

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING WITH A REALITY APPROACH FOR SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT SLB PUTRA MANDIRI LAMONGAN

Research Article

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Abstract. This study is entitled "Efforts to Improve Islamic Character Education through Individual Counseling with a Reality Approach for Seventh-Grade Students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan." The purpose of this study is to improve students' Islamic character education, particularly in obeying school rules, through individual counseling using a reality approach for seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan. The research method used in this study is Action Research, which consists of two cycles. Each cycle includes the following stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Based on the results of the action research, it can be concluded that individual counseling with a reality approach is effective in improving Islamic character education among seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan. Furthermore, the researcher recommends: (1) Teachers who experience similar difficulties are encouraged to apply individual counseling with a reality approach to improve students' Islamic character education. (2) To achieve optimal results, teachers are expected to design individual counseling with a reality approach that is more engaging and varied

Keywords:

Keywords: Islamic Character Education, Services, Behavioral Contract

Introduction

In the current era of globalization, Indonesia has entered a freemarket system that allows individuals from various countries to enter and engage in activities without being restricted by citizenship status. This situation demands that every Indonesian citizen possess a high level of competitiveness in facing global competition. A fundamental competency that significantly contributes to the development of individual quality is the cultivation of Islamic character education.

Islamic character education represents an individual's behavioral expression of obedience and adherence to established norms and regulations, primarily driven by internal awareness rather than external pressure or coercion. However, the reality on the ground shows that the practice of Islamic character education is often still based on a coercive approach or rules that tend to be restrictive. This situation has given rise to the perception among some communities that Islamic character education is synonymous with rigidity and instills fear.

In a broader context, character education is a crucial concern in Indonesia, particularly in addressing the behavioral crisis facing the younger generation. Education is the process of developing each person's ability to behave better. This is consistent with the provisions outlined in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that education is intended to develop human potential by fostering faith and devotion to the Creator, nurturing noble character,

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broadening knowledge, enhancing skills, strengthening personal resilience, and shaping responsible individuals who are prepared to be accountable for their actions in life. (Lusi Meilani dkk 2025).

Islamic character education can be understood as a systematic process of shaping individual personality and behavior based on Islamic values. The primary goal of this education is to develop students' potential so they grow into faithful, pious, and noble individuals capable of fulfilling their role as caliphs on earth. This concept highlights the internalization of essential Islamic values, including honesty, justice, compassion, responsibility, and wisdom, as guiding principles to be consistently upheld in all aspects of life.

Furthermore, the process of Islamic character education is not solely focused on cognitive development, but also encompasses the balanced and integrated enhancement of affective and psychomotor dimensions, enabling the formation of a holistic and well-rounded personality. (Murdianto 2024).

SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan is a special education institution located in Lamongan Regency. Students attending this institution generally come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with some students from families with better economic conditions. This situation indicates the heterogeneity of the student population at this school. This diversity is reflected in various aspects, such as learning patterns, social interactions, and adherence to established school regulations.

Like most educational institutions, SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan has a set of regulations that all students must adhere to. These provisions are designed to support student success in the learning process throughout their education at the school. The regulations apply not only to academic activities but also to aspects of worship and social interaction between individuals. This is intended to foster and internalize the values of Islamic character education in various aspects of students' lives, both within the school environment and in the broader community.

However, these indicators are not yet fully evident among students at Putra Mandiri Special School in Lamongan, particularly in seventh grade. This is evidenced by the continued presence of various disciplinary violations, particularly those related to time management. One of the most frequent violations is lateness to school, with an average of 1.6% of students being late each day. Furthermore, at the start of the 2026/2027 school year, approximately 25% of students were absent without a valid reason.

Another issue that emerged was the low level of student discipline in participating in classroom learning activities. A number of students still arrived late to class, even after the lesson had begun. During the learning process, some students did not show optimal engagement, such as talking with peers or engaging in other activities such as drawing while the teacher was explaining the material. Based on researchers' observations, approximately 30% of students often arrived late to class, claiming to be in the bathroom. Furthermore, when school hours had begun, some students were reluctant to enter the classroom and tended to delay participating in learning activities, simply waiting for the order to enter the classroom.

