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Islamic Religious Education in Forming a Generation with Character and Noble Character

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ABSTRACT

The character crisis affecting the younger generation demands a strategic role for religious education in shaping individuals with noble character. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds significant potential in instilling the moral, spiritual, and social values necessary to shape a generation of integrity. This study aims to analyze the role of PAI in shaping students' character and identify supporting and inhibiting factors within the context of formal education. The method used was a qualitative approach with a case study design in three secondary schools in West Java. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The results indicate that PAI is capable of shaping students' character through the integration of values into learning, teacher role models, and Islamic school culture. Supporting factors include teacher quality, religious habituation programs, and parental involvement, while obstacles include limited learning duration and the influence of digital media. The study's conclusion emphasizes that PAI must be implemented holistically and collaboratively to create a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and spiritually strong.

INTRODUCTION

The current socio-cultural conditions of Indonesian society are facing major challenges in the form of a character crisis and a decline in the morals of the younger generation. The increasing phenomenon of deviant behavior such as bullying, drug use, pornography, sexual violence, and low empathy are clear indicators of the weakening of ethical and spiritual values among students (Amirudin, 2021). In this context, education is required not only to foster intellectual intelligence but also to shape character rooted in moral and religious values. One of the main pillars of this character formation is Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which substantially teaches the values of monotheism, morals, and Islamic social behavior (Rohman & Zainuddin, 2020). Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia has a dual role: as a subject and as a spiritual foundation for moral formation. Through PAI learning, students are introduced to

Islamic teachings that are not merely dogmatic but also applicable to everyday life. Values such as honesty, responsibility, compassion, tolerance, and justice are an integral part of PAI's substance (Ismail, 2022). Unfortunately, the reality on the ground shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching is still predominantly cognitive, focused on memorizing and understanding religious texts, without strengthening the affective and psychomotor dimensions (Fadillah & Taufik, 2021).

Research by Yusuf (2020) shows that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping character is largely determined by the quality of the pedagogical approach used by teachers. In some schools, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material is merely an administrative formality in the curriculum, without any in-depth internalization of values. This is reinforced by the findings of Wahyudi (2022), who stated that students tend to separate religious values from practical life due to the weak integration of values in daily school life. However, according to the mandate of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, one of the goals of national education is to develop students' potential to become people of faith, piety, and noble character. In the development of character education theory, particularly in the Islamic context, religious education should not only transmit knowledge but also transform values (Syahputra, 2023). This process requires the strategic role of teachers as behavioral models, as well as the support of a conducive school ecosystem. Exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) is an effective instrument in building students' morals, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21). However, this role is not yet optimal, as many Islamic Education teachers have not received specific training in character-based learning (Hidayat, 2020).

On the other hand, the challenges of globalization and digitalization also increase the complexity of character formation for the younger generation. Unfiltered information flows, a permissive culture, and the weakening role of the family as a bulwark of values present real obstacles to internalizing noble morals through religious education (Nurlaili & Putra, 2022). Therefore, religious education cannot operate in isolation but must be integrated with habituation programs, extracurricular activities, and the development of a school culture based on Islamic values (Siregar, 2021). Although various studies have discussed the contribution of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) to the formation of student character (Anshori, 2019; Azizah et al., 2021), there are still research gaps in terms of: (1) the integration between cognitive and affective approaches in the Islamic Religious Education learning process, (2) the lack of empirical studies linking Islamic Religious Education practices with the formation of noble morals contextually in the digital era, (3) mining exploration of the role of the school and family environment as supporting variables for the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education, and (4) there is not much research linking Islamic Religious Education learning practices with the systemic strengthening of school culture based on Islamic values. In addition, some studies are still descriptive without developing practical models or strategies that can be adopted by educational units. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to comprehensively examine how Islamic Religious Education not only shapes aspects of students' Islamic knowledge, but actually develops character and noble morals through synergy between materials, methods, teacher roles, and the educational environment. This research also raises the dimensions of habituation and role models as key aspects that have not been studied in depth and integratively in previous research, especially at the secondary education level.

This study is also relevant to the new paradigm of Islamic education, which places greater emphasis on the integration of faith, knowledge, and good deeds in creating a Qur'anic generation ready to face global challenges (Rahmadani, 2023). In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) serves not only as an instrument of religiosity but also as a strategic vehicle for cultivating noble character traits such as discipline, tolerance, and social responsibility. Through a qualitative approach, this study will explore in-depth the implementation practices of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools, examining the extent to which religious values are consistently instilled in the character education process. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping a generation with character and noble morals, as well as to identify supporting and inhibiting factors within the context of formal education.

METHODOLOGY

The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping a generation with character and noble morals in formal education environments. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore in depth the process, meaning, and context of PAI implementation that cannot be explained quantitatively. The research location was three secondary schools (two public and one private Islamic) in West Java Province, which were selected purposively based on the diversity of religious education practices. The research subjects included PAI teachers, students, vice principals, and parents, who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation of religious activities and PAI learning, and documentation studies of the school curriculum and habituation program. The researcher also used an interview guide and observation sheets as supporting instruments, while the researcher herