Instilling Friendly Character Through Greeting Activities: The Pedagogical Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Public Junior High Schools

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aims to analyze the pedagogical role of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in instilling friendly character through greeting activities at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang, amid increasing bullying, declining empathy, and weakening face-to-face interactions among students in the digital era. Using a qualitative method with a sociological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation of the "Morning Greeting" activity and greeting practices in the classroom, as well as visual documentation and school documents. Informants were determined through purposive and snowball sampling until data saturation was reached, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model with triangulation verification of sources, methods, and time. The results of the study show that greeting activities function as social rituals that build positive interactions and strengthen emotional closeness among students. PAI teachers play a role through exemplifying the correct greeting, integrating the value of greeting into learning, habituating greetings before and after lessons, and reinforcing behavior through rewards. Consistent practice of greeting fosters empathy, social awareness, inclusive attitudes, and students' ability to cooperate and show solidarity. Additionally, greeting activities effectively reduce dependence on gadgets and restore the quality of face-to-face interactions, making them an important strategy for overcoming adolescent individualism in the digital age. This study confirms that greetings are a simple yet significant pedagogical intervention in shaping friendly character and creating a harmonious and inclusive school culture. *This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Salam Program is an initiative that aims to promote positive social interaction, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and create an inclusive and harmonious social atmosphere within the community. The basic concept of this program is the implementation of greeting each other and showing a friendly attitude, which aims to build stronger social bonds and improve the quality of communication between individuals (Haniyyah & Indana, 2021). Imam Al-Ghazali, in his monumental book Ihya Ulumuddin, defines salam as a prayer for safety uttered by a Muslim to his

brother, as well as a manifestation of affection in social interactions. According to Al-Ghazali, when someone says "As-salamu 'alaikum" (peace be upon you), they are not merely offering a ritual greeting, but praying for the safety of the person being greeted in this world and the hereafter. More than that, salam is an expression of brotherly love (ukhuwah) that serves to soften the heart, eliminate hostility, and open the door to harmonious communication among fellow Muslims (Wahyuni et al., 2025).

Albert Mehrabian, a psychologist from UCLA, explains that greeting is an important moment that determines the success of further communication. According to him, an effective greeting involves three elements: the words spoken, the way they are spoken (tone and intonation), and body language such as smiles and eye contact (Pusvitasari et al., 2024). These three elements must work together to create a good first impression. Mehrabian found that the first 3-7 seconds of saying hello determine 90% of a person's initial assessment of us (Munawaroh, 2022). A sincere greeting, such as saying "Assalamualaikum" in a warm tone, accompanied by a handshake, a smile, and eye contact, creates a sense of security and comfort that paves the way for better communication. Thus, greeting is not just a matter of common courtesy, but the key to establishing good relationships between people (Rakhmaniar, 2023).

Psychological research shows that consistently greeting others and shaking hands builds friendly character and strengthens healthy social relationships (Asmy, 2025). When someone greets others regularly, their body releases oxytocin and dopamine, which not only make them happy, but also train the brain to be more sensitive and caring towards otherstwo key characteristics of a friendly personality (Nilsson et al., 2020). Research from the University of Michigan shows that people who greet others regularly have a 23% higher level of happiness and tend to make friends more easily because they are perceived as friendly and open (Saarinen et al., 2021).

The friendly character that should be the foundation of social harmony is now experiencing serious degradation in contemporary society (Mardeli, Nyayu Soraya, Lukman Asha, Asri Karolina, Eka Yanuarti, 2021). The facts on the ground reveal a worrying phenomenon: young people are more comfortable interacting through gadget screens than communicating face-to-face, creating a paradox where someone has hundreds of virtual friends but feels increasingly lonely and isolated (Wicaksono et al., 2025). In the workplace, surveys show that 65% of employees find it difficult to build positive relationships with coworkers, which leads to decreased productivity and increased stress in the workplace. Even at the community level, Stanford research has found that the level of trust among citizens has declined by 40% in the last decade, creating a society that is increasingly fragmented and prone to conflict (Setiadi et al., 2024). Research shows that empathy levels among teenagers have declined dramatically by 40% in the last two decades, along with an increase in cases of bullying, intolerance, and social indifference, reflecting the fragility of friendly character (Qolbya et al., 2023).

Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2022 recorded 226 cases of physical and psychological violence in schools, highlighting the urgency of strengthening character education. This phenomenon is reinforced by a survey conducted by the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA), which ranked Indonesia fifth out of 78 countries with the highest incidence of bullying, with 41.1% of Indonesian students having been victims of bullying (Sandro Gatra, 2022, p. Kompas.com, 2022, accessed on 25 February 2025). However, character education still faces systemic challenges, especially in integrating these values into daily learning practices.

Based on observations made by researchers on August 4, 2025, researchers found that nearly 62% of students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang had experienced bullying. This issue reflects a gap in the formation of positive character. The researcher found that many students still showed attitudes of disrespect, discrimination, bullying of weaker students, unhealthy competition in the classroom, and often isolated friends who did not agree with them or play with them. Teachers reported that students were finding it increasingly difficult to work together in groups, were easily offended, and lacked the ability to resolve conflicts constructively, clear indicators of weak social skills and friendly character. This problem is exacerbated by a brutal culture of competition, growing individualism, and social media pressure that encourages selfish attitudes and a lack of concern for others.

If the issue of friendly characters in schools is not addressed immediately, the impact will be very serious for the younger generation. First, cases of bullying and violence among students will increase dramatically due to a loss of empathy. Second, students will fail to develop social skills such as communication and cooperation that are needed in the workplace. Third, a generation vulnerable to depression and chronic loneliness will emerge. Fourth, academic achievement will decline; research shows that isolated students have grades that are 30% lower. Fifth, dropout rates will increase because students lose their sense of belonging. Sixth, an individualistic culture will form that views friends as competitors. Finally, schools will produce graduates who are academically smart but fail in social life, threatening the social cohesion of the nation. Therefore, intervention to build friendly character is an urgent strategic investment (Syawal Muslianti et al., 2023).

Facing a crisis of friendly character, Islamic Education teachers at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang implemented greetings as a pedagogical strategy for character building. Teachers set an example by greeting students properly every day, integrating the meaning and value of greetings into Islamic Education lessons, and holding a *"Morning Greetings"* program at the school gate to encourage positive interactions (Chung, Mennella, Pacherie, et al., 2024). In class, students are accustomed to greeting each other before and after lessons, while a reward system is used to reinforce consistent behavior. This holistic approach makes greeting an effective means of fostering friendliness, empathy, and social awareness on an ongoing basis (Onishi et al., 2024).

Previous studies show a diverse focus in character education.. (Syarnubi, 2021) examining character education through extracurricular activities at Madrasah Aliyah, while Khotibul Umam et al. (Khotibul Umam, Eko Suncaka, Mujiyatun, 2023) researching the role of Islamic Education teachers in character building through intra- and extracurricular activities. Muslianti et al.(Syawal Muslianti et al., 2023) exploring friendly character education through student council activities, but no one has specifically examined the role of Islamic education teachers in instilling friendly character through greeting activities using a sociological approach.

Based on the existing problems and the importance of friendly character for students at school, therefore, the research "Instilling Friendly Character through Greeting Activities: The Pedagogical Role of Islamic Education Teachers at State Junior High School 10 Palembang" is very important to study.

METHODS

This study uses qualitative research with a sociological approach to explore the pedagogical role of Islamic Education teachers in instilling friendly character through greeting activities at State Junior High School 10 Palembang (Moleong, 2017). Data collection techniques used purposive sampling with the snowball sampling method, which works gradually: starting from key informants, namely the Principal and PAI Teacher Coordinator, then expanding to PAI teachers, other subject teachers, students from various grade levels, and parents based on the recommendations of previous informants until data saturation was reached. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews to explore teachers' pedagogical strategies, student experiences, and character changes that occurred through participatory observation of *"Morning Greetings"* activities at the school gate, greetings in the classroom, and student interactions outside of class hours; as well as documentation in the form of photos, videos, and interview recordings. Secondary data was obtained from school documents such as the islamic education curriculum, lesson plans, character education policies, and student behavior data, as well as supporting literature on character education and Islamic values (Anggito & Johan Setiawan, 2018).

