

Two-Way Communication Strategies in Fostering Students' Moral Character

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Abstract

Keywords:

two-way communication, moral character formation, character education, Islamic education, moral development barriers

Communication serves as the foundational element of all human interactions, playing a pivotal role across social, cultural, political, and educational domains. Within family and school contexts, effective communication necessitates strategic approaches, particularly two-way communication, supported by modalities such as interpersonal, group, and mass communication. A critical dimension of achieving educational objectives lies in moral character formation, wherein communication functions as a key facilitator. This study examines the application of two-way communication strategies, their specific forms, and the barriers encountered in fostering students' moral development. Employing a qualitative research design, the investigation reveals that two-way communication is operationalized through an integrated framework comprising character education, religious and ethical instruction, and social activities. The forms of two-way communication encompass vertical (teacher-student), horizontal (peer-to-peer), and diagonal (cross-level, e.g., teacher-parent-student) interactions. Key inhibiting factors include external environmental influences, limited parental awareness and involvement, adverse effects of media and technology, and socioeconomic or social instability. These findings underscore the transformative potential of dialogic, reciprocal communication in moral education while highlighting the need for strengthened home-school collaboration and protective mechanisms against external value conflicts to enhance moral internalization in educational settings.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: komunikasi dua arah, pembentukan karakter moral, pendidikan karakter, pendidikan Islam, hambatan perkembangan moral

Komunikasi berfungsi sebagai elemen dasar dari semua interaksi manusia, memainkan peran penting di berbagai bidang sosial, budaya, politik, dan pendidikan. Dalam konteks keluarga dan sekolah, komunikasi yang efektif membutuhkan pendekatan strategis, khususnya komunikasi dua arah, yang didukung oleh modalitas seperti komunikasi interpersonal, kelompok, dan massa. Dimensi penting dalam mencapai tujuan pendidikan terletak pada pembentukan karakter moral, di mana komunikasi berfungsi sebagai fasilitator utama. Studi ini meneliti penerapan strategi komunikasi dua arah, bentuk-bentuk spesifiknya, dan hambatan yang dihadapi dalam membina perkembangan moral siswa. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, investigasi ini mengungkapkan bahwa komunikasi dua arah dioperasionalkan melalui kerangka kerja terintegrasi yang terdiri dari pendidikan karakter, pengajaran agama dan etika, dan kegiatan sosial. Bentuk-bentuk komunikasi dua arah mencakup interaksi vertikal (guru-siswa), horizontal (antar teman sebaya), dan diagonal (lintas tingkat, misalnya, guru-orang tua-siswa). Faktor penghambat utama meliputi pengaruh lingkungan eksternal, kesadaran dan keterlibatan orang tua yang terbatas, dampak buruk media dan teknologi, serta ketidakstabilan sosial ekonomi. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi potensi transformatif komunikasi dialogis dan timbal balik dalam pendidikan moral, sekaligus menyoroti perlunya penguatan kolaborasi antara rumah dan sekolah serta mekanisme perlindungan terhadap konflik nilai eksternal untuk meningkatkan internalisasi moral dalam lingkungan pendidikan.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the foundation of all human interactions and plays a crucial role in social, cultural, political, and educational life. In family and school environments, effective communication requires strategies employing a two-way communication approach, supported by various forms such as interpersonal communication, group communication, and mass communication. Two-way communication is a model in which both parties alternate roles as communicator and receiver, continuously sending and receiving messages (Wexley & Yukl, 1977). This bidirectional process is enhanced by interpersonal communication, which is essential for building more meaningful human relationships through specific approaches embedded within it.

In education and teaching, communication serves as a conduit for transferring knowledge, fostering intellectual development, moral formation (akhlak), and the acquisition of skills necessary for all aspects of life (Widjaya, 1977). The message conveyed consists of learning materials from the curriculum, with sources including educators, students, parents, and others; channels involve educational media; and the receiver is primarily the student (Sabri, 2005). Generally, two-way communication effectively achieves positive goals, such as building students' moral character. Although classroom communication between teachers and students is typically group-oriented, teachers can transform it into interpersonal communication by adopting two-way methods (Effendy, 2005).

