

The Strategy of Da'wah Bil Hikmah in the Formation of Student Characters: Ethnographic Study in Class XI of Integrated Islamic High School Darul Hasan

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Abstract

This study examines the strategy of da'wah bil hikmah in the formation of student character through an ethnographic study conducted in Grade XI at SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan, Padangsidempuan City. In the context of contemporary educational challenges marked by globalization and rapid technological development, character formation based on Islamic values requires pedagogical strategies that are contextual, humane, and adaptive to students' psychological and social conditions. Employing a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach, this study collected data through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the school principal, Islamic Education teachers, and students. The findings reveal that da'wah bil hikmah is implemented through wise instructional delivery, gentle and persuasive communication, dialogical interactions, and teacher exemplification, which collectively contribute to a psychologically safe and morally supportive learning environment. These practices foster the internalization of Islamic character values, including religious obedience, respect for teachers, discipline, empathy, responsibility, critical attitudes, and tolerance toward differences in religious understanding. However, the study also identifies several challenges, such as variations in students' motivation and comprehension, limited instructional time, the influence of social media, and inconsistent parental support. Overall, the study concludes that da'wah bil hikmah, when systematically planned and supported by teachers, school leadership, structured programs, and positive peer environments, serves as an effective and sustainable strategy for holistic character formation in integrated Islamic secondary education.

Keywords: Character Education, Da'Wah Bil Hikmah, Ethnographic Study, Integrated Islamic School, Islamic Education.

Introduction

Da'wah in Islam is an obligation for every Muslim, aimed at inviting humanity to the path approved by Allah SWT (Hidayat et al., 2024). In the educational context, da'wah cannot be understood merely as the transmission of religious messages, but rather as a pedagogical strategy that plays a role in the comprehensive formation of students' morals, character, and personality in accordance with Islamic values (Khasanah, 2022). This perspective is in line with Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that education must develop individuals who are faithful, pious, possess noble character, are knowledgeable, healthy, independent, and responsible (Nurhayati, 2020).

Islamic education has a broader orientation than merely the process of knowledge transfer. Its essence lies in the holistic internalization of Islamic values to form individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also possess good character. One approach that is widely applied in this process is da'wah bil hikmah, a da'wah strategy that emphasizes wisdom, patience, exemplary conduct, and the adjustment of

messages to the psychological and social conditions of the da'wah recipients. Through this approach, Islamic values are expected to be not only cognitively understood but also internalized and manifested in students' daily behavior (Nurunnisa, 2024).

In educational studies, strategy is understood as a series of systematically designed steps to achieve learning objectives. Strategy does not only include teaching methods or techniques but also involves the processes of planning, organizing, and controlling learning so that predetermined goals can be achieved effectively (Agustriani, 2023). Therefore, the application of da'wah bil hikmah in education should not be viewed as an individual teacher's spontaneous action, but rather as part of pedagogical planning that considers students' psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. Well-designed strategies enable teachers to convey religious messages effectively while simultaneously developing students' character in a balanced manner across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Nurmala Syahfitri et al., 2024).

The challenges of character formation among the younger generation have become increasingly complex in the era of globalization, marked by rapid advancements in information technology. The unfiltered flow of information, the penetration of popular culture, instant lifestyles, and symptoms of moral degradation pose serious threats to students' character development (Arifin, 2025). Several studies have indicated an increase in deviant behavior among adolescents, such as declining manners, consumptive behavior, rising individualism, and the weakening of Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*) (Aulia Herawati et al., 2025). These conditions demand da'wah strategies that are not only normative but also contextual and relevant to the realities of students' lives within formal educational settings.

SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan is one of the formal educational institutions that integrates the national curriculum with the values of the Qur'an and Hadith. This integration positions character development as a primary objective alongside academic achievement. At this school, da'wah bil hikmah is implemented through various forms, including teacher exemplification, habituation of worship, halaqah activities, Islamic extracurricular programs, and personal approaches to students. These practices are grounded in the concepts of ta'lim, tarbiyah, and ta'dib as the foundations of Islamic education.

Fundamentally, the effectiveness of da'wah bil hikmah is highly dependent on systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation, enabling the balanced development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potentials (Dahnar, 2024). However, in practice, the implementation of this strategy often encounters various obstacles, such as differences in students' backgrounds, variations in levels of religious understanding, limited instructional time, and the influence of external environments outside the school that are difficult to control.

Empirical studies on da'wah bil hikmah have been widely conducted, yet most have focused on non-formal and community contexts. Research by Dwifa Ginting (2024) demonstrates the effectiveness of da'wah bil hikmah in increasing community participation in religious activities at the community level (Ginting et al., 2024). A study by Rista Puspita Sari (2023) emphasizes the relevance of the bil hikmah approach in addressing adolescent moral degradation but is limited to the context of majelis taklim (Sari, 2023). Meanwhile, Baehaki (2022) examined the implementation of da'wah bil hikmah in Islamic boarding schools, focusing on the development of students' moderate character as an effort to prevent radicalism (Baehaki, 2022).