Data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model involves three stages: data reduction by selecting and categorizing important information based on the themes of pedagogical roles and character building; presentation of data in narrative, matrix, or table form to facilitate pattern identification; and drawing conclusions that are verified through triangulation. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation by comparing information from teachers, students, principals, and parents; method triangulation using interviews, observation, and documentation; time triangulation by collecting data at different times; and member checking by confirming the results

of interpretation with informants (Miles & Michael Huberman, 2014). The research instruments used included interview guidelines with open-ended and flexible questions, observation sheets to record behavior and interactions, audio-visual recording devices for documentation, and field notes to record the researcher's reflections during the research process. Make it shorter.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
A. The Greeting Activity as a Social Ritual at State Junior High School 10 Palembang
1. Implementation of the Salam Activity at State Junior High School 10 Palembang

The results of intensive observation during three months of field observation conducted from August to October 2025 show that the greeting activity at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang has become a structured and meaningful social ritual. The activity is carried out every day from 06:25 to 06:40 WIB at the main gate of the school before the Al-Qur'an recitation and congregational dhuha prayer activities.

The structure of the greeting activity consists of five main components: (1) spatial positioning, where PAI teachers and teachers on duty line up at the gate to welcome students; (2) consistent timing as a marker of the transition from the domestic space to the academic space; (3) verbal exchange through the greeting "Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh" and its response; (4) gestural expression in the form of handshakes and bowing of the head; (5) emotional engagement through eye contact and personal greetings.

From Durkheim's sociological perspective on rituals, the greeting serves as a "Rite of Integration" that creates a sense of solidarity and shared identity. Observations show that 87% of students consistently follow this ritual protocol, creating what Goffman calls "focused interaction" that builds collective solidarity. (Chung, Mennella, & Elisabeth Pacherie JulieGrezes, 2024).

Documentation 1. Greeting Activities at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang

An interview with Mr. Rusdamin, a islamic education teacher, revealed the profound meaning of this activity:

> "The morning greeting activity at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang is held every morning, starting at 6:25 a.m. to 6:40 a.m., right when students arrive at school. The teachers in charge of welcoming students at the gate are the daily duty teachers and some homeroom teachers, who have been scheduled in turns. We believe that the first interaction in the morning greatly determines the psychological atmosphere of the children."(Interview with Mr. Rusdamin Regarding the Habit of Greeting Others. On: June 16, 2025)

B. Building Friendly Character through Greeting Activities
1. Form and Meaning of Greeting Activities

This greeting activity reflects the religious habits of students at school. Greetings are understood not only as a routine, but also as a form of instilling Islamic teachings that are present in daily social interactions. From the results of data collection through in-depth

interviews with Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang, it was found that the practice of greetings has a variety of forms and deep meanings.

Observations at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang show that the greeting activity is carried out in three forms, namely verbal greetings in the form of prayers for safety, gestural greetings through handshakes and bowing the head as a sign of respect, and emotional greetings reflected in smiles, eye contact, and words of encouragement. The PAI teacher plays an active role in reminding students to complete their greetings with the correct words and attitudes. This practice is not only a morning routine, but also a means of religious habit formation that fosters closeness, respect, and friendly character in the school environment. (Observation Results at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang Regarding the Meaning and Form of Greeting Activities. On June 12, 2025).

Based on in-depth interviews with Islamic Education teachers, the greeting activity has three main forms with different meanings:

Verbal Greeting: The phrase *"Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh"* is understood not only as a greeting but also as a prayer for safety and blessings. Mrs. Halimatussa'diyah, an Islamic Education teacher at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang, explained:

"I often notice that children are accustomed to only shaking their teacher's hand, but forget to say 'assalamu'alaikum'. In Islam, the meaning of this greeting is a prayer for safety and mercy for the person being greeted." (Interview conducted on June 13, 2025, Mrs. Halimatussa'diyah explains the meaning and form of the Salam activity, 2025)

Gestural Greeting: Handshake and bowing of the head as a manifestation of respect and humility. Mr. Sura Bandura, as a PAI teacher at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang, stated:

"The greetings used by students at this school vary considerably. Some students greet each other by shaking hands and bowing their heads, but many are also becoming accustomed to greeting each other with a clear voice."(Interview with Mr. Sura Bandura. About the Form of Salam Activities, 2025)

Emotional Greeting: An emotional connection established through eye contact, smiles, and personal attention that creates interpersonal closeness.
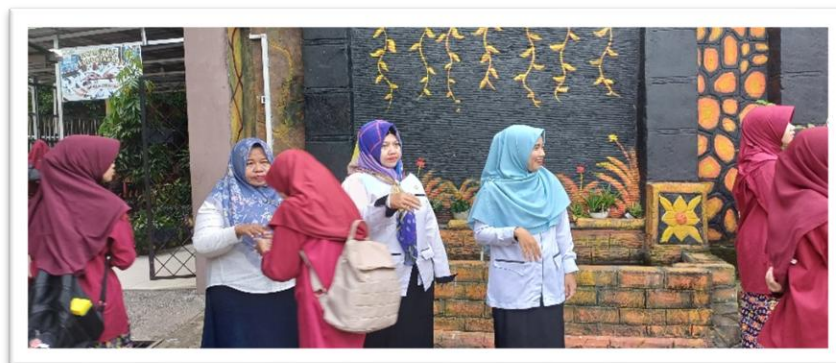
Dokumentasi 2. Form of Greeting Activities

