

## **Adolescents' Difficulties in Performing the Five Daily Prayers in a Rural Muslim Community**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes adolescents' difficulties in performing the five daily prayers in Parmainan Village, Hutaraja Tinggi District, Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The problem addressed in this study is the inconsistency between adolescents' basic knowledge of prayer as an Islamic obligation and their daily practice of performing prayer regularly and on time. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case-study orientation. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with adolescents, parents, the village head, and religious/community leaders, as well as documentation of village and religious activities. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source triangulation and persistent observation. The findings show that adolescents' prayer practice remains inconsistent. Some adolescents perform prayer only at certain times, delay prayer because of smartphones, peer activities, fatigue, or household work, and pray mainly after parental reminders. The main difficulties appear in two stages: pre-prayer readiness and prayer performance. Pre-prayer difficulties include delaying ablution, weak time discipline, and difficulty disengaging from leisure or work activities. Prayer-performance difficulties include limited mastery of recitations and procedures, rushed movements, low concentration, and uncertainty about correct practice. These difficulties are shaped by personal motivation, procedural competence, parental modelling, peer norms, digital habits, and rural household demands. The study concludes that adolescents' difficulty in establishing the five daily prayers should be understood as a layered religious-educational problem rather than merely as laziness or disobedience. Strengthening prayer discipline requires adaptive guidance, consistent parental modelling, peer-based religious support, digital habit management, and collaboration among families, schools, mosques, and village communities.

### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: 09-04-2026

Revised: 17-04-2026

Accepted: 26-05-2026

Published: 31-05-2026

### **KEYWORDS**

Adolescent Religiosity;  
Five Daily Prayers;  
Islamic Education;  
Parental Guidance;  
Peer Influence;  
Rural Muslim  
Community

## **Introduction**

Prayer (salah) occupies a central position in Islamic religious life. It is not merely a ritual obligation, but also a religious practice that forms discipline, remembrance of God, moral consciousness, and spiritual orientation. The Qur'an describes prayer as an obligation prescribed at specific times and as a practice that restrains immoral conduct (Abdel Haleem, 2004). In Islamic educational thought, education is directed not only toward cognitive achievement but also toward moral and spiritual formation (Halstead, 2004). Therefore, the five daily prayers

have both devotional and formative significance: they train punctuality, self-regulation, bodily discipline, humility, and accountability before God.

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in which religious habits and personal identity are actively negotiated. The World Health Organization (2024) defines adolescents as persons aged 10–19 years, while Sawyer et al. (2018) argue that contemporary biological, social, and educational transitions may extend the practical boundaries of adolescence into the early twenties. Erikson (1968) explains adolescence as a decisive period of identity formation, during which young people negotiate values, roles, and recognition. In religious life, adolescents do not merely receive religious expectations passively. They interpret, test, resist, or internalize religious norms within the realities of family life, peer interaction, schooling, digital media, and local culture. Religiosity during adolescence is also closely related to self-regulation, psychosocial development, and adjustment (Schnitker et al., 2021).

In Muslim communities, the obligation to perform the five daily prayers is generally introduced from early childhood through family instruction, Qur'anic learning, formal and non-formal Islamic education, mosque activities, and community norms. However, knowledge of obligation does not automatically produce stable religious practice. Many adolescents know that prayer is obligatory but still struggle to perform it regularly. This tension is important for Islamic education because the goal of religious learning is not only the acquisition of knowledge but also habituation, moral formation, and practical obedience. Thus, the central question is not only whether adolescents understand prayer, but how they organize their daily life so that prayer becomes a stable and meaningful practice.

The present study emerged from field concerns in Parmainan Village, Hutaraja Tinggi District, Padang Lawas Regency. Preliminary observation showed that some adolescents had not performed the five daily prayers regularly. Some prayed only at certain times, some delayed prayer because of smartphone use or peer activities, and others performed prayer mainly when reminded by parents. These patterns indicate a gap between religious knowledge and religious practice. The gap cannot be reduced to individual weakness alone. It reflects an interaction among adolescent motivation, prayer competence, parental supervision, peer culture, digital distraction, fatigue, household responsibility, and the socioeconomic rhythm of rural life.

Several theoretical perspectives help explain this complexity. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory emphasizes that human development is shaped by nested environments, including family, peer groups, schools, religious institutions, communities, and broader culture. Adolescents' prayer discipline is therefore not formed in isolation but through repeated interaction with significant others and social settings. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory also explains that behaviour is learned through modelling, observation, reinforcement, and perceived social norms. When parents, peers, and community members model prayer discipline, adolescents may internalize it more easily. Conversely, when peer activities normalize delaying prayer or when adults do not provide consistent examples, adolescents may treat prayer as less urgent.

Motivation theory also provides a useful lens. Self-determination theory argues that sustained behaviour is more likely when individuals experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the context of prayer, competence refers to adolescents' ability to perform prayer correctly, autonomy refers to their personal awareness and willingness, and relatedness refers to support from parents, peers, teachers, and religious communities. Family religious transmission studies similarly show that parental modelling, warmth, religious conversation, and shared religious practice strongly influence young people's religious habits and faith continuity (Bengtson et al., 2013; Dollahite & Marks, 2019; Goodman & Dyer, 2020).

Previous studies on Muslim adolescents and religiosity indicate that family, peers, religious coping, and social environment are important in shaping youth religious development, including in Indonesian Muslim adolescent samples (French et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2023). However, the specific issue of how adolescents negotiate the five daily prayers as a daily ritual discipline still requires closer qualitative attention, particularly in rural Muslim communities where family work routines, local religious expectations, and digital media intersect. This study addresses that gap by examining adolescents' difficulties in performing prayer not only as a matter of knowledge, but also as a practical struggle involving time management, fatigue, peer belonging, smartphone habits, parental guidance, and confidence in ritual performance.

The novelty of this study lies in its interpretation of adolescent prayer difficulty as a layered religious-educational problem rather than a single moral failure. It distinguishes between pre-prayer difficulties, such as delaying ablution and failing to respond immediately to prayer time, and prayer-performance difficulties, such as uncertainty about recitation, lack of concentration, and rushed movements. It also situates these difficulties within adolescents' relational ecology: family, peers, digital culture, and rural household demands. Thus, this study aims to analyze the pattern of adolescents' performance of the five daily prayers in Parmainan Village and to identify the difficulties they experience in establishing regular prayer practice. The study is expected to contribute to Islamic education, adolescent religious development, and community-based religious guidance.

## **Methods**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case-study orientation. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on adolescents' experiences, religious practices, family guidance, peer influence, and contextual obstacles in a natural social setting without manipulating variables. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate when researchers seek to understand meanings, experiences, interactions, and contextual factors within real-life settings (Creswell & Poth, 2024). A case-study orientation was used because the research examined a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are closely connected (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted in Parmainan Village, Hutaraja Tinggi District, Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The location was selected

because preliminary observation showed that several adolescents in the village still experienced difficulty performing the five daily prayers regularly and on time. The village context is also relevant because religious life, agricultural work, family routines, peer interaction, and smartphone use intersect in adolescents' everyday lives. This made the site appropriate for examining how religious obligation is negotiated in a rural Muslim community.