Nevertheless, studies that specifically examine the implementation of *da'wah bil hikmah* in the context of formal secondary education, particularly integrated Islamic schools, remain very limited. In fact, integrated Islamic schools have unique dynamics in integrating the national curriculum with Islamic values, thereby requiring character development strategies that differ from those of non-formal educational institutions or Islamic boarding schools. This research gap indicates the need to explore more deeply how *da'wah bil hikmah* is practiced in integrated Islamic schools, the challenges faced by teachers, and its effectiveness in shaping students' character.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of *da'wah bil hikmah* in the formation of students' character at SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan, identify the supporting and inhibiting factors, and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy in shaping Islamic personalities that are relevant to contemporary challenges. The findings of this study are expected not only to provide practical contributions to SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan but also to enrich academic discourse on *da'wah* strategies in formal education and serve as a reference for other Islamic educational institutions in designing character development programs based on Islamic values.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach (Blomberg & Burrell, 2009). The qualitative approach was chosen because the study seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena related to the implementation of *da'wah bil hikmah* strategies by teachers in shaping students' character (Whitehead, 2005; Williamson, 2013). An ethnographic approach was deemed appropriate as the researcher aimed to observe directly the everyday experiences of Grade XI students at SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan, including classroom interactions, school culture, and the lived practices of *da'wah bil hikmah* within the school environment.

The research was conducted at SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan, Padangsidempuan City, from September to October 2025. The research context involved Grade XI students, consisting of 31 students in class XI PA and 35 students in class XI PI. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, as this study required participants who possessed rich and relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The selection of informants was based on the following criteria: (1) having direct experience in participating in or implementing character development activities based on *da'wah bil hikmah*; (2) being actively involved in learning processes or religious activities at the school; and (3) having adequate understanding of the objectives, processes, and dynamics of *da'wah bil hikmah* implementation in the school setting.

Based on these criteria, four key informants were selected to represent different roles within the school system, including school leadership, educators, and students. To maintain ethical standards and protect participants' anonymity, all informants are identified using initials rather than real names. The informants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informants

Initials	Gender	Position/Role
P-01	Male	Principal

Initials	Gender	Position/Role		
T-01	Male	Islamic Teacher	Education	(PAI)
S-01	Male	Grade XI Student		
S-02	Female	Grade XI Student		

Data collection techniques consisted of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for approximately 30–45 minutes using interview guidelines developed in accordance with the research objectives. Participant observation was carried out during classroom learning activities, religious programs, and routine student coaching sessions to capture interaction patterns, instructional approaches, and students' responses to *da'wah bil hikmah* practices. Documentation included learning modules, lesson plans (RPP), standard operating procedures (SOPs) for student development, records of religious activities, as well as relevant photographs and meeting archives.

Table 2. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness Procedures

Stage / Aspect	Purpose	Procedures Applied	Data Sources	Output / Validity Contribution
Data Reduction	To focus and simplify raw qualitative data	Repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents; open coding; grouping codes into sub-themes related to <i>da'wah bil hikmah</i> practices	Interviews, observations, documents	Initial codes and sub-themes ensuring analytical focus
Data Display	To organize data for systematic interpretation	Presentation of reduced data in narrative and thematic forms to compare patterns across informants	Coded and categorized data	Clear thematic patterns supporting interpretive transparency
Conclusion Drawing / Verification	To identify dominant patterns and meanings	Analysis of recurring themes and relationships; continuous comparison across data sources	Thematic narratives and displays	Verified interpretations of <i>da'wah bil hikmah</i> strategies
Source Triangulation	To enhance credibility	Cross-checking data from principal,	Multiple informants	Consistency of findings across sources

Stage / Aspect	Purpose	Procedures Applied	Data Sources	Output / Validity Contribution
		teacher, and student informants		
Technique Triangulation	To strengthen reliability	Comparing interview data with observation results and documentation	Interviews, observations, documents	Validation of findings through methodological convergence
Member Checking	To ensure accuracy of interpretation	Reconfirming interview transcripts and analytical interpretations with informants	Informant feedback	Confirmed credibility and trustworthiness of findings

Data analysis in this study followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, and was conducted manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software. During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were read repeatedly, coded, and organized into initial codes and sub-themes. The reduced data were then presented in narrative and thematic forms to facilitate systematic interpretation, while the final stage involved analyzing recurring patterns and relationships among themes to identify dominant *da'wah bil hikmah* strategies and their implications for student character formation. To ensure data trustworthiness, validation techniques including source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking were applied. Member checking was conducted by reconfirming interview transcripts and the researcher's interpretations with the informants to ensure accuracy and credibility. As summarized in Table 2, the integration of analytical stages and validation strategies was implemented systematically to maintain rigor, transparency, and reliability throughout the qualitative research process.