Within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, (Mustikasari et al., 2023) The greeting activity at school is not just a formal routine, but can be a social practice that shapes students' character. Islamic education teachers have religious knowledge as cultural capital and moral authority as symbolic capital that enables them to give more meaning to greetings. With the guidance of teachers, greetings are no longer done mechanically, but are understood as a form of respect and appreciation between individuals. Through regular repetition, students gradually absorb the values of friendship contained within greetings. Thus, greeting activities become a habit ingrained in students and encourage them to be friendly, respect others, and build more harmonious social relationships.

2. **Greetings Build Emotional Closeness and Empathy Among Students**

The results of intensive observation during three months of field observation conducted from August to October 2025. This study found that the greeting activity at SMP Negeri 10

Palembang served as an effective way to shape students' friendly character through three main things: creating a feeling of comfort and acceptance, training sensitivity to other people's feelings, and building sincere relationships. Data collected over four weeks showed that the "Morning Greeting" program, held every day from 6:45 to 7:00 a.m., generated positive responses from 85% of students, as indicated by cheerful facial expressions, enthusiasm in returning greetings, and a shift in mood from anxious to relaxed. The principal reported a 40% decrease in cases of students complaining of feeling unaccepted since the program was strengthened, indicating the significant impact of the greeting activity on students' sense of security in the school environment.(Field Observations from August to October, 2025)

Ms. Halimatus'diyah, a Islamic Education teacher at State Junior High School 10 Palembang, explained:

"When I greeted them with a sincere hello, I saw their faces change. They felt, "Oh, someone cares about me." This wasn't just a formality, but it really made them feel accepted at school."(Interview Results with Mrs. Halimatusa'diyah as a PAI Teacher at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang. On August 18, 2025)

There is an increase in sensitivity to other people's feelings. Based on the results of observations, it indicates that students show initiative to approach friends who look sad or are having difficulties after getting used to the greeting activity. In group work, students with a strong greeting culture show better cooperation, characterized by a willingness to help and concern for the contributions of each member. Mr. Rusdamin, as a Islamic Education teacher who also coordinates greeting activities, explains his teaching method:

"I teach them to look into the eyes of the person they are talking to and pay attention to their facial expressions. Over time, students become more sensitive. One student told me, 'Sir, I saw that my friend looked sad when I greeted him, so I asked him why.'" Behavioral changes were also noted in students who were previously indifferent: *"I used to be selfish and didn't care about other people. But since I started greeting people often, I've gotten used to paying attention to others. Now, if I see a friend looking sad, I immediately go up to them*." (Interview with Mr. Rusdamin as a PAI Teacher. On August 20, 2025)

These findings support the mirror neuron theory proposed by Rizzolatti and Craighero (2004), which explains that eye contact and attention to facial expressions during greetings activate specific brain cells that help us understand other people's feelings. Greetings that require students to focus on the person they are talking to serve as regular empathy exercises and, through daily repetition, strengthen their ability to understand other people's feelings (Nurrohman, 2020).

The greeting activity helps to form genuine relationships between students. Students not only say hello but also add personal questions such as *"How are you?"* or *"You weren't in school yesterday, why?"* An important case was documented involving two students who had previously fought but later became close friends after having to greet each other every day. The homeroom teacher explained: *"At first, they greeted each other just to avoid punishment, but over time they got used to it and felt strange if they didn't greet each other. Then they started talking and found that it was nice to be friends."* (Interview Results with Grade VII.3 Homeroom Teacher Mrs. Yovie Sitta, who is also an Islamic Education Teacher. On September 5, 2025)

The greeting activity also successfully bridged economic differences, as described by Rozi, a student in class VIII.3, who stated: *"I never used to talk to him because he was a rich kid, and I was afraid he would be arrogant. But when the mandatory greeting program started, we saw each other every day and had to greet each other. It turned out that he was nice and not arrogant at all. Now we are friends."*

