# Moral Decadence Among Students: A Social Analysis of Changes in Values and Norms at Muhammadiyah 06 Medan Middle School

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#### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** This research aims to explore the phenomenon of declining moral values among students at Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School in Medan through the perspective of Islamic education. The investigation addresses the pressing issue arising from globalization and rapid technological advancement, which introduce external values that often conflict with local cultural and religious principles. In this context, adolescents in the formative stage of identity development become particularly susceptible to behaviors that deviate from moral and ethical norms.

**Methodology:** A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was employed. The subjects consisted of students, teachers, homeroom teachers, and the principal, all directly involved in the learning process and behavior supervision. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, including school rules and student violation records. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of reduction, presentation, and conclusion, with validity ensured through source and method triangulation.

Main Findings: The study identified two major findings. First, moral decline is evident in disrespect toward teachers, increased bullying, academic dishonesty, and misuse of social media, which reflects Durkheim's concept of anomie. Second, Islamic education functions as a moral bulwark through congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, moral lessons, and teacher role modeling. These practices enhance students' self-control and spiritual awareness, supported by QS. Al-'Ankabut (29:45).

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The study demonstrates that synergy between religious education, teacher exemplarity, and parental involvement is an effective model for preventing adolescent moral decline while strengthening Islamic identity in the era of globalization.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid social transformation and globalization have significantly influenced the values and norms of society [1], including those manifested within educational institutions [2]. As centers of character formation, schools face substantial challenges in cultivating moral values that are consistent with national identity and religious principles [3]. This situation is reflected in the growing moral deterioration among students, such as declining respect for teachers, increasing cases of bullying [4], academic dishonesty [5], and misuse of social media [6].

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Morality is fundamentally a standard of social and cultural values [7], that serves as a guideline for evaluating individual behavior [8]. Moral judgment is shaped through social interactions [9], encompassing perceptions of right and wrong as well as appropriate and inappropriate conduct [10], and is collectively acknowledged as a shared worldview [11]. Nevertheless, numerous studies indicate that the moral decline of the younger generation has become increasingly evident, posing serious implications for the nation's future [12] Ideally, adolescents should represent the hope of civilization [13]. Unfortunately, deviant behavior is now found not only among the general public [14], but also among well-educated groups [15], demonstrating that the moral crisis transcends age, social background, and educational level [16].

Values represent abstract concepts of what is considered good, whereas norms are concrete rules that regulate behavior [17]. In the field of education, the dominance of external values that conflict with local norms can generate moral confusion and stimulate deviant behavior. Durkheim emphasized the importance of social integration in maintaining collective morality, noting that the weakening of norms as a result of social change leads to a state of anomie [18]. One of the major factors accelerating moral deterioration is globalization [19]. The modern lifestyle and Western popular culture are often adopted as role models by Indonesian adolescents, while the flow of global information transmits foreign values that are not always compatible with Eastern traditions and the nation's moral teachings [20]. Although globalization brings positive aspects such as technological advancement and informational openness, its negative effects on adolescents tend to be more dominant [21]. This influence is evident in the shifting attitudes toward traditional values, social norms, and Eastern etiquette.

The rapid pace of technological development is not always accompanied by the maturity of social and cultural values [22]. Adolescents growing up in the digital era are increasingly vulnerable to moral deterioration [23]. Dependence on social media frequently blurs ethical and moral boundaries [24], while exposure to foreign cultures reinforces individualistic tendencies and encourages deviant behaviors such as gang violence, theft, promiscuity, and abortion [25]. Concrete examples illustrate this condition, including students displaying disrespectful behavior toward teachers and groups of junior and senior high school students engaging in violent convoys while carrying sharp weapons. These realities demonstrate that moral decline is no longer a latent issue but a tangible phenomenon that requires urgent attention.

From a sociological perspective, Berger and Luckmann emphasize that moral values are constructed through a socialization process facilitated by agents such as the family, school, and media. When these agents fail to perform their respective roles, students are likely to seek values from external sources, particularly social media, which frequently transmits global cultural content without filtering local norm [26]. Ideally, education should cultivate independent, disciplined individuals capable of making positive contributions to society. Therefore, discipline, adherence to norms [27], and positive behavior must be integrated into the learning process to prepare students to face social challenges [28]. Education and religion thus constitute the fundamental pillars in addressing moral decline In this context, parents play a vital role in character formation from an early age [29], while teachers are responsible for fostering moral values through integrative, religion-based learning approaches.