Results and Discussion

SMA Swasta IT Darul Hasan is a private Islamic senior high school located on Jalan Ompu Huta Tunjul Gg. Attaubah, Hutaimbaru Subdistrict, Padangsidempuan City, North Sumatra. Established on March 22, 2019, the school operates morning classes over six instructional days. With a land area of approximately 4,125 square meters, the institution possesses sufficient spatial capacity to support the development of educational facilities and learning infrastructure. Institutionally, SMA Swasta IT Darul Hasan has obtained a "B" accreditation status from the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasahs (BAN-SM), as stipulated in Decree Number 1452/BAN-SM/SK/2019 dated December 12, 2019.

The school's vision is to become a national-level Islamic senior high school that delivers high-quality education grounded in Integrated Islamic Education and aligned with the national education system, with the ultimate goal of producing an Islamic generation characterized by strong moral character, personal integrity, and intellectual competence. This vision is operationalized through missions focused on strengthening students' devotion to Allah SWT, cultivating Islamic identity and noble character

(*akhlaqul karimah*), and fostering academic excellence and competitiveness in science and technology.

Implementation of the *Da'wah Bil Hikmah* Strategy

This study explores the implementation of the *da'wah bil hikmah* strategy in shaping the character of Grade XI students at SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with students, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, and the school principal, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic values are transmitted through pedagogical practices that consider students' psychological conditions and cognitive readiness. Findings indicate that *hikmah* is not merely embedded in instructional content but is reflected in teachers' overall approach to guidance, advice, and dialogue, encompassing both academic and religious dimensions. This strategy has a discernible influence on students' attitudes, behaviors, and internalization of moral values.

Hikmah in Instructional Delivery and Daily Guidance

Teachers consistently deliver learning materials using simple, contextualized language, appropriate pacing, and real-life illustrations that resonate with students' daily experiences. This approach facilitates gradual comprehension and meaningful engagement with religious teachings. As stated by Student A (Grade XI Science):

"In my opinion, over the past few years the guidance provided by teachers has been quite good. One example is when the teacher explained the supplication recited while sitting between the two prostrations. The teacher explained that the supplication has an important meaning for ourselves, so we better understood its benefits." (*Informant, interview, 2025*)

This testimony illustrates how students are able to grasp religious meanings not only at a cognitive level but also in relation to their lived spiritual experiences. Such pedagogical practice aligns with the principle of *hikmah* as *wad'u al-shay' fi mahallihi* placing messages appropriately according to context and audience. Teachers do not limit instruction to ritualistic explanations but link worship practices to their spiritual and moral implications.

However, differences in students' learning pace remain a pedagogical consideration. Student B (Grade XI Science) noted:

"In my opinion, the way teachers explain lessons should be done more slowly so that it is easier to understand. In one class there are usually students who understand quickly and others who need more time. If the explanation is too fast, some students may be left behind in understanding."

This finding underscores the necessity of adaptive instructional strategies that accommodate diverse learning needs, reinforcing the centrality of *hikmah* as pedagogical sensitivity.

Gentleness as an Expression of Hikmah in Guidance

Gentleness (*rifq*) emerges as a key manifestation of *hikmah* in teacher-student interactions. Teachers deliberately employ persuasive and calming communication when offering advice or corrective guidance, which enhances students' receptivity to moral messages. Student responses reflect this impact:

"I feel more enthusiastic about learning religion." (*Student A, Grade XI Science, interview, 2025*)

“In my opinion, when teachers give advice in an angry tone, students tend to find it difficult to accept. However, if advice is delivered gently, it is easier to touch the heart and be remembered.” (*Student B, Grade XI Science, interview, 2025*)

These statements indicate that teachers’ awareness of students’ emotional conditions reduces resistance and fosters a psychologically safe learning environment. Within the framework of *da’wah bil hikmah*, gentleness functions as a strategic adaptation of message delivery, ensuring moral values are internalized without coercion.

This practice resonates with the Prophetic teaching emphasizing gentleness as a beautifying moral force (Narrated by Muslim no. 2594) and is empirically supported by Saputra (2024) and Prilianto et al. (2025), who highlight empathy and respectful communication as catalysts for intrinsic motivation and moral development. Moreover, Ivira Wanda R.I et al. (2025) situate such practices within the moral feeling dimension of character education, complementing moral knowing and moral action.

