

# Implementation of the Contextual Learning Model in Developing Students' Religious Character at SMK Al Razi Sinar Harapan School, Medan Johor

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the contextual learning model in developing students' religious character at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor. The background of this research arises from the urgent need in education to present a learning model that is not only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward fostering students' religious character. The study employed a qualitative approach with a field study design, in which data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that the application of the contextual learning model enhances students' religious awareness by integrating religious values into daily learning activities. The main results include: (1) teachers successfully connected the learning material to students' real-life contexts, resulting in more consistent and reflective religious practices; and (2) contextual learning encouraged students to cultivate deeper religious experiences through collaborative activities and value-based projects. This study underscores the significance of contextual learning as an effective strategy for shaping the religious character of the younger generation.

**Keywords:** *Contextual Learning, Religious Character Implementation, SMK Al Razi Sinar Harapan*

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## Introduction

Education plays a strategic role in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses strong character [1]. In the context of education in Indonesia, schools serve as the front line in realizing the national education goals, namely to educate the life of the nation while simultaneously shaping dignified character and civilization [2]. Therefore, school-based learning should not merely be directed toward cognitive achievement but also toward the cultivation of students' attitudes, values, and morality [3].

One of the most important dimensions of character formation is the reinforcement of religious values. Religious character functions as a moral and spiritual foundation that guides students' behavior in daily life [4]. In the midst of globalization, the rapid flow of foreign cultural influences often affects the mindset and lifestyle of adolescents, leading to a degradation of religious values. This condition requires a learning strategy capable of effectively and contextually internalizing religious values into students [5].

The Contextual Teaching and Learning model emerges as a relevant approach to address this challenge [6]. Contextual Teaching and Learning emphasizes the connection between subject matter and students' real-life experiences [7]. Through this strategy, students not only learn concepts theoretically but also understand the relevance of knowledge in everyday life [8]. Within the framework of Islamic education, Contextual Teaching and Learning has great potential to link religious teachings with students' daily experiences, making it easier for them to internalize religious values [9].

The implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning in vocational high schools carries its own urgency. Vocational schools are often perceived as being more oriented toward job skills, leaving character education—particularly religious character—receiving less emphasis. In fact, graduates of vocational schools directly enter the workforce and society, where work ethic, integrity, and religiosity become increasingly essential. Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School in Medan Johor represents one such institution that combines vocational education with the strengthening of religious values. However, this effort faces several challenges, ranging from the limited teaching methods that adequately address students' affective domains to the lack of awareness among some students in practicing religious teachings. Therefore, this study seeks to examine in greater depth how the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning at this school contributes to the development of students' religious character.

Previous studies have shown that Contextual Teaching and Learning can enhance learning motivation, social awareness, and critical thinking skills. However, research specifically focusing on its application in strengthening religious character at vocational high schools remains limited. This creates a research gap that must be addressed, namely the extent to which contextual learning can shape students' religiosity that is not only cognitive but also reflected in real attitudes and behaviors [7].

Conceptually, Contextual Teaching and Learning comprises seven main components: constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment. When linked to the reinforcement of religious character, each component can serve as a tool for habituating values. For instance, reflection can foster spiritual awareness, while the learning community encourages cooperation and mutual reminders in practicing goodness. Thus, Contextual Teaching and Learning has the potential to be an effective instrument for developing students' religious character.

The multicultural social context of Medan Johor also serves as an important background for this study. Vocational high school students interact not only within the school environment but also in a heterogeneous society. Strengthening religious character through Contextual Teaching and Learning can help students navigate diverse social realities while fostering tolerance and moderation. This aligns with the vision of national education, which emphasizes harmony among citizens without eroding religious identity.

In addition, this research is relevant to the government's policy direction on Character Education Strengthening. One of the core pillars of character education reinforcement is religiosity, which is expected to shape a generation that is faithful, devoted, and noble in character. Thus, this study contributes not only theoretically but also practically in supporting national education policy.

Based on the above discussion, this research focuses on examining the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning in developing students' religious character at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor. This focus is expected to provide a concrete picture of effective learning strategies in nurturing students' religiosity and to serve as a reference for other schools seeking to integrate Contextual Teaching and Learning with character education. Furthermore, this study contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic education theory that emphasizes the synergy between academic learning and the formation of noble character.