The level of student responsibility at Putra Mandiri Special School Lamongan, particularly in relation to learning activities, remains relatively low. This condition is evident from the students' inconsistent study habits, as most of them do not have a structured study schedule and demonstrate limited ability to independently manage their learning activities outside the school environment. Based on previous findings, the implementation of individual counseling services in relation to students' self-understanding revealed that only approximately five students were able to organize and manage their learning activities in a clear and systematic.

Furthermore, students have not been able to utilize their free time effectively, as it is often spent on less productive activities. The researcher's observations suggest that the insufficient internalization of Islamic character education among students contributes to the emergence of various negative behaviors, including low learning motivation, a tendency to procrastinate in completing assignments, tardiness in attending school, limited habits of greeting and praying, and inadequate social interaction patterns, particularly in the use of social media.

Based on the theoretical foundations presented and the empirical phenomena observed at Putra Mandiri Special School in Lamongan, it can be concluded that the low level of Islamic character education among students is largely influenced by self-awareness. This indicates that the problems that arise are not solely caused by external factors but are also closely related to the lack of internalization of values within students. Therefore, systematic and sustained efforts are needed to foster Islamic character education based on the intrinsic awareness of each individual, so that the resulting behavioral changes are more profound and sustainable.

One effort that can be made to improve Islamic character education in students is through the implementation of guidance. Guidance is an intervention aimed at individuals with the goal of helping them achieve independence in various aspects of life. In this context, one relevant type of service is content mastery, which can be utilized as a means to develop and strengthen Islamic character education in students. "Content mastery services are services that have the function of enabling someone to master certain content to increase insight and understanding, direct attitude assessments, master certain methods or habits to fulfill their needs and overcome their problems" (Prayitno, 2004: 2).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) differs from religious studies in general because of its specific focus on Islamic teachings. According to Mustofa, the primary goal of this learning is to strengthen students' religious identity and equip them with a solid understanding of the principles contained in Islam.⁶ Through a specially designed curriculum, students are introduced to various aspects of religious life such as worship, morality, sharia laws, religious history, and universal values held by Muslims throughout the world (Rahmadani 2024).

The primary objective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not solely to transmit religious knowledge, but also to cultivate individuals who demonstrate faith, piety, and noble character in their interactions with others and the surrounding environment. However, in today's rapidly advancing digital era, the implementation of PAI learning encounters various emerging challenges that require serious consideration. Technological progress has brought substantial changes across multiple aspects of life, including the field of education. This accelerated digital transformation compels educational systems to continuously adapt in order to maintain relevance. Furthermore, the widespread use of the internet, social media, and diverse technology-based learning platforms has significantly reshaped the way students access information and comprehend religious concepts (Prayetno 2025).

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) over recent decades has brought substantial changes across various sectors, including education. In the digital era, the integration of technology into the learning process has become an inevitable necessity. As an essential component of the educational system, Islamic education cannot be separated from this development. The utilization of technology offers significant opportunities to enhance learning effectiveness, broaden access to educational resources, and foster more efficient interactions between teachers and students (Isti'ana 2024).

The development of religious education, especially for children and adolescents, is influenced by many factors, including the family environment, social community, and advances in technology and information (Purwaningsih 2014).

Therefore, it is essential for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to strengthen their competencies in educational technology in order to maximize the potential of digital tools for creating more innovative, engaging, and relevant learning experiences (Harahap 2025).

Integrated education services refer to an educational system that provides children with special needs the opportunity to learn alongside their peers in mainstream schools. Through this integrated approach, children with special needs and regular students participate in the learning process together within the same educational environment (Jati Rinakri Atmaja 2018).

Inclusive education is an educational concept that is needed in learning at SLB which does not question the differences in children that are not obstacles, but instead accepts children with all their differences, especially those with special needs in their learning activities (Sururin 2022).

Every child possesses unique characteristics, and these differences serve as strengths that support the development of their individual potential. The fundamental principle of inclusive education is the belief that all children, without exception, are capable of learning. The learning process itself is a collaborative responsibility shared by teachers, parents, and the wider community. Therefore, the successful implementation of inclusive education requires shifts in mindset, technical adjustments, supportive policies, cultural transformation, effective classroom management, and the consistent application of adaptation principles (Arriani 2021).

According to the Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education issued by the Directorate of PSLB (2004: 6–32), each category of disability is described briefly. Children with visual impairments are those who experience partial or total loss of vision and, despite the use of specialized assistive devices, still require special educational services. Meanwhile, children with hearing impairments are individuals who have lost part or all of their hearing ability, resulting in limitations in verbal communication, and although supported by hearing aids, they continue to need specialized educational assistance (Amka 2020).

Islamic Religious Education holds a vital role in shaping the character and moral values of Muslim individuals. However, alongside the rapid advancement of digital technology, new challenges have emerged in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning in the modern era (Riyanto & Hastuti, 2017). However, with the awareness of the importance of religious, moral and social ethical values in the life of this nation, there is no other media that is better than education, both formal and informal. (Mukhibat, 2016). Sebagai contoh yaitu Wilayah Banyumas sebagai salah satu wilayah di Indonesia has a rich culture and strong religious traditions, but also needs to adapt to technological advances to maintain the relevance and appeal of learning for the younger generation (Muhamad Slamet Yahya 2023).

Therefore, based on the various perspectives presented above, character education can be understood as a fundamental form of education that instills moral values and positive habits acquired through the family environment, educational institutions, and the broader social context. The roles of parents, teachers, society, and the state are essential in supporting the development of good character in individuals, particularly students, through both formal and informal educational processes (Fadilah 2021)

The digital age, with all its complexities and challenges, demands a more innovative and integrative approach to character education. Today's young generation faces unique challenges such as overexposure to social media, fake news, cyberbullying, and online peer pressure. All of this requires critical skills and moral strength, which must be instilled from an early age. Character education in the digital era extends beyond the teaching of moral and ethical values; it also aims to prepare students to become responsible digital citizens. This includes fostering digital ethics, such as respecting online privacy, recognizing and addressing misinformation, and utilizing technology in an ethical and productive manner. Islamic values that emphasize honesty, generosity, sincerity, and steadfastness can serve as a strong foundation for fostering resilient and adaptive character in the digital age. Therefore, this study explores how Islamic education can contribute significantly to character education, particularly in addressing the unique challenges of the digital age. By understanding the importance of character education, we can help shape a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also morally and emotionally strong (Eryandi 2023).

It is also recognized that there are still many areas for RA teachers to improve, particularly regarding classroom learning. Problems include a lack of learning media, limited variety of methods, and a lack of competence among RA teachers (Hidayatulloh et al. 2017).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policies also need to consider student diversity in facing the digital era. With differing access to technology, not all students have equal opportunities to learn in the same ways. Therefore, it is crucial for education policies to create an inclusive system, where all students, including those from low-income backgrounds, can access quality religious education. Furthermore, in formulating education policies, collaboration between the government, schools, and the community is essential. All stakeholders must be involved in the policy development process to accommodate the needs and expectations of all parties. With effective collaboration, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policies can be more effective in addressing the challenges faced in the digital era (Maulindawati Ritonga 2024).

Guidance and counseling skills are fundamental foundations that play a crucial role in shaping individuals, communities, and even the world. Guidance and counseling is a process involving professionals to help individuals face life's challenges, overcome psychological obstacles, and develop their full potential. In the realm of guidance, skills go beyond simply directing someone toward a desired goal. In other words, the skills required include the ability to listen empathetically, open mutually beneficial lines of communication, and carefully read verbal and nonverbal cues. A skilled counselor will be able to build a strong bond of trust with clients, create a safe environment, and uphold the principle of confidentiality that allows clients to feel comfortable speaking without fear or embarrassment (Wibowo 2022).

The author implements individual services to strengthen students' Islamic character education because the author wants to foster Islamic character education that stems from the understanding of each student. Guidance and counseling services are implemented with the aim of providing services, benefits, or certain advantages to individuals who use the service. Therefore, the usefulness, benefits, or services obtained from a service are the result of the implementation of the intended service function. This means that the function of a service can be determined by examining the usefulness, benefits, or advantages it can provide. A service can be

said to be dysfunctional if it does not demonstrate usefulness or does not provide certain benefits or advantages (Suhertina, n.d.).

The problems of Islamic Character Education faced by students of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan must be understood and resolved individually. The implementation of individual guidance can be done gradually and eliminate each individual. In line with the opinion of Prayitno (2004: 8), namely: "Content mastery services are generally held directly (directive) and face to face with a classical, group, or individual format while still providing touches on the personality and humanity aspects of service participants (especially the affective aspects, enthusiasm, attitudes, values and morals)".

The development of Islamic character education in individuals is influenced by various factors, including the use of educational tools to influence, direct, foster, and shape behavior in accordance with Islamic values. Furthermore, the presence of role models also plays a crucial role in this character formation process. Therefore, the researcher selected individual counseling services based on the reality approach as a strategic effort to address the challenges associated with strengthening students' Islamic character education.

The ultimate objective of this study is to examine the efforts to enhance students' Islamic character education following the implementation of individual counseling services based on the reality approach, thereby determining the effectiveness of the intervention in shaping behaviors that align with Islamic values.

Religious guidance and counseling fundamentally constitute spiritual and psychological assistance designed to strengthen an individual's faith and devotion to God, enabling them to cope more effectively with life's challenges. These challenges may involve occupational, familial, educational, social, and personal issues, including those directly related to one's religious beliefs (Hidayanti and Hidayanti 2013).

Meanwhile, children with special needs require educational services that differ from those provided to other children due to the learning and developmental difficulties they may encounter. Consequently, they need educational approaches that are specifically adapted to their individual learning needs in order to support the optimal development of their human potential (Zuhdi 2024).

Parents play a crucial role in shaping the character, attitudes, and behavior of children with intellectual disabilities at home. In addition to parents, schools also play a crucial role in meeting the developmental needs of children with special needs. (Eva Lailatul 2024). Therefore, humans must continue to seek and study knowledge to live their lives to the fullest. One important area for parents and early childhood educators to understand is learning about children with special needs (Isroini et al. 2024).

On the other hand, parents make various efforts to ensure that their children with special needs are able to live independently and gain acceptance within society. Children with special needs and intellectual disabilities have below-average IQs, which makes it difficult for them to absorb learning (Nur and Nurdin 2024).

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen, and every individual has the opportunity to develop their potential and actively participate in society, including children with special needs. For these children, education is not merely a necessity but also a crucial foundation for securing better future opportunities (Yanah 2024).

Everyone has the right to receive an education according to their abilities, including children with disabilities. Smart children are considered to be those who

have demonstrated academic success and educational achievements. Children with disabilities or learning problems are generally considered less intelligent. However, many people still assume that children with below-average intellectual abilities are incapable of achieving meaningful accomplishments. In fact, the primary objective of special pedagogy in special schools is to maximize their potential, enabling them to develop independence and adapt effectively to their environment (Aini and Harsiwi 2024).

By nature, every human being has different needs, including children with special needs. One such need is education. The hope is that once children with special needs are met, they will learn to care for themselves and reduce their dependence on others (Azmi et al. 2025).

The implementation of good counseling services not only focuses on intellectual values but also on social and emotional empowerment and resilience. In schools, counseling services include individual guidance, therapy, socializing, and fostering positive thinking for student growth and development (Syafira, Novaliza, and Restary 2025).

Based on the analysis of the profile of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, preliminary study findings, and a review of various relevant research literature, the researcher concluded that the level of Islamic character education among students is still relatively low, so that targeted efforts are needed to improve it. In this case, individual counseling services are seen as an alternative that can be used to help individuals develop and master various content related to character formation. Therefore, these services are suspected to be effective in improving Islamic character education for students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan.

Despite the growing literature on character education in Indonesian schools, there remains a notable research gap concerning the specific application of individual counseling with a reality approach in Special Education Schools (SLB), particularly for students with special needs. Most prior studies have focused on regular school settings or employed classical classroom-based guidance formats, leaving the effectiveness of individualized, reality-based interventions at the SLB level largely unexplored. Furthermore, empirical studies that systematically measure pre- and post-intervention levels of Islamic character education through validated percentage criteria in a CAR design at SLB institutions remain scarce in the existing literature.