Previous studies have explored this topic. For instance, Handayani (2011) examined effective communication to improve the quality of teaching and learning processes, citing Nana Sudjana to describe two-way communication where teachers and students mutually act as initiators and recipients of actions. This establishes a bidirectional relationship, albeit limited to individual teacher-student interactions, with limited peer-to-peer discussion among students. More recently, Purandina (2021) highlighted that two-way communication strategies – where teachers' actions elicit feedback from recipients – enhance positive personal interactions between teachers, students, and parents.

Substantively, two-way communication in education promotes moral development by facilitating dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding, allowing teachers to model ethical behavior while encouraging students to internalize values through active participation rather than passive reception. In Islamic educational contexts, this approach aligns with character education principles, where teachers initiate modeling (*uswah hasanah*) and foster two-

way interactions to cultivate sympathy, empathy, and religious values (Hastasari et al., 2022). Such bidirectional exchanges support the formation of akhlak by creating reflective spaces for moral reasoning, feedback, and relational trust, distinguishing it from unidirectional models that limit student agency (Zuliati, 2024; Negara, 2023). This dynamic not only transmits knowledge but also nurtures holistic moral and spiritual growth, making two-way strategies particularly relevant for examining their role in shaping students' character at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme Gresik. Thus, it is highly intriguing to investigate two-way communication strategies in forming students' moral character. The objectives of this study are to identify the two-way communication strategies employed in shaping students' morals at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme Gresik, the forms of strategies used, and the factors influencing these strategies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach combined with a case study research design. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive, detailed, and naturalistic portrayal of a phenomenon in its real-life context, emphasizing rich description rather than theory generation or quantification (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was specifically selected to enable an in-depth, holistic analysis of the phenomenon – namely, the implementation of two-way communication strategies in shaping students' moral character – within its bounded system at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme Gresik. Case studies are particularly appropriate for exploring complex social processes, understanding contextual influences, and examining contemporary events where the researcher has limited control over behavioral events (Yin, 2018). This approach allowed for a thorough examination of the strategies, their forms, and influencing factors as they unfolded in the school's natural educational environment.

Data collection utilized multiple techniques to ensure richness and triangulation: (1) observation, involving non-participant and participant observations of classroom interactions, teacher-student dialogues, and extracurricular activities to capture real-time two-way communication dynamics; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants to explore perceptions, experiences, and rationales behind the strategies; and (3) documentation review, including lesson plans, school policy documents, student moral development records, and relevant administrative files. Primary data sources comprised religious education teachers (guru Agama), students, the vice principal for student affairs (wakil kepala kesiswaan), and guidance and counseling staff (BK). Secondary data were derived from relevant school

documents, such as curriculum guidelines, moral education programs, and activity reports, to provide contextual corroboration.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2020), consisting of three concurrent, iterative phases: (1) data reduction, where raw data from transcripts, field notes, and documents were selected, focused, simplified, and organized through coding and categorization to identify patterns and themes; (2) data display, involving the organization of reduced data into matrices, charts, networks, or narrative summaries to facilitate pattern recognition and comparison; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, where tentative interpretations were drawn, tested against the data, and refined through iterative review to ensure logical coherence and groundedness. This cyclical process allowed for ongoing refinement of emerging insights.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, data validity was ensured through multiple strategies aligned with qualitative rigor criteria: (1) triangulation, by cross-verifying information across data sources (e.g., interviews, observations, documents), methods, and informants to mitigate bias and strengthen convergence; (2) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, involving extended fieldwork and repeated visits to build rapport, gain deeper contextual understanding, and observe consistency over time; and (3) member checking, where preliminary findings and interpretations were shared with select participants for feedback and validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). These measures collectively bolstered the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presentation below is based on research conducted at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme, Gresik. To obtain valid and reliable data, the researcher underwent a lengthy process. The researcher followed several stages, as outlined below.

First Stage

In this initial stage, the researcher visited the school to request permission to conduct the research. The principal and the vice principal for student affairs warmly welcomed the researcher. The principal then introduced the researcher to the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teacher. After obtaining approval to proceed with the research, the researcher began by asking the principal about the history of the establishment of SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme.

The first question posed by the researcher to the IRE teacher was: "What programs are implemented to shape students' moral character using two-way communication strategies?"