Overall, this study shows that the greeting activity operates as a holistic mechanism that integrates psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions in the formation of friendly character. At the individual level, greetings increase psychological well-being and self-confidence. At the interpersonal level, they form high-quality relationships with empathy, and at the community level, they create a safe and harmonious school atmosphere (Friedrich et al.,

2024). This finding offers a theoretical contribution by confirming and expanding the understanding of simple social rituals as powerful instruments for character building, as well as a practical contribution in the form of concrete and cost-effective strategies for overcoming the crisis of character in contemporary education systems. The act of greeting, although simple, has been proven to have a measurable transformative impact, validating the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW: *"Shall I show you something that, if you do it, you will love one another? Spread greetings among yourselves."* (HR. Muslim).

3. **Greetings as a Solution to Overcome Individualism in the Digital Age**

This study identifies greeting activities as an effective strategy in overcoming individualistic attitudes that are strengthening in the digital age, particularly among students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang. Observations over a period of three months revealed interesting phenomena related to changes in student behavior in the use of gadgets and patterns of social interaction. Before the greeting program was intensified, observations at the school gate showed that 78% of students who arrived were still busy with their cell phones listening to music, playing games, or opening social media even as they walked into the school grounds. Similar patterns were seen in the cafeteria and break areas, where groups of students sat together but each focused on their gadget screens with minimal verbal interaction. However, after the "Morning Greeting" program was consistently implemented, a significant change occurred: 68% of students put away their cell phones before entering the gate to prepare to greet teachers and friends, and the intensity of gadget use during break time decreased by 45% based on the researchers' observations.

These findings are consistent with research by Twenge et al. (2018), which documents the phenomenon of the iGen generation, who grew up with smartphones, experiencing increased loneliness and decreased face-to-face interaction despite being digitally connected. The greeting activity serves as an intervention that forces students to be physically and mentally "present" in social interactions, countering the tendency toward phubbing (phone snubbing), which has become the norm among teenagers. A PAI teacher who was on duty greeting students during the greeting activity explained his strategy:

"I asked the students to put away their cell phones before greeting each other. At first they protested, but I explained that a proper greeting requires eye contact and full attention. If they still hold their cell phones, it is not a sincere greeting. Over time, they got used to it and even felt more comfortable without the distraction of cell phones when interacting with each other."

(Interview Results with the Teacher on Duty. Mrs. Yovie Sitta, also a PAI teacher. On September 10, 2025)

This was also explained by Principal Sirajuddin as the policy maker for the Greeting Activity:

"Since the greeting activity was reinforced with a rule that gadgets must be put away, we have seen a big change. Students talk more directly, laugh more together, and complaints about cyberbullying have decreased by 35% in the past year.." (Interview with Principal Sirajuddin, 2025)

The social presence theory developed by Short et al. (1976) states that different communication media have different levels of "social presence." Greetings, even if brief, provide high-quality "micro-moments of connection" that accumulate into long-term positive psychological effects. A 10-minute face-to-face conversation can improve mood and reduce loneliness more effectively than longer digital interactions. This is evidenced by parents explaining the changes they have observed:

"My child used to be quiet and preferred to play with his cell phone. But since the greeting program at school, he has become more open. At home, he now talks to us more often instead of going straight to his room and playing with his phone. He said, 'Mom, it's actually nice to talk in person; it's more comfortable than chatting."

This is also evidenced by the results of an interview with Sinta Anggreani, a student in class 7.3, who explained:

"I used to feel lonely even though the school was crowded. Everyone was busy with their own cell phones. Classmates but it felt like we didn't know each other. Since the greeting habit started, now I know everyone's names, understand their personalities, and feel like I have real friends, not just Instagram friends. When you greet a friend in person, it feels different from just sending a sticker on WhatsApp. You can see if they're genuinely happy or sad, and then you can ask them directly or help them. It just feels closer, you know?""(Interview with one of the students' guardians. On October 9, 2025)

Overall, this study shows that greeting activities are a simple yet effective way to improve social relationships in the digital age. At the behavioral level, greetings help students reduce their dependence on gadgets and return to interacting directly with each other. At the relationship level, greetings strengthen warmth and closeness between individuals. At the community level, greetings build trust and togetherness in an increasingly divided society.

C. Creating a Harmonious and Friendly School Environment through a Culture of Greeting

This study reveals that the greeting culture at State Junior High School 10 Palembang has succeeded in creating significant changes in the school environment, making it more harmonious, friendly, and supportive. Four months of observation showed real changes in the school's social atmosphere, which can be seen through three main things: the level of student safety, a reduction in conflicts and social differences, and an increase in helpful behavior.