The participants consisted of four categories of informants: adolescents, parents, village leadership, and religious/community leaders. The primary participants were eight adolescents aged approximately 13–20 years, representing early, middle, and late adolescence. Eight parents were interviewed to obtain family perspectives on religious guidance, supervision, and daily routines. The village head and three religious or community leaders were also included to provide broader community-level perspectives. This combination of participants enabled the study to compare adolescents' self-reports with parental observations and community interpretations.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to identify adolescents' behaviour around prayer time, their interaction with peers, smartphone use, household activities, and parental reminders. Semi-structured interviews explored adolescents' understanding of prayer, their daily prayer practice, difficulties before and during prayer, peer influence, parental guidance, and sources of motivation. Parent interviews focused on the importance of prayer, methods of guidance, responses when children missed prayer, peer influence, and obstacles experienced by adolescents. Interviews with village and religious leaders examined community concerns, perceived causes of weak prayer discipline, and possible forms of collective guidance. Documentation supported contextual understanding of village conditions and religious activities.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020). In the data condensation stage, the researcher selected and summarized data related to delayed prayer, smartphone distraction, peer influence, parental reminders, weak prayer knowledge, fatigue, household work, and difficulty performing prayer correctly. In the data display stage, these data were organized into thematic narratives to identify patterns of prayer practice and forms of difficulty. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the relationship between adolescent motivation, procedural competence, family guidance, peer culture, digital habits, and rural household demands.

Data trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, persistent observation, and documentation review. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from adolescents, parents, the village head, and religious/community leaders. Technique triangulation was carried out by comparing interview data, observation notes, and documentation. Triangulation and persistent observation are important strategies for strengthening credibility in qualitative research because they reduce dependence on a single source or method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical caution was maintained by emphasizing participant categories rather than

exposing personal details, and by minimizing direct quotations while retaining the substance of the findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Patterns of Adolescents' Five Daily Prayer Practice in Parmainan Village***

The findings show that adolescents in Parmainan Village generally understood the five daily prayers as an Islamic obligation, but their daily practice did not consistently reflect that knowledge. Most adolescent participants stated that prayer is required for Muslims and should not be abandoned. However, their practice varied. Some prayed but not always five times a day, some delayed prayer until the end of the prescribed time, and some prayed mainly when reminded by parents. This finding indicates that the main issue is not a complete absence of religious knowledge but a gap between knowing and doing.

This gap was visible in the timing and regularity of prayer. Maghrib prayer was more likely to be performed because it occurs when family members are often at home and community religious life becomes more visible. Dhuhr was also more likely to be performed by adolescents who were at school because the school environment sometimes provided collective reminders or opportunities for congregational prayer. In contrast, Asr and Isha were more frequently delayed or missed. Asr often coincided with outdoor play, cooking, household chores, farm-related activities, or time with peers, while Isha was sometimes missed because adolescents fell asleep, remained absorbed in smartphones, or lacked parental monitoring.

The pattern suggests that adolescents' prayer practice is strongly shaped by routine structures. Prayer is easier to perform when the surrounding environment supports it: when the family is present, when school organizes worship, or when peers encourage prayer. Conversely, prayer becomes more difficult when adolescents must rely only on their own self-regulation in the middle of leisure, work, or digital engagement. This interpretation is consistent with self-determination theory, which emphasizes that sustained action requires competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the context of this study, adolescents may know that prayer is obligatory, but they have not always developed the self-regulatory competence and personal commitment required to perform prayer consistently.

Parental reminders were found to be important but insufficient when they were not supported by consistent modelling and daily structure. Some adolescents reported that their parents reminded them to pray, but they still delayed prayer because they were watching television, using a smartphone, playing with friends, or feeling tired. Parents also reported difficulty moving adolescents from leisure activities to prayer. This pattern is consistent with research on family religious transmission, which shows that verbal instruction becomes more effective when supported by parental modelling, emotional closeness, shared practice, and meaningful religious conversation (Bengtson et al., 2013; Dollahite & Marks, 2019; Goodman & Dyer, 2020).

Thus, the inconsistency of prayer practice in Parmainan Village should be understood as an educational problem involving religious knowledge, self-

regulation, family habit, and social support. Islamic education often emphasizes knowledge of legal rulings, prayer procedures, and religious obligations. However, the findings show that adolescents also need practical formation: learning how to respond when the adhan is heard, how to stop an enjoyable activity, how to prioritize prayer despite fatigue, and how to perform prayer with confidence. Religious learning must therefore move from cognitive understanding toward embodied discipline.