Religion serves as a key factor in regulating adolescent behavior [30], Within the educational context, teachers hold a strategic role [31], in shaping students' moral and character development amid the rapidly evolving challenges of modern life [32]. The success of moral education depends not only on teachers but also on the synergy among teachers, students, and parents. Home-based learning provides an effective collaborative space that bridges parental guidance with pedagogical direction, creating a conducive environment for the moral and spiritual growth of students.

Religious-based schools, such as SMP Muhammadiyah 06 Medan, are expected to serve as a moral fortress for students. However, reality shows that even Islamic schools are not completely immune to the negative influences of popular culture and the social environment. Values and norms that were previously upheld are slowly shifting, especially among teenagers who are in the phase of searching for their identity. Moral decadence in schools does not occur suddenly, but is the result of complex interactions between internal factors (identity crisis, weak religious understanding, and lack of role models) and external factors (mass media, instant lifestyle, and permissive environment). As a result, there is a gap between the ideal norms taught and the reality of students' daily behavior.

Although numerous studies have investigated the moral decline of adolescents, several research gaps remain evident. First, most existing works concentrate on macro-level analyses, while research focusing specifically on the context of Islamic educational institutions, particularly Muhammadiyah junior high schools, is still limited. Second, the theoretical frameworks employed are often fragmented, with few attempts to integrate Durkheim's concept of anomie and Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of values to explain the penetration of global influences into students' moral lives. Third, prior studies tend to be descriptive and rarely examine the interaction between internal value systems derived from family, school, and religion and external influences such as social media and global culture. Fourth, many recommendations remain normative and general, lacking actionable strategies that can be directly applied within Islamic schools. Addressing these limitations, this study introduces a novel analytical framework that integrates sociological and educational perspectives to understand moral decline in the context of Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School in Medan. The research is

urgent due to the growing moral challenges faced by adolescents in the digital era, with the primary aim of developing an Islamic education-based model for strengthening students' moral resilience against the influence of global cultural values.

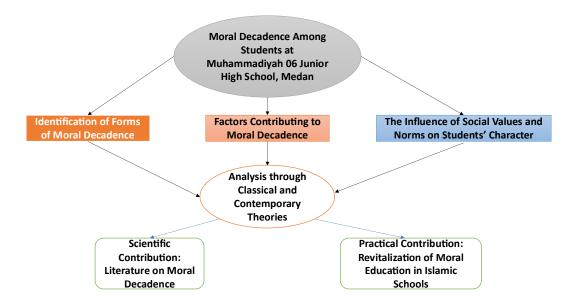


Figure 1. Concept Map of the Background of Student Moral Decadence Image Source: Personal Documentation

Based on these identified gaps, this research aims to investigate the various forms of moral decadence among students at Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School in Medan, examine the contributing factors, and analyze how shifts in social values and norms influence the formation of student character. The primary contribution of this research lies in presenting a comprehensive sociological analysis that integrates both classical and contemporary theoretical frameworks while emphasizing the context of Islamic educational institutions. Accordingly, this study is expected to make a scholarly contribution to the academic discourse on moral decline and provide practical recommendations for revitalizing moral education in Islamic schools amid the challenges of globalization.

#### 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method to explore and analyze the phenomenon of moral decline among students in depth. The study was conducted at Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School in Medan, involving students, teachers, homeroom teachers, and the principal as participants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the educational process and supervision of student behavior [33]. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation focused on student moral behavior both inside and outside the classroom, while semi-structured interviews with teachers and the principal provided insights into forms and causes of moral decline. Documentation included analysis of school regulations, student violation reports, and records of moral guidance activities [34]. The instruments used consisted of observation guidelines, interview guides, and document checklists aligned with the research objectives. Data analysis followed the interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, conducted iteratively to identify emerging patterns and themes [33]. Research procedures included four main stages, namely preliminary study, data collection, analysis, and reporting, while data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods by comparing findings from students, teachers, parents, and school archives [35]. This methodological framework provided a comprehensive understanding of moral decline among students and contributed to the development of effective moral education strategies in Islamic schools.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 3.1. Manifestations of Moral Decadence

The phenomenon of moral decadence among adolescents in Indonesia, including those in Islamic schools, has become increasingly visible in the era of globalization. Adolescents who should represent the future of the nation are now confronted with serious challenges in maintaining compliance with social norms, ethics, and manners that have long been upheld [36]. This issue extends beyond individual behavior, reflecting a broader dysfunction in the processes of character building and value internalization. These findings support previous studies that emphasize how globalization and digital exposure erode traditional moral foundations and weaken students' ethical awareness [37].