## Literature Review

The contextual learning model, or Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), is an approach that emphasizes the connection between learning material and students' real-life experiences [10]. Contextual Teaching and Learning assists students in constructing meaning by linking academic knowledge with the contexts of their daily lives [11]. Meanwhile, the development of religious character constitutes a central focus in Islamic education, as it is emphasized that character is shaped through the habituation of values in everyday practice [8].

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Contextual Teaching and Learning in developing various aspects of students' skills. It has been shown to enhance learning motivation and awareness of moral values. Within the framework of Islamic education, Contextual Teaching and Learning is considered highly relevant, as it facilitates students not only in cognitively understanding religious texts but also in applying them through real-life behavior. Therefore, this study focuses on the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning in the context of vocational secondary education as a means to develop students' religious character [9].

## Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a field study design. The research was conducted at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and students, direct classroom observations, and the analysis of school documents related to religious activities. The interviews were conducted between late June and early August 2025, involving five teachers of both general and religious subjects as well as ten students from grades X and XI. Data analysis was carried out descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was strengthened by source and method triangulation [12].

## Results

### 4.1 Integration of Religious Values in Contextual Teaching and Learning

The findings of this study show that teachers at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor, have systematically implemented the Contextual Teaching and Learning model in both Islamic Religious Education and general subjects. Observations conducted in late June 2025 revealed that teachers began lessons by linking the subject matter to daily religious activities, such as discipline in prayer, honesty in trade, and responsibility for maintaining the school environment. This approach enabled students to feel closer to the material, as it was not merely theoretical but directly connected to their lives.

An interview with Mr. H, an Islamic Religious Education teacher, emphasized that the contextual approach helps students understand that religion is not limited to doctrinal aspects but is manifested in everyday practice. According to him, *"When students see the connection*

*between lessons and their own lives, religious awareness grows more naturally. For instance, I connect the subject of noble character with their daily behavior at school, so that they do not only know it in theory but also become accustomed to practicing it."*

The integration of religious values was evident in students' worship habits. Observations in early July indicated an increase in student participation in *shalat dhuha* and Qur'an recitation before lessons began. Students were not only physically present but also participated with greater awareness. Some even admitted that they continued these practices at home, demonstrating the sustainable internalization of religious values.

One grade XI student, identified as A, stated during an interview that he felt more disciplined after engaging in context-based learning. He remarked, *"I have become more aware that performing prayers on time is not only a religious obligation but also an exercise in discipline that is useful at school and later in the workplace."* This statement illustrates that students are able to link religious teachings with relevant life skills, reflecting one of the key objectives of Contextual Teaching and Learning.

Contextual learning was also applied by teachers to instill the value of honesty. For example, in economics lessons, teachers connected the topic of business ethics with the Prophet Muhammad's honesty in trade. Teachers not only provided examples but also assigned students to conduct small-scale observations in their home or local market environment. The students' findings were then discussed in class and reflected upon in a religious framework. This activity enabled students to understand that honesty is not only a moral value but also an integral part of worship.

The integration of religious values was further reinforced through reflective strategies following lessons. Teachers regularly asked students to record their religious experiences in personal journals. Several students admitted that they were more motivated to maintain consistency in worship because they anticipated the reflection being discussed in class. Teachers then connected these reflections with Islamic values, thereby creating continuity between students' personal experiences and classroom learning.

By mid-July, the researcher observed that students were becoming more active in providing examples of religious behavior during classroom discussions. They began reminding one another of the importance of praying before activities, maintaining cleanliness as part of faith, and helping classmates who were struggling with their studies. This indicates the development of religious attitudes nurtured by contextual learning, which emphasizes the connection between religious values and practical actions.

Another teacher, Ms. S, who teaches Indonesian language, also integrated religious values into literary materials. She asked students to analyze short stories with religious themes, focusing on moral messages. According to her, *"Through literary analysis, students not only learn about language but also evaluate characters' behavior from a religious perspective. From there, they learn to distinguish which behaviors are worthy of emulation and which are not."* This strategy broadened students' understanding that religious values can be embedded in various subjects, not only in Islamic Religious Education.

It is important to note that the success of integrating religious values into contextual learning did not rely solely on teachers but was also supported by the broader school environment. The principal consistently promoted a religious culture through practices such as greetings, collective prayers, and the habituation of congregational prayer. This environment provided a conducive space for students to connect the values learned in class with routine school activities, thereby strengthening the internalization process.