The novelty of the present study lies in its focused examination of individual counseling using a reality approach as an intervention strategy within the context of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, a special education institution serving students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Unlike previous studies that addressed character education in general or inclusive school settings, this research specifically targets students with special needs and operationalizes Islamic character education improvement through a structured two-cycle CAR design with measurable behavioral outcomes. This study thus contributes an empirical, context-specific understanding of how reality-based counseling can serve as an effective mechanism for internalizing Islamic values in special needs learners.

Based on the foregoing explanation, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled "Efforts to Improve Islamic Character Education through Individual Counseling with a Reality Approach for Seventh-Grade Students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan".

Method

Research Setting

This study was conducted at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, Lamongan Regency, East Java Province, during the 2025/2026 academic year. SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan has three study groups/classrooms and relatively limited facilities, including an inadequate library, a science laboratory, a computer laboratory, and other supporting facilities. The school is staffed by nine teachers and two educational support personnel.

Research Object

The research subjects were seventh-grade students of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, Lamongan Regency, East Java, totaling five students, consisting of three male students and two female students.

Research Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of three months, from July to September 2025. The research focused on Akhlaq (morality) and Islamic Character Education. The study was designed to consist of two cycles, with each cycle involving one meeting.

Data analysis

This research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design with cycles. In analyzing the research data, the researcher used descriptive percentage analysis techniques to determine the level of students' Islamic character education before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the treatment in the form of individual counseling using a symbolic reality approach. The formula used to calculate the descriptive percentage is as follows :

$$N = R / SM \times 100\%$$

Where :

N = Percentage score

R = Actual score obtained

SM = Ideal score (Purwanto 2010)

The percentage scores obtained were then compared with the percentage criteria in order to draw conclusions. The steps for determining the percentage criteria are as follows :

Table 1.1 Criteria for Assessing the Level of Students' Islamic Character Education

Number	Name
85% - 100 %	Very High
70% - 85%	High
55% - 70%	Moderate
40% - 55%	Low
25% - 40%	Very Low

Results

Initial Condition

Preparation

Based on the objective of this study, which is to determine the condition of Islamic Character Education at the school prior to the implementation of Individual Counseling using the Reality Approach, a test was administered to students before the treatment was given.

Implementation

The implementation of the action was carried out on Thursday, July 5, 2025, from 07:00 to 09:00 WIB. The service activities were conducted in three stages: the preliminary activity, the main activity, and the closing activity. The time allocated for the preliminary activity was 10 minutes, while the main activity was allocated 90 minutes, and the closing activity was allocated 20 minutes.

Implementation

In the preliminary activities, the teacher carried out three activities, namely: (1) greeting the students and checking their attendance, (2) conducting an ice-breaking activity in the form of singing, and (3) exploring students' prior knowledge and linking it to the learning material to be taught next.

Based on the test results, an overall picture shows that the level of Islamic Character Education at the school is in the moderate category, with a percentage of 66.25%.

The score of 66.25%, when reviewed based on the criteria table for the level of Islamic Character Education presented in Chapter III, falls into the moderate category. In other words, it can be stated that students' Islamic Character Education, as viewed from the aspects of understanding applicable regulations, having a good mental attitude, and demonstrating earnestness, is in a fairly good condition.

Observation

The following are the results of observations from the Islamic Character Education scale at the school before Individual Counseling with the Reality Approach was implemented.

Table 1.2. Initial Condition

Research			
Number	Name	Score	Category
1	Vallentino Wesley	60	Moderate
2	Andin Lintang	80	High
3	Alfat Nur Faizin	70	Moderate
4	Raka Wisnu	60	Moderate
5	Khalimah Nur Intan	70	Moderate
	Total	340	
	Average	68,00	Moderate

Reflection

Based on Table 1.2, it can be seen that before the implementation of Individual Counseling using the Reality Approach, among the five Grade VII students of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, one student (20%) was in the high category and four students (80%) were in the moderate category in terms of Islamic Character Education. There were no students found to have Islamic Character Education levels in the very high, low, or very low categories.

Description of Cycle I

Preparation

Based on the objectives of this study, which aim to identify the condition of Islamic Character Education among students before the implementation of individual counseling with a reality approach, a pre-test was administered to the students prior to the treatment.