Dialogical Interaction as a Form of Hikmah

Hikmah is further manifested through dialogical teaching practices. Teachers actively encourage student participation, accept differing viewpoints, and provide clarification without dismissiveness. Student A (Grade XI Science) explained:

“Usually the teacher first accepts students’ opinions, then explains whether the opinion is correct or still needs to be corrected. This method makes us more confident to express opinions without fear of being blamed.” (*Informant, interview, 2025*)

Such dialogical openness cultivates students’ confidence and critical engagement. This approach becomes particularly salient when addressing differences in Islamic jurisprudential schools (*mazhab*). As noted by Student B:

“For example, during worship practice, differences in schools of thought often arise, such as Shafi’i, Hanbali, or Hanafi. The teacher explains that these differences do not need to be debated, but rather understood well. In this way, we learn to respect differences.” (*Informant, interview, 2025*)

Teachers’ emphasis on tolerance and understanding demonstrates hikmah as both communicative strategy and conflict management skill. These findings align with Agus Sulthoni Imami et al. (2021) and Komariyah (2025), who emphasize dialogical learning as a means of enhancing critical thinking and respectful discourse in religious education.

Character Values Formed Through Da’wah Bil Hikmah

Empirical findings indicate that the *da’wah bil hikmah* strategy significantly contributes to the formation of Islamic character among students. Students reported increased obedience in worship, improved manners, respect toward teachers, and heightened moral awareness. As expressed by Student A:

“In my opinion, the guidance given by teachers makes us better in the future. We become more obedient in worship and also more mindful of manners in daily life.”

Student B further added:

“I am becoming more aware of the importance of not arguing with teachers. This makes me learn to respect and honor teachers more.”

Teachers corroborated these observations, noting developments in students’ self-awareness, empathy, responsibility, critical attitudes, and respect for diversity. These outcomes reflect the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor

domains, consistent with the character education framework proposed by Sasongko & Arif (2025) and reinforced by Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive learning theory.

Challenges and Obstacles in Character Formation

Despite its effectiveness, the implementation of *da'wah bil hikmah* faces several challenges. Internal factors include low student motivation and varying levels of understanding, as acknowledged by teachers:

"The obstacles I often encounter include students' lack of interest; some students may be less motivated or not interested in Islamic Education material."

Students themselves emphasized the need for gradual explanations, reinforcing the importance of differentiated instruction (Widiastuti et al., 2023).

External challenges involve environmental influences, particularly social media, which may introduce values inconsistent with school teachings:

"Environmental and social media influences, values that conflict with peer environments or social media can erode the values that have already been instilled."

Insufficient parental support and limited instructional time further complicate moral habituation. Teachers and the principal emphasized that these constraints necessitate strategic prioritization, patience, and exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*).

Supporting Factors for Da'wah Bil Hikmah Implementation

The effectiveness of *da'wah bil hikmah* is reinforced by holistic support from teachers, school leadership, structured programs, and peer environments. Teachers provide individualized attention and serve as moral exemplars, while the principal strengthens teacher capacity through supervision and guidance. Routine programs such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, *dhikr*, and moral habituation offer experiential contexts for value internalization. Peer influence further amplifies positive behavior, consistent with Bandura's social-cognitive framework as discussed by Sumianto et al. (2024). This synergy ensures that character formation proceeds comprehensively, consistently, and sustainably.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the *da'wah bil hikmah* strategy plays a substantial and multidimensional role in shaping the Islamic character of students at SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan, Padangsidempuan City. The implementation of this strategy is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but extends to the cultivation of moral awareness, emotional sensitivity, and ethical behavior through pedagogical wisdom, gentleness, and contextual dialogue. Empirical findings demonstrate that teachers' ability to adapt instructional methods to students' cognitive levels, emotional conditions, and social contexts significantly enhances students' receptivity to moral values and religious teachings. The results indicate that *hikmah* is manifested through several interrelated practices, including the use of simple and meaningful language, appropriate pacing of instruction, persuasive and compassionate communication, and dialogical interactions that respect students' perspectives. These practices foster a psychologically safe learning environment, enabling students to internalize Islamic values not only cognitively but also affectively and behaviorally. Consequently, students exhibit positive developments in religious obedience, respect toward teachers, empathy, responsibility, discipline, and tolerance toward differences in religious understanding.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies persistent challenges, such as varying levels of student motivation, disparities in comprehension, limited instructional time, external influences from social media, and inconsistent parental support. These obstacles highlight the necessity for continuous adaptation of *da'wah bil hikmah*, strengthened collaboration between schools and families, and sustained efforts to enhance teachers' pedagogical and moral capacities. Overall, this research affirms that *da'wah bil hikmah*, when supported by exemplary educators, structured school programs, and a positive peer environment, constitutes an effective and sustainable approach to holistic character education, aligning religious values with students' lived experiences and contemporary educational realities.

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