### ***Difficulties in Establishing Prayer Discipline and the Need for Contextual Religious Guidance***

The second major finding concerns the difficulties experienced by adolescents in establishing prayer discipline. These difficulties appear in two interconnected stages: pre-prayer readiness and prayer performance. Pre-prayer difficulties include delaying ablution, not preparing oneself immediately, continuing activities after prayer time begins, and lacking readiness to shift from ordinary activity to worship. In the field data, several adolescents delayed prayer because they were absorbed in smartphones, interacting with peers, helping parents, or resting after school and work. This shows that the difficulty of prayer often begins before prayer itself, at the moment when adolescents must stop another activity and enter a ritual state of readiness.

Time discipline is a central pre-prayer obstacle. Adolescents often knew that prayer should be performed on time but treated prayer time flexibly, assuming that prayer could be delayed until later. Such postponement weakens the formative function of prayer as a timed obligation. The Qur'anic framing of prayer as a prescribed-time obligation is not only theological but also educational because it trains believers to submit daily routines to a sacred temporal order (Abdel Haleem, 2004). For adolescents, learning to pray on time also means learning to regulate impulse, pleasure, fatigue, and social pressure.

Pre-prayer difficulty is closely connected to adolescent development. Adolescents are still negotiating identity, autonomy, peer belonging, and everyday priorities. Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation helps explain why adolescents may understand religious expectations but not yet integrate them into stable daily discipline. In this study, some adolescents identified themselves as Muslims who should pray, but their actions were still shaped by competing activities, including play, digital entertainment, peer pressure, household work, and tiredness. This indicates that religious identity requires repeated habituation before it becomes consistent practice.

During the performance of prayer, some adolescents experienced uncertainty about recitations, correct movements, and the order of prayer. Several findings indicate limited mastery of prayer recitations, lack of concentration, rushed movements, and insufficient confidence in performing prayer correctly. This finding challenges the assumption that adolescents who do not pray regularly are simply negligent. In some cases, reluctance to pray is connected to a competence problem. Adolescents who feel unsure about recitation, pronunciation, or procedure may avoid prayer because they are afraid of making mistakes. From the perspective of self-determination theory, perceived competence is essential for

sustained behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000). If adolescents feel incompetent, they may experience shame, avoidance, or dependence on reminders.

The competence issue has practical implications for Islamic education. Prayer instruction should not end at childhood. Adolescents who did not receive strong early religious training, attended schools with limited religious practice, or did not consistently participate in Qur'anic learning may need remedial and non-stigmatizing guidance. Such guidance should include practical review of ablution, prayer recitations, prayer movements, and the meaning of key recitations. The goal is not to shame adolescents for what they do not know, but to rebuild their confidence through repeated, supportive, and corrective learning.

Peer influence and smartphone use also emerged as important factors. Observation and interviews showed that adolescents often delayed prayer because they were using smartphones, watching videos, playing games, or gathering with friends. However, peer influence was not always negative. Some adolescents stated that friends who invited them to pray made them more motivated. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which explains that behaviour is learned through observing and imitating significant models (Bandura, 1977). Peer groups can therefore function either as a risk factor when they normalize delaying prayer or as a protective factor when they normalize praying together. Studies on Indonesian Muslim adolescents also show that peer relationships contribute to religiosity and religious coping through selection and influence processes (Shen et al., 2023).

Smartphones intensify the problem because digital engagement is immersive, socially rewarding, and time-consuming. Recent research on religious youth in Indonesia shows that smartphones are viewed ambivalently by educators: they can be moral risks but also tools for religious learning and engagement (Larson, 2024). In this study, smartphones often operated as an amplifier of weak self-regulation. Adolescents who lacked strong prayer habits became more likely to postpone prayer when absorbed in digital activity. At the same time, technology should not be treated only as a threat. It can also be redirected through prayer reminders, Qur'anic applications, religious content, and peer-based digital campaigns that normalize pausing digital activity for prayer.