The moral formation programs conducted at the school consist of daily habituation activities carried out by students. These include collective Quran recitation (*mengaji bersama*) before the teaching and learning process begins, congregational Dhuhr prayer, Dhuha prayer, Friday *istighosah*, and other routine practices applied daily. In addition, as a religious education teacher, the IRE teacher also fosters moral development within the classroom during teaching and learning activities by delivering material related to moral values such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and empathy through various teaching methods, including lectures, discussions, and group activities.

Meanwhile, in an interview with the vice principal for student affairs (*Waka Kesiswaan*), the researcher asked the same question: "What programs are implemented to shape students' moral character using two-way communication strategies?"

The moral formation program using two-way communication strategies is carried out through daily religious habituation activities such as collective Quran recitation, congregational Dhuhr and Dhuha prayers, *istighosah*, and *tahlil*. These practices serve as a strategy to build students' religious moral character so that they become accustomed to them in daily life not only at school but also at home. Furthermore, moral formation is reinforced through social activities such as fundraising drives, visits to sick students, and environmental initiatives. These activities are designed to help students socialize effectively with the community and their peers.

From the interviews with both the IRE teacher and the vice principal for student affairs, it can be concluded that the programs for shaping students' moral character through two-way communication strategies involve a religious approach combined with social activities. These efforts aim to develop students who possess good morals and exemplary character (*akhlakul karimah*).

The researcher then asked the IRE teacher: "When is two-way communication implemented?"

In shaping students' moral character, I apply open, two-way communication. I believe that effective communication is key to helping students understand moral values. I frequently hold small-group discussion sessions where students can freely express their views on moral issues relevant to contemporary life. Additionally, I use an active listening approach paying close attention when students speak, ask questions, or share opinions to encourage them to think critically about the moral situations they currently face.

It can be concluded that two-way communication is implemented by the IRE teacher during the teaching and learning process in the classroom, particularly through discussions of current moral issues. This approach

stimulates students to speak, ask questions, express opinions, and think critically about contemporary moral concerns.

The researcher further inquired of the IRE teacher: “How do you design the moral formation program for students using a two-way communication approach?”

Religious values in Islamic education lessons are a crucial aspect of our efforts to shape students’ moral character. One method I use is to integrate understanding of Islamic teachings with students’ everyday life contexts. For example, we discuss stories of Prophet Muhammad as exemplary role models (uswah hasanah) that students can apply in daily life. In line with moral formation at SMP YPI Darussalam, we incorporate character education within the 2013 Curriculum, emphasizing values such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, and communicativeness.

The moral formation program using a two-way communication approach is designed by facilitating material comprehension in ways that allow students to speak, ask questions, and discuss Islamic moral values. This process helps them grasp the true meaning of these values and apply them in everyday life.

The researcher again asked the IRE teacher: “During moral formation in the classroom, have there been students who violated rules?”

Of course. In my experience as a IRE teacher, students occasionally violate classroom rules during lessons, such as using foul language or causing disruptions. To address this and shape their moral character, I instruct the student to recite istighfar (seeking forgiveness) 10 times as a means to curb foul speech. However, if the behavior persists and recurs repeatedly, I refer the student to the guidance and counseling (BK) teacher for further counseling. Alternatively, I record points in the student’s point book provided by the BK teacher to monitor repeated violations. I have encountered cases where a student was repeatedly late to class (up to four times) or failed to wear complete uniform attributes. In such instances, I decided to refer the matter to the BK teacher.

The researcher posed a related question to the BK teacher: “During moral formation efforts, have there been reports or referrals from teachers regarding students who violated rules?”

Yes. When a student engages in inappropriate behavior, they are often referred to me as the BK teacher. For example, if a student uses improper language, I assign them to memorize Ayat Kursi or recite istighfar 50 times as a corrective measure to prevent recurrence. Additionally, I monitor violations by checking the point book placed in the classroom cupboard. Other subject teachers can also record points when students exhibit issues during their classes.

From the accounts of both the IRE teacher and the BK teacher, it can be concluded that when students violate rules during classroom moral formation, the initial response is to provide advice. If the violation persists repeatedly, points are recorded in the BK-provided point book. Continued violations lead to referral to the BK teacher for further guidance.

The researcher then asked the IRE teacher: “In your experience, what external factors most frequently hinder efforts to shape students’ moral character in the school environment?”