Implementation

The implementation of the action was carried out on Thursday, August 7, 2025, from 07:00 to 09:00 a.m. (WIB). The service activities were conducted in three stages: the preliminary activity, the core activity, and the closing activity. The time allocated for the preliminary activity was 10 minutes, while 90 minutes were allocated for the core activity, and 20 minutes were allocated for the closing activity.

During the preliminary activity, the teacher carried out three activities: (1) greeting the students and checking attendance, (2) conducting ice-breaking activities in the form of singing, and (3) exploring students' prior knowledge and linking it to the learning material to be taught. Based on the results of the pre-test, the overall level of Islamic Character Education at the school was categorized as moderate, with a percentage of 66.25%. According to the criteria table for the level of Islamic Character Education, a score of 66.25% falls into the moderate category. In other words, the students' Islamic character education—viewed from aspects of understanding school regulations, positive mental attitudes, and earnestness—was in a fairly good condition.

Implementation

The following are the results of observations from the Islamic Character Education scale at the school before the implementation of individual counseling with a reality approach.

Table 1.3. Condition of Cycle I

Research			
Number	Name	Score	Category
1	Vallentino Wesley	60	Moderate
2	Andin Lintang	80	High
3	Alfat Nur Faizin	70	Moderate
4	Raka Wisnu	60	Moderate
5	Khalimah Nur Intan	70	Moderate
	Total	340	
	Average	68,00	Moderate

Reflection

From Table 1.3, it can be seen that before the implementation of individual counseling using a symbolic reality approach, among the five seventh-grade students

of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, one student (20%) was in the high category and four students (80%) were in the moderate category in terms of Islamic character education. No students were found to be in the very high, low, or very low categories.

Description of Cycle II

Preparation

Based on the results of Cycle I, in order to achieve the objective of this study—namely, to identify the condition of students' Islamic character education before the implementation of individual counseling with a reality approach—a test was administered to the students prior to the treatment.

Implementation

The implementation of the action was carried out on Thursday, September 4, 2025, from 07:00 to 09:00 a.m. (WIB). The service activities were conducted in three stages: the preliminary activity, the main activity, and the closing activity. The time allocation for the preliminary activity was 10 minutes, while the main activity was allocated 90 minutes, and the closing activity was allocated 20 minutes.



Figure 1.1 Guidance and Counseling Activities

During the preliminary activities, the teacher carried out three main activities: (1) greeting the students and checking attendance, (2) conducting ice-breaking activities in the form of singing, and (3) exploring students' prior knowledge and linking it to the lesson material to be taught next. The ice-breaking activities were conducted by the teacher to create a conducive learning atmosphere. Based on the test results, an overall picture of the level of Islamic Character Education at the school shows that it falls into the moderate category, with a percentage of 76.5%. According to the criteria table for Islamic Character Education levels, a score of 76.5% is classified as moderate. In other words, students' Islamic character education, as viewed from aspects of understanding applicable rules, positive mental attitudes, and seriousness, is in a fairly good condition.



Figure 1.2 Counseling Guidance Activities

Implementation

The following are the observation results from the Islamic Character Education scale at the school before the implementation of Individual Counseling with a Reality Approach.

Table 1.3 Condition of Cycle II

Research			
Number	Name	Score	Category
1	Vallentino Wesley	70	Moderate
2	Andin Lintang	90	Very High
3	Alfat Nur Faizin	80	High
4	Raka Wisnu	70	Moderate
5	Khalimah Nur Intan	90	Very High
	Total	400	
	Average	80,00	High

Reflection

Based on Table 1.3, it can be seen that before the implementation of individual counseling with a symbolic reality approach, among the five seventh-grade students of SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan, two students (40%) were in the very high category, one student (20%) was in the high category, and two students (40%) were in the moderate category in terms of Islamic character education. No students were found to have Islamic character education levels in the low or very low categories.

Service Results

The results of the study indicate that the evaluation of the initial condition of seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan in improving their understanding of Islamic Character Education showed an average initial score of 68.0. The highest score was 80, achieved by one student, while the lowest score was 60, achieved by two students, based on initial observations.