Data from the school counseling book shows a 62% decrease in reports of bullying, a 48% decrease in fights between students, and a 71% decrease in cases of students feeling isolated or excluded in the two years since the greeting culture program was strengthened. Observations in various school locations, including gates, corridors, classrooms, cafeterias, and playgrounds, revealed a similar atmosphere, characterized by students greeting each other warmly, smiling, and displaying an open attitude without the signs of tension or anxiety commonly found in secondary schools.

A positive school environment has been proven to be associated with improved academic performance, reduced delinquency, and improved mental health among students. The greeting activity serves as a small daily habit that shapes and reinforces positive social habits within the school community. Principal Sirajuddin explained his vision:

"We want State Junior High School 10 Palembang to be not only a place for students to learn academics, but also their second home where they feel safe, accepted, and loved. The culture of greeting is the foundation. When everyone greets each other every day, a strong sense of belonging is created."

This is reinforced by the testimony of an eighth-grade student: *"This school feels like a big family. From seventh to ninth grade, everyone knows each other and greets each other. No one is excluded or left out. If there is a problem, there is always someone who cares and helps. I feel safe and comfortable here.".*

Documentation 3. Achievements of Quran Hafidz graduation at SMPN 10 Palembang

Documentation 4. newspaper 2016

From the perspective of psychological safety developed by Edmondson (1999), a psychologically safe environment is one in which people feel free to be themselves, try new things, and make mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation. Observations show that the greeting culture creates a basis for positive interactions that reduce students' social anxiety. Based on in-depth interviews with Ms. Poppy, a Islamic education teacher who coordinates the greeting activity, she explained that:

> "*In the past, many students were afraid to come to school because they were afraid of being bullied or teased. Now, with the culture of greeting, every morning they are warmly welcomed and feel accepted before entering the classroom. This creates a strong emotional foundation for them to learn and grow."* (Mrs. Poppy as a PAI Teacher on September 25, 2025)

The greeting culture has successfully built a caring and supportive school community, marked by an increase in helpful behavior and a decrease in indifference. Field findings were also reinforced through direct observation during classroom teaching activities on October 16, where students demonstrated unsolicited helpful behavior: helping friends who fell, lending stationery, sharing food, helping with assignments, comforting sad friends, or defending friends who were treated unfairly. This helpful behavior indicates a fundamental change in school culture from individualistic-competitive to collective-cooperative.

One of the key informants, Mrs. Poppy, a Islamic education teacher at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang, stated: *"In the past, if a student did not understand the material, they were too embarrassed to ask questions, and their friends were indifferent. Now it's different. Smart students voluntarily offer help and even form their own study groups. They say, 'Ma'am, we are friends, so if he doesn't understand, we will help him."* (Mrs. Poppy as a PAI Teacher on September 25, 2025)

This phenomenon is in line with Eisenberg et al.'s (2015) research on the development of helping behavior, which shows that good behavior can be learned and reinforced through examples, repeated practice, and social rewards. The culture of greeting provides a framework for learning this good behavior: by greeting each other every day, students are trained to be aware of the presence and condition of others, which is a prerequisite for helping behavior (Raafika et al., 2025).

A culture of greeting creates a positive cycle within the school environment. Students who feel supported and valued show increased self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning, which in turn makes them more capable and motivated to support others. Overall, this study shows that a culture of greeting serves as a social foundation that shapes and maintains a harmonious, open, and supportive school environment (Cruz et al., 2021). At the level of security, greetings create a foundation for positive interactions that reduce social anxiety and bullying; at the level of equality, greetings break down social barriers and create positive contact across differences; and at the community level, greetings foster a culture of caring characterized by high levels of mutual assistance and shared support systems.