The external factor that most often hinders moral formation efforts in the school environment is the influence of the social environment outside school. Today, students are exposed to various sources of information and popular culture that are not aligned with the moral values taught at school. Social media, in particular, often presents perspectives or digital content that contradict religious teachings. Therefore, as a religious education teacher, it is important to open open discussion spaces about these issues and help students understand the differences between religious values and external influences.

The BK teacher concurred, adding that external factors include lack of parental support, unsupervised social media use, excessive peer influence, and other environmental elements. These are among the primary obstacles to students’ moral formation.

Finally, the researcher asked the IRE teacher: “How do you address the challenge of teaching moral values aligned with religious teachings when students are also exposed to differing values from the external environment?”

The approach I apply is to provide students with a deep understanding of religious values and their relevance to daily life. I strive to explain the importance of religiously taught moral values for personal development and societal harmony. I use real-life examples that connect to students’ own experiences in their surroundings. I also encourage students to think critically and analyze the impact of the various values they encounter.

Second Stage

In the second stage, the researcher conducted observations related to moral formation at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme using two-way communication strategies. The observations confirmed that the school strengthens existing programs through consistent implementation. Moral formation occurs both in the classroom by integrating moral material during teaching and learning processes and through social activities. The researcher observed that these efforts have been carried out effectively.

Discussion

Two-Way Communication Strategies at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme

Two-way communication is a reciprocal form of communication between the communicator and the communicant (Priyono, 2002). Based on the research findings, the strategies employed at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme utilize two-way communication strategies. Two-way communication is a form of communication in which there is an exchange of information and understanding between two or more parties. The purpose of two-way communication strategies is to assist students in forming moral character with religious attitudes, discipline, and tolerance, understanding correct moral actions, and developing the ability to make appropriate moral decisions in various situations. Therefore, the teachers' strategies in shaping students' moral character at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 include programs such as collective Quran recitation (*mengaji bersama*) before the teaching and learning process, Dhuha prayer, congregational Dhuhr prayer, and Friday *istighosah*; these represent one form of moral formation program through a religious approach. In addition, the IRE teacher applies two-way communication strategies in shaping students' moral character through the classroom learning process by delivering material related to religious values such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and empathy.

In shaping students' moral character at this school, the moral values used by SMP YPI Darussalam relate to character education in the 2013 Curriculum, including religious and ethical education, extracurricular activities, and social activities. These components work together to shape students' moral character in accordance with the desired principles. Moral formation does not occur only through formal classroom learning but also through daily experiences and interactions at school and in the community. The IRE teacher adopts a two-way communication approach, which is implemented through small-group discussions where, during the teaching process, the IRE teacher discusses real-life moral issues. For example, real-life cases observed by the researcher included students who were undisciplined by waiting at the canteen instead of attending Quran recitation sessions, resulting in reprimands and potential sanctions directed to the BK teacher.

Two-way communication carried out by the IRE teacher in shaping students' moral character involves small-group discussions in which students can speak freely about real moral issues in everyday life. The IRE teacher also fosters moral understanding in the classroom by discussing exemplary stories from Prophet Muhammad or the Prophet's companions. Moral formation at school can also be carried out through social activities, referring to an educational approach that teaches moral and ethical values to students through active

participation in various social activities aimed at benefiting the community or surrounding environment. Examples of social activities that support students' moral formation include:

1. Fundraising for charity, conducted once a week on Fridays (known as Jumat Shodaqoh), with funds allocated later for purposes beneficial to students.
2. Visits to sick students or families of the deceased, where students, accompanied by teachers, visit sick friends or family members who have passed away.
3. Environmental activities, such as collective clean-up sessions (Jumat Bersih), where students engage in mutual cooperation (gotong royong) to clean the school premises, accompanied by teachers; this activity involves the entire school community, including staff, teachers, vice principals, and the principal.
4. Anti-bullying or violence socialization, involving students in preventing bullying and violence, helping them understand the importance of respect, maintaining peace, and interacting positively.

By involving students in meaningful and relevant social activities, the school can help shape moral character, positive values, and strong social responsibility in students. Two-way communication strategies, also referred to as bidirectional communication, involve not only dynamic interaction between teachers and students but also dynamic interaction among students themselves (Sudjana, 1995).