The results further show that in Cycle I, the service provided to seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan to improve their understanding of Islamic Character Education through the use of a Behavioral Contract resulted in an average score of 68.0. The highest score in Cycle I was 80, achieved by one student, and the lowest score was 60, achieved by two students. Meanwhile, in Cycle II, the average score increased to 80.0. The highest score was 90, achieved by two students, while the lowest score was 70, achieved by two students. Students achieved mastery after the implementation of Cycle I and Cycle II. Based on the data on students' Islamic character education from Cycle I and Cycle II, the findings indicate an improvement in the Islamic character education of seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan in the 2025/2026 academic year, demonstrating that the use of a Behavioral Contract effectively enhanced students' understanding of Islamic Character Education.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a measurable improvement in Islamic character education among seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan following the implementation of individual counseling with a reality approach across two cycles. The mean score increased from 68.0 in the initial condition and Cycle I to 80.0 in Cycle II, representing a gain of 12 points (approximately 17.6%). This progression indicates that the intervention moved the student cohort from a predominantly "moderate" classification to a "high" category, with two students (40%) attaining "very high" scores in Cycle II. These results are consistent with the theoretical premise that reality therapy—rooted in the work of William Glasser—is particularly effective in helping individuals take personal responsibility for their behavior by focusing on present actions and future goals rather than past failures (Glasser, 1965).

The use of a Behavioral Contract as the primary instrument in Cycle II appears to have been particularly impactful. By establishing explicit written agreements between counselor and student, the contract technique operationalizes the core principle of reality therapy—that meaningful change is driven by commitment rather than external coercion (Corey, 2013). This aligns with the earlier theoretical argument that Islamic character education should emerge from internalized values rather than imposed rules. The behavioral contract thus served as a bridge between students' self-awareness and tangible behavioral targets, facilitating a shift from external compliance to intrinsic motivation.

From the researcher's perspective, the relatively unchanged scores between the initial condition and Cycle I (both averaging 68.0) suggest that a single counseling session may not be sufficient to produce observable behavioral change in students with special needs. The improvement observed in Cycle II supports the conclusion that repetition and reinforcement are critical components of effective counseling for this population. This observation is consistent with Prayitno's (2004) assertion that content mastery services must address affective dimensions, including enthusiasm, attitude, and internalized values, to yield lasting behavioral outcomes.

It is also noteworthy that the improvement was not uniform across students. Vallengino Wesley and Raka Wisnu remained in the "moderate" category in Cycle II despite demonstrating score gains (from 60 to 70). This differential outcome suggests that individual variability in cognitive capacity, family support, and degree of disability plays a moderating role in the effectiveness of the counseling intervention. Future iterations may benefit from differentiated counseling strategies tailored to each student's specific needs and learning profile.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study implementing Individual Counseling with a Reality Approach, it can be concluded that individual counseling with a reality approach is effective in improving Islamic character education among seventh-grade students at SLB Putra Mandiri Lamongan.

Research Implications

This study carries several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the applicability of reality therapy principles within the Islamic education framework, particularly in special education contexts. The results suggest that self-determined behavioral commitment, as embodied in the Behavioral Contract technique, is a culturally appropriate mechanism for fostering Islamic character in students with special needs. Practically, the study provides school counselors and guidance teachers at SLB institutions with an evidence-based framework for designing individual counseling programs. Education policymakers may also consider integrating structured individual counseling protocols into the school's guidance and counseling curriculum as a systematic strategy for addressing the character education deficit observed in special education settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several directions for future research are recommended. First, future studies should involve a larger sample across multiple SLB institutions to enhance generalizability. The current five-student sample, while appropriate for a CAR design, limits external validity. Second, researchers may extend the intervention beyond two cycles to examine sustainability of gains. Third, comparative studies contrasting the reality approach with other counseling modalities within SLB settings would provide valuable evidence. Fourth, mixed-method designs incorporating qualitative data from students, parents, and teachers would enrich understanding of the mechanisms involved. Finally, future research should examine the role of parental involvement as a moderating variable, given the documented influence of family environment on character development in children with special needs.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher offers the following suggestions:

Teachers who experience similar difficulties are encouraged to apply individual counseling with a reality approach as an alternative to improve the quality of students' Islamic character education.

Teachers who intend to implement individual counseling to enhance Islamic character education through a reality approach are advised to design counseling sessions that are more engaging and varied.

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