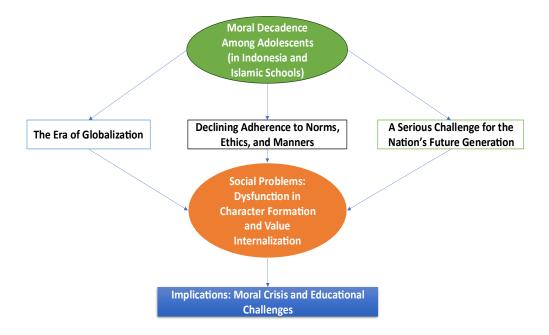


Figure 2. Moral Decadence Among Youth Image Source: Personal Documentation

In the context of globalization, the rapid flow of information, the influence of digital media, and the allure of Western popular culture have become dominant external forces shaping adolescent behavior. Excessive engagement with social media exposes students to new values that often conflict with local traditions and religious teachings. As a result, behaviors such as academic dishonesty, bullying, consumerism, and hedonism are becoming increasingly common in school environments. Similar patterns have been identified by Zidni [38], who found that social media trends contribute significantly to adolescents' moral confusion and declining respect for authority.

The principal of Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School in Medan emphasized that moral decadence is indeed one of the greatest challenges faced by schools today. He stated:

"We see that changes in student behavior are greatly influenced by social media. There are students who dare to argue with teachers, even imitating the speech and behavior of artists or content creators that are not in line with Islamic school culture. In fact, we have emphasized religious values in learning activities" (Interview, August 2025).

This statement aligns with Durkheim's concept of anomie, which refers to a societal condition where social norms weaken and lose their capacity to regulate individual behavior, resulting in moral confusion and disorientation.

An Islamic education teacher also expressed concern about the declining observance of religious practices among students, particularly in performing prayers. He explained:

"Prayer, which should be a moral fortress (QS. Al-'Ankabut: 45), is still often neglected. There are students who pretend to pray or come late, even though we have guided them. If prayer is not maintained, daily behavior can easily deviate" (Interview, August 2025).

The Qur'an Al-'Ankabut (29: 45) emphasizes that prayer prevents immorality and wrongdoing, indicating that worship functions not merely as ritual observance but as a means of moral reinforcement. When adolescents

neglect worship and fail to make religion a guiding principle, they become increasingly vulnerable to moral deterioration. This observation corresponds with the findings of Nuha [39], who reported that weak religious engagement contributes to behavioral deviance among students in Islamic schools.

The moral decline among adolescents is also intertwined with the identity crisis typical of adolescence—a developmental stage characterized by a search for self-definition. During this phase, adolescents are highly susceptible to external influences, especially global values conveyed through the internet, music, films, and modern lifestyle trends. Self-identification, which should ideally be shaped by family and school guidance, is increasingly influenced by public figures and online celebrities who may not serve as positive moral examples.

The homeroom teacher at Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School raised concerns regarding students' discipline and manners in the classroom. He observed:

"There are students who do not hesitate to use harsh words toward their friends, and some even argue with teachers loudly. This shows a crisis of manners. In fact, Islam strictly forbids us from belittling or insulting others, as emphasized in QS. Al-Hujurat: 11" (Interview, July 2025).

The tangible impact of moral decline can be observed through disrespectful behavior toward teachers, diminished peer solidarity, and the rise of violent conduct such as group fights. In extreme cases, students have been caught carrying sharp weapons or engaging in delinquent acts that reflect a collapse in moral self-control. The Qur'an Al-Hujurat (49: 11–12) warns against mocking or insulting others, labeling such acts as wicked behavior. Contrary to the study by Guna et al., [40], which found that moral education programs in Islamic schools effectively foster discipline, the current findings indicate that internalization of moral teachings remains weak in practice.