Forms of Communication Strategies Used in Shaping Students' Moral Character at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme

Based on the research at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme, the communication strategies planned for moral formation include interpersonal communication, group communication, and mass communication. Interpersonal communication, which involves two or more individuals and is also known as two-way communication, is used by the IRE teacher in interacting with students during the learning process and outside of it. This form of communication is not limited to the IRE teacher but is practiced by all school members; it is frequently employed by the IRE teacher when guiding students who violate rules at school. Violations such as improper speech, tardiness, or incomplete uniform attire lead to referral to the BK teacher for guidance and counseling aimed at shaping students' moral character.

Furthermore, moral formation through mass communication is carried out by the IRE teacher through discussions and two-way interactions. The IRE

teacher believes that through this process, students not only listen and receive information but also have the opportunity to express their own moral viewpoints, encouraging participation in discussions. Mass communication is also used to interact with parents, facilitating instant communication such as notifications about student activities or meetings.

Moreover, group communication is a strategy employed by teachers to approach interactions involving students, parents, and teachers. The purpose of group communication is to strengthen moral values, ethics, and positive behavior, as well as to build group communication by sharing information between teachers and parents in shaping students' moral character. With this purpose, it is hoped that students will develop moral character not only at school but also at home. Communication strategies in moral formation must consider the individual's level of moral development, which includes three stages: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. Communication strategies should be adjusted to the individual's moral stage to be more effective in promoting higher moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1995).

Inhibiting Factors in Implementing Two-Way Communication Strategies

Communication is considered effective when the sender successfully conveys the intended meaning, or when the stimulus transmitted and intended by the sender closely corresponds to the stimulus received and understood by the receiver (Tubbs, 2005). Based on the research findings at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme, there are still obstacles in implementing two-way communication. These inhibiting factors affect the execution of two-way communication strategies at school. One such factor is the effectiveness of two-way communication, which requires information exchange from all involved parties. To overcome inhibiting factors in implementing two-way communication strategies at school, an approach is needed in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves.

The IRE teacher experiences obstacles when students lack confidence to speak during moral discussions; when students are reluctant to participate, this creates barriers to two-way communication in moral discussions, affecting not only the discussion but also students' overall classroom activity. External factors hindering moral formation efforts in the school environment include the influence of the social environment outside school; students are also affected by sources of information and popular culture that do not align with the moral values taught at school. Social media often presents views contradictory to religious teachings or digital content inconsistent with religious values. Therefore, students need guidance through open discussions to understand the

differences between religious values and external influences. In addition, the BK teacher also applies two-way communication strategies in shaping students' moral character through interpersonal communication; this is frequently used to provide guidance to students. When students face difficulties with issues encountered at school, the teacher meets with parents to discuss the experiences faced by the student and seek solutions.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of two-way communication in moral character formation at SMP YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme is systematically planned through an integrated framework that combines character education, religious and ethical instruction, and social activities. This approach embeds core moral values such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, tolerance, responsibility, and empathy within the 2013 Curriculum's formal components and daily habituation practices, including collective Quran recitation, congregational prayers, Friday istighosah, charity collections, sick visits, environmental clean-ups, and anti-bullying socialization. By prioritizing participatory and reciprocal interactions, these programs enable students to internalize values through active dialogue, critical reflection, and real-life application, fostering holistic moral development in alignment with Islamic educational principles.

The execution of two-way communication plays a pivotal role in educational practice by actively engaging students in the moral formation process, shifting from unidirectional value transmission to dynamic, dialogic interaction. Supported by the IRE teacher's classroom-based instruction—through discussions of prophetic exemplary stories, contemporary ethical issues, and value-integrated lessons and reinforced by the BK teacher's guidance and counseling, this bidirectional strategy promotes critical thinking, empathy, self-regulation, and ethical decision-making. The collaborative efforts among teachers, guidance personnel, and school leadership ensure consistency and sustainability, transforming moral education into a relational and reflective experience that extends beyond the classroom into students' daily lives.

Despite its strengths, the approach faces significant barriers, primarily from external influences such as conflicting social environments, negative media and digital content, unsupervised technology exposure, limited parental awareness or support, and socioeconomic instability. These factors often create value conflicts, contribute to student passivity in discussions, reduce confidence in moral expression, and hinder consistent reinforcement across home and school contexts. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing efforts to create safe dialogic spaces, strengthen home-school partnerships, and equip students with

critical discernment skills to navigate external influences while upholding religious and ethical values.

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