cannot rely on standardized strategies alone. Instead, educational policymakers, school leaders, and curriculum developers must adopt a flexible, adaptive approach that responds to the socio-geographical realities of each learning environment. Urban schools would benefit from further investment in educational technology and space optimization; suburban schools should continue strengthening school-family partnerships; and rural schools require sustained community support and localized resources. Future research may expand on these findings by incorporating longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to measure the long-term impact of prayer-based education on students' moral and spiritual development. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights into how geographical and cultural contexts can shape—and strengthen—religious pedagogy in Indonesia and beyond.

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