Overall, the findings of this research indicate that the integration of religious values through the Contextual Teaching and Learning model at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor, has been effective. Students not only acquired religious knowledge cognitively but also experienced and practiced it in daily life. The linking of lessons with real-life contexts emerged as a key factor in fostering students' religious awareness. Thus,

Contextual Teaching and Learning proves to be a strategic approach in developing religious character, particularly within vocational secondary school environments.

#### 4.2 Collaborative Activities and the Strengthening of Religious Character

The findings indicate that the implementation of contextual learning at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor, was not limited to the integration of religious values into subject matter but also extended to collaborative student activities. These activities were designed for students to work in groups on tasks or projects with religious content. Through this approach, students not only learned to understand religious concepts individually but also internalized religious values through cooperation, mutual reminders, and discussion.

In early August 2025, the Indonesian language teacher, Ms. R, assigned a project in which students were asked to write short stories with religious themes. The students were divided into small groups to address moral issues such as honesty, responsibility, and brotherhood. An interview with one student, identified as S, revealed that the group work encouraged them to remind one another about the importance of maintaining consistent worship practices. He stated, *"We often discussed and even reminded each other if someone was reluctant to pray. It felt more comfortable to remind one another since the group project itself was related to religious values."*

Researcher observations during the project showed that students were more active in discussions, with even previously passive students contributing ideas when the discussion topics were connected to religious values. This situation demonstrated that collaborative activities fostered broader participation. Working together in a religious context created a positive learning atmosphere while simultaneously strengthening solidarity among students.

Mr. H, a Religious Education teacher, also emphasized the importance of collaboration in spiritual activities. In an interview, he stated, *"We accustom the students to learning in groups, whether memorizing prayers, reading the Qur'an, or discussing hadith. In this way, they learn to help one another. Religious character develops more quickly when supported and supervised by peers."* This statement highlights that collaborative, context-based learning strengthens religious solidarity among students.

Beyond intramural activities, the strengthening of religious character through collaboration was also evident in extracurricular *Rohis* (Islamic Spirituality) activities. Observations in mid-July showed that students did not merely participate in teacher-led sessions but began taking the initiative to organize activities such as communal prayers, Qur'an recitation, and religious discussions. This illustrates how collaboration enabled students to act as active agents in religious practice rather than passive recipients of instruction.

Another student, identified as M, remarked, *"When Rohis activities are done together, we feel closer. It's not only about learning religion but also about caring for one another."* This statement reflects how collaborative activities not only reinforced religious understanding but also fostered social bonds rooted in religiosity. Such interactions became part of the natural internalization of religious character.

Collaboration was also shown to enhance students' sense of responsibility. In group activities, teachers emphasized a clear division of roles so that each member had specific tasks. When linked to religious values, this responsibility was understood as part of fulfilling a trust (*amanah*). Several students admitted that they worked more seriously on group assignments because they believed negligence in completing tasks equated to neglecting the religious values being studied.

In a project-based learning activity in grade XI, the teacher asked students to create campaign posters with the theme *"Islamic Youth."* This activity required cooperative creativity and the contextualization of religious values in daily life. The posters produced did not merely call for prayer but also conveyed social messages such as maintaining cleanliness, respecting parents, and avoiding negative peer associations. These works were displayed at school, giving students a sense of pride while simultaneously serving as a medium of *dakwah* among peers.

A key supporting factor in the success of these collaborative activities was the role of teachers as facilitators. Teachers provided general guidance but allowed students freedom to be creative according to their understanding. This strategy aligns with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning, which positions students as active subjects in the learning process. Consequently, the formation of religious character was not imposed through one-sided doctrinal instruction but emerged from students' collective experiences in real contexts.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that collaborative activities integrated with the Contextual Teaching and Learning model effectively strengthened students' religious character at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor. Collaboration encouraged students to remind one another, share religious experiences, and develop responsibility toward both their groups and religious values. As a result, religious character formation occurred not only in the classroom but also extended into extracurricular activities and students' social lives. Thus, collaborative activities serve as one of the main pillars of the successful implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning in this school.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning model at Al Razi Sinar Harapan Private Vocational School, Medan Johor, has proven effective in developing students' religious character. Teachers successfully connected subject matter with real-life contexts, making it easier for students to internalize religious values. Furthermore, collaborative activities within contextual learning encouraged students to cultivate deeper and more sustainable religious experiences. Hence, contextual learning can serve as a relevant strategy for vocational secondary schools to integrate academic achievement with the formation of religious character. This study also underscores the importance of continuous support from schools and parents so that the development of students' religious character is not confined to the classroom but carried into their daily lives.

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