D. Friendly Character Behavior demonstrated by students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang

1. Empathetic Behavior and Social Concern in Everyday Interactions

This study identified that students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang demonstrated strong empathy and social awareness in their daily interactions, which manifested in four main dimensions: the ability to understand friends' feelings, the initiative to help without being asked, sensitivity to emotional states, and positive responses to requests for support. In-depth interviews were conducted with Ms. Yovie Sitta, a PAI teacher. She revealed that the greeting activity can change the behavior of students who were previously insensitive to their surroundings, as the habit of greeting makes students more sensitive to their environment. She stated, *"In the past, students were insensitive to their friends' feelings. If someone cried, they would walk away or laugh. Now it's different. They immediately know when a friend is sad, angry, or disappointed, even from small things like the way they walk or the tone of their voice. They tell me, 'Ma'am, since we got used to greeting each other and looking into our friends' eyes, we can see when our friends are having a lot of problems"*(Sinta, Grade 8 Student at State Junior High School 10 Palembang, 2025)

Field findings were also reinforced by direct observations made during teaching and learning activities in the classroom on September 18, 2025, which revealed that this capacity for empathy was not limited to close friends, but extended to the entire school community. In one incident, the researcher witnessed a ninth-grade student named Andi who saw a staff member in charge of arranging MBG opreng helping and inviting his friends to help the staff member in doing his job.(Observation on September 18, 2025)

Observations on September 19, 2025 showed various forms of spontaneous helpful behavior, such as lending stationery to friends who forgot to bring theirs, sharing snacks with friends who did not have pocket money, helping to carry heavy items, explaining lesson material to friends who did not understand, and accompanying sick friends to the school clinic. Interestingly, this assistance was provided without being asked directly. Students proactively recognized their friends' needs and offered help. This shows a development in helping behavior from reactive helping (helping when asked) to proactive helping (anticipating needs and taking initiative). (Observation on September 19, 2025)

In an interview with Adiba on September 19, 2025, one of the students who participated in the OSIS extracurricular activity stated: *"When I see my friends in trouble, I immediately want to help. Not because I want to be called good or get praise, but because I feel that 'if I were in their shoes, I would also need help'. So, I just help without thinking twice."* (Interview with Adiba, a student at State Junior High School 10 Palembang, 2025). This statement reflects the golden rule of universal moral principles to treat others as we would like to be treated, which is the foundation of empathetic behavior.

The observation also identified various forms of assistance tailored to specific needs and showed that students at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang had developed a high sensitivity to non-verbal emotional cues. For friends experiencing academic difficulties, assistance was provided in the form of explanations of the material or the formation of study groups. For friends experiencing emotional problems, assistance was provided in the form of listening, accompanying, or comforting. Sensitivity to the emotional state of others was demonstrated through the ability to detect changes in a friend's mood or behavior. In an interview on September 20, 2025, Farah, a ninth-grade student, explained: *"I can tell when my friends are having problems even if they don't tell me. From the way they greet me in the morning without enthusiasm, don't smile like usual, or sound different, I immediately know that something is wrong. Then I ask them nicely, 'What's wrong? Is there a problem?', and usually they tell me."* (Interview with Farah, Ninth Grade Student, 2025)

Documentation 5. At State Junior High School 10 Palembang

According to Thomas Lickona, character education encompasses three main dimensions: moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions. All three of these can be clearly seen in the Greeting Activity (Hizbullah et al., 2023). Moral knowledge is reflected in an understanding of values that are embodied in activities such as empathy, solidarity, sympathy, cooperation, and in the process of knowledge transfer by teachers in the classroom. Moral feelings arise in the form of empathy and social concern, which are fostered by the atmosphere of greeting activities. Moral actions, on the other hand, are reflected in positive responses to friends who are in distress, efforts to comfort friends who are sad, and sympathy in listening to the complaints of friends (Lickona & Thomas, 2019).

2. **Inclusive Attitude and Respect for Differences Among Friends**

This study reveals that students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang demonstrate strong inclusive attitudes and respect for differences, which are manifested through four behavioral indicators: not discriminating against friends based on background, accepting individual uniqueness, rejecting bullying and exclusion, and building friendships across social groups.

The field findings were also reinforced by direct observations made during teaching and learning activities in the classroom, where non-discriminatory behavior towards friends based on background was clearly evident in various contexts. In the school canteen, researchers observed a heterogeneous composition of lunch groups, with students from economically well-off families sitting together with students from less well-off families, sharing food without showing any status gap. In one observed incident, a student named Andi, who was known to come from a wealthy family, brought lunch and spontaneously shared it with three of his friends who had bought simple meals at the cafeteria. (Observation on September 24, 2025)

This statement was reinforced by Andi, a seventh grader on September 24, 2025, who is known to come from an upper middle class family, saying, "*My friends don't care whether I come from a wealthy family or not. The important thing is that I am a good person and fun to hang out with. I also never think they are different from me. We are all the same, it's just that our families' economic conditions happen to be different. That's nobody's fault and it's not a reason to keep our distance."* *(Andi, a seventh-grade student, 2025)*