Parental supervision and modelling were also central. Parents generally recognized the importance of prayer for adolescents and associated prayer with discipline, moral character, responsibility, and protection from negative influence. However, parental supervision was uneven. Some parents worked outside the home for long hours, particularly in farming or plantation-related activities, and could not consistently monitor their children. Some also admitted that they did not always remind children because they were tired or because their own prayer practice was not fully consistent. This finding shows that prayer discipline is closely linked to the family religious ecology. In ecological theory, the family is a microsystem in which repeated daily interactions shape development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). If prayer is embedded in household routines, adolescents encounter it as normal and expected. If prayer appears only as occasional advice, its formative power becomes weaker.

Parental modelling is therefore more important than verbal command alone. A parent who commands prayer but does not model prayer may unintentionally reduce the moral authority of the instruction. Adolescents observe consistency, not only instruction. When parents stop activities for prayer, pray on time, invite children with warmth, and create a household rhythm around worship, adolescents receive both information and living example. This supports Bandura's (1977) view that behaviour is learned through observed models, especially models who are emotionally significant.

Rural household demands also shape adolescents' prayer practice. Parmainan Village is characterized by agricultural and plantation-related livelihoods. Several adolescents help parents at home or in the field, and some prayer times coincide with cooking, household chores, fieldwork, or rest after work. These conditions show that prayer difficulties are not caused only by leisure and technology; they also emerge from the structure of rural family life. Therefore, religious guidance must be context-sensitive. Adolescents who help in the field need practical guidance on how to prepare for prayer before leaving home, how to identify a clean place to pray, and how to manage prayer time during work. Adolescents responsible for household tasks also need family routines that allow prayer to be integrated into daily responsibilities rather than postponed until all work is finished.

Overall, the findings show that adolescents' difficulty in performing the five daily prayers is shaped by five interacting factors. First, there is a motivational factor: adolescents may understand the obligation but lack strong personal awareness and commitment. Second, there is a competence factor: some adolescents are uncertain about recitation and procedure. Third, there is a habit factor: prayer is not consistently embedded in daily routines. Fourth, there is a relational factor: parents and peers influence whether prayer is delayed or prioritized. Fifth, there is a contextual factor: rural work, fatigue, smartphones, and household responsibilities affect time and energy. These factors interact rather than operate separately.

This study therefore argues that effective prayer guidance for adolescents should be adaptive, relational, and community-based. Families need to provide consistent modelling and warm supervision. Schools and Islamic teachers need to reinforce procedural competence and time discipline. Mosques and religious leaders need to create youth-friendly religious activities. Peer groups should be used as positive religious support rather than treated only as sources of risk. Digital media should be managed through practical routines and, where possible, redirected as tools for religious reminders and learning. In this way, adolescent prayer discipline can be strengthened not through punitive approaches alone but through a supportive ecology of worship.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that adolescents' performance of the five daily prayers in Parmainan Village remains inconsistent despite their basic knowledge of prayer as an Islamic obligation. The main difficulties appear in pre-prayer readiness and prayer performance. Pre-prayer difficulties include

delaying ablution, weak time discipline, fatigue, smartphone distraction, and difficulty disengaging from peer or household activities. Prayer-performance difficulties include limited mastery of recitations and procedures, lack of concentration, rushed movements, and uncertainty about correct practice. These difficulties are reinforced by uneven parental supervision, inconsistent modelling at home, peer norms that sometimes normalize delaying prayer, and rural household or agricultural demands. Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic education by showing that adolescent prayer difficulty should be understood as a knowing-doing gap shaped by personal, relational, and contextual factors. Practically, the findings suggest that strengthening prayer discipline requires collaboration among families, schools, mosques, peers, and village communities. Programs should include practical prayer mentoring, parental role modelling, peer-based mosque activities, digital habit management, and context-sensitive guidance for adolescents who help with household or agricultural work. Future research should compare similar issues across rural and urban settings, explore gendered patterns of prayer difficulty, and test intervention models that combine family guidance, peer support, and school-based religious habituation.

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