In addition to external pressures, insufficient family supervision and limited school engagement have worsened the situation. Families, as primary socialization agents, often fail to monitor their children's moral development due to work-related busyness, while teachers tend to prioritize academic achievement over character education. This observation supports the findings [41], who noted that weak collaboration between families and schools contributes to moral degradation among adolescents.

Globalization undoubtedly brings positive dimensions such as technological progress, open information, and cross-cultural interaction. However, its negative effects on adolescents remain more dominant, given that their moral and spiritual foundations are not yet mature. The Qur'an Luqman (31: 13–14) highlights the obligation of parents to instill monotheism and moral values from an early age. Without consistent value education within the family, adolescents become easily influenced by external cultures that contradict religious and local norms.

A student interviewed admitted the significant influence of social media in shaping their attitudes:

"Sometimes we imitate trends from TikTok or YouTube because they are considered cool. But we are also aware that this is not in accordance with school or religious teachings. However, if we do not follow the trends, we feel left behind by our friends" (Interview, September 2025).

From a sociological perspective, Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction emphasizes that moral values are formed through continuous socialization involving families, schools, and media. When global media assumes the dominant role while family and school functions weaken, adolescents absorb more values that deviate from local moral norms. These findings support the conclusions of [39], who found that digital platforms have become the strongest socializing agents among Indonesian youth.

Parents consulted through homeroom teachers also expressed challenges in supervising their children. One parent noted:

"We sometimes cannot supervise our children at home because we are busy working. As a result, our children spend more time with their gadgets. When that happens, our control as parents becomes weak" (Interview, August 2025).

This statement highlights a critical gap in the family's role as the primary moral and socializing institution. Therefore, the persistence of moral decadence among adolescents can be understood as the outcome of external factors—such as global cultural penetration—and internal weaknesses within family and school systems. Durkheim's concept of anomie provides a theoretical explanation for how weakened collective norms generate moral confusion, while Berger and Luckmann's framework clarifies the social processes through which global values are internalized by youth. Consequently, addressing this moral crisis requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates the roles of family, school, and community in reinforcing value-based education and developing adolescents' moral resilience.

# 3.2. The Role of Religion in Moral Reconstruction

Islamic schools hold a strategic position as moral fortresses in an era of rapid globalization that continuously introduces external cultural values into society. In the context of Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School in Medan, the institution not only serves as a center for knowledge transfer but also as a vital arena for the cultivation of Islamic morals and character. Religious education in Islamic schools functions as a primary medium

for the internalization of moral values, ensuring that students retain their ethical and spiritual identity amid global influences. These findings support previous studies that identify Islamic schools as key agents in reinforcing moral and spiritual resilience among youth [42].

The principal of Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School emphasized the significance of religious education as the main moral foundation for students. He stated:

"We strive to make this school a second home for students. Congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, and moral studies are routine activities so that students become accustomed to religious values. Religious education is not just a lesson in the classroom, but we bring it to life in the school culture" (Interview, August 2025).

This statement underscores the integration of religious instruction and school culture as a form of moral socialization. The role of teachers is therefore central. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering lessons but also for exemplifying good character in their conduct, speech, and everyday interactions. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared, "I was sent to perfect noble character." The teacher's personal example thus becomes a living instrument for instilling discipline, honesty, and respect so that students not only comprehend moral theory but also embody it in practice. Teachers' moral models play an important role in shaping students' ethical behavior in Islamic schools.

The Islamic Education teacher at Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School emphasized the function of religion as an effective filter in regulating student behavior:

"I always remind the children that knowledge without morals is useless. The Qur'an has emphasized that prayer prevents evil and immoral deeds (QS. Al-'Ankabut: 45). So, we try to connect lessons with daily practices so that they truly understand the function of worship" (Interview, September 2025).

The Qur'an explicitly affirms the importance of education in maintaining morality. In QS. At-Tahrim (66:6), Allah commands believers to protect themselves and their families from the fire of Hell. This verse illustrates that moral education is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities. This study highlights that the integration of moral instruction within religious education reinforces students' self-control and ethical awareness [37].

Synergy among teachers, parents, and students emerges as a crucial factor in ensuring the success of moral education. Teachers provide guidance and role modeling at school, while parents reinforce these lessons at home. As one guidance counselor explained:

"When dealing with students who break the rules, we often relate it to religious values. For example, we remind them of the Qur'an's prohibition against being unjust or disrespecting parents and teachers. With this approach, students are more receptive to guidance" (Interview, September 2025).

This approach demonstrates how religion can serve not only as a moral foundation but also as a practical instrument in behavioral correction. These findings support the study of Fatimah [41], which found that religious-based counseling contributes significantly to student discipline and emotional control.

Furthermore, religious education should not be confined to Islamic Education classes but should permeate all learning domains. Values such as honesty, responsibility, and social awareness can be integrated into general subjects through contextual and cross-disciplinary approaches. From a sociological perspective, Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction suggests that repeated socialization within religious school settings strengthens moral habitus and counterbalances global influences.

At Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School, this role is manifested in programs such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation sessions, and Islamic moral studies that create a religious atmosphere supporting moral development. The Qur'an Al-Mujadilah (58:11) teaches that Allah elevates those who believe and acquire knowledge, reflecting the balance between intellectual growth and spiritual refinement. Regular worship and moral education practices in schools foster social empathy and student discipline.

However, the effectiveness of these programs depends largely on consistent implementation and the exemplary conduct of the entire school community. Religious education also functions preventively by guiding students away from immoral behavior, as reflected in QS. An-Nahl (16:90), which commands justice, kindness, and the avoidance of evil and immorality. Overall, Islamic schools act as moral fortresses that integrate faith, education, and ethical conduct. Religious education forms the foundation for nurturing students who are intellectually competent, spiritually grounded, and morally upright. The synergy between teachers, parents, and the school environment ensures that students remain resilient against the negative effects of globalization while maintaining the noble values of Islam and national identity.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The moral decadence among adolescents in the era of globalization illustrates the erosion of social norms consistent with Durkheim's concept of anomie, where external influences such as social media, popular culture, and materialistic lifestyles blur the distinction between right and wrong. This study reveals that global media has increasingly replaced family and school as dominant agents of moral socialization, producing behavioral problems such as diminished respect for teachers, bullying, and academic dishonesty. Theoretically, this research integrates Durkheim's anomie theory with Berger and Luckmann's concept of social construction to explain how global cultural penetration reshapes adolescents' moral orientation while weakening traditional structures of value formation.

The findings underscore the strategic role of Islamic schools, particularly Muhammadiyah 06 Junior High School Medan, as agents of moral reconstruction. Religious education, manifested through congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, and moral instruction, serves as a systematic process of moral habituation supported by teachers' exemplary conduct and collaboration between schools and families. Practically, Islamic schools should adopt a holistic value-based curriculum by embedding moral and religious principles across all subjects rather than isolating them within Islamic education. Teacher training programs must prioritize moral modeling, while schools and families should institutionalize cooperation through parent engagement and moral counseling programs. Digital literacy and ethical awareness should also be incorporated to help students critically navigate global media influences. Although this study is limited to a single-site case analysis, it provides a foundational model for moral education in Islamic schools and offers a theoretical contribution that positions religion-based education as an adaptive framework for moral reconstruction in the age of globalization.

However, on the other hand, religious education carried out at SMP Muhammadiyah 06 Medan has proven to have a strategic role as a moral fortress to resist this decline. Through the habit of praying in congregation, reciting the Qur'an, studying morals, and the exemplary behavior of teachers, Islamic schools strive to internalize religious values into the lives of students. The Qur'an emphasizes that prayer can prevent evil and immoral deeds QS. Al-'Ankabut (29:45), so that religious education is not only positioned as a subject but as the main foundation in character building. The synergy between teachers, parents, and the school environment is a determining factor in ensuring that the moral values taught are truly internalized in students.

Thus, the moral decadence of adolescents in the context of globalization is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather the result of a complex interaction between external and internal factors. Islamic schools, such as SMP Muhammadiyah 06 Medan, serve as important institutions for integrating religious education and character building, thereby strengthening students' moral filters. This study shows that religion-based education has great potential in overcoming moral confusion caused by globalization, while offering a path to revitalize values through collaboration between families, schools, and communities in building a generation that is knowledgeable, faithful, and noble in character.

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