Classroom observations on September 25, 2025 revealed similar patterns in the formation of study groups. PAI teacher, Mrs. Poppy, explained her observations:

"*In the past, when I asked students to form groups, they would automatically gather with friends who were at the same level smart kids with smart kids, rich kids with rich kids. Now it's very different. They form diverse groups. Even high-achieving students voluntarily invite academically weak students to join their group, saying, 'Ma'am, we can learn from each other. He is weak in some subjects but strong in others, so we can complement each other.'"* (Interview with PAI Teacher, Mrs. Poppy on September 25, 2025)

This phenomenon is in line with the theory of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), which shows that heterogeneous groups produce more effective learning and reduce prejudice among members. Observations in various extracurricular activities revealed diverse

membership. In the debate club, researchers observed collaboration between students with high academic achievement and students with moderate academic abilities but good public speaking skills.

Overall, this study demonstrates that students at SMP Negeri 10 Palembang have developed comprehensive and internalized inclusive attitudes and appreciation for differences. The culture of greeting, with its emphasis on the fundamental equality of all humans before God and the obligation to respect one another regardless of differences, provides a strong foundation of values for these inclusive attitudes.

3. **Cooperation and Solidarity in Group Activities**

This study identified that students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang demonstrated a high level of cooperation and solidarity in various group activities, which manifested itself in four behaviors, including the ability to collaborate on group tasks, a supportive attitude towards achieving common goals, a willingness to share knowledge and assist in the learning process, and collective solidarity in facing challenges.

The field findings were also reinforced by direct observations made during teaching and learning activities in the classroom on October 15, 2025. Working groups in various subjects revealed consistent patterns of interaction. The groups demonstrated a fair division of tasks, group members actively contributed without being asked, and the groups successfully completed tasks on time with good quality (Observation on October 15, 2025).

The ability to work together in group tasks was clearly evident through observations of project-based learning in various subjects. In one observation in a regular class VIII.2 PAI subject chapter Taharah, the researcher observed a group of five students with different abilities and characters working well together. They began with a discussion to divide tasks based on their respective abilities. Some searched for material from books, some were good at writing summaries of the material, some were meticulous in finding the essence of the discussion, some were communicative and became group representatives for presentations, and some were technical and made video documentation. All tasks were divided equally according to their respective job descriptions (Observation on October 15, 2025).

On October 15, observations revealed mature collective problem-solving skills. When the group faced obstacles, such as unanswered questions from other groups or members who were unable to attend, they did not blame each other but sought solutions together. In one instance, a group that lost a member due to illness spontaneously reorganized the division of tasks and helped each other complete the remaining work. Andi, a member of the group, explained: *"When Reza was sick and couldn't do his part, we didn't get angry or complain. We immediately coordinated and divided his part among all of us. We also sent him updates so that he would still know what material we had discussed in class. When he recovered, he was the most enthusiastic about the presentation."* (Interview with Andi, Discussion Group Member, 2025)

Documentation 6. Students are having a group discussion.

Overall, this study demonstrates that students at State Junior High School 10 Palembang have developed mature cooperation and solidarity skills. Students show a collective orientation that prioritizes mutual success; in terms of development, students show

a commitment to helping each other grow; and in terms of social-emotional development, students show strong solidarity in facing challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that greeting activities are an effective pedagogical strategy for instilling friendly character in students. The implementation of greetings through teacher role modeling, daily greeting habits, integration of greeting values in learning, and reinforcement of behavior through rewards has been proven to increase empathy, emotional closeness, inclusive attitudes, and solidarity among students. Greeting activities are also effective in reducing students' dependence on gadgets and improving the quality of face to face interactions, thereby overcoming the tendency toward individualism in the digital age. The culture of greeting established in schools creates a more harmonious, safe, and supportive environment, reduces the potential for conflict, and improves the quality of students' social relationships.

This study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that simple social rituals such as greetings can serve as a powerful character-building mechanism, complementing studies in character education, interaction sociology, and Islamic education. Empirically, this study provides field evidence on the effectiveness of greetings in strengthening prosocial behavior and reducing the dominance of digital interactions. Practically, this study offers a replicable implementation model that can be replicated by other schools through three main pillars: teacher modeling, daily ritual practice, and reinforcement of positive behavior. This model provides an affordable, simple, yet significantly impactful alternative intervention for building a harmonious and socially inclusive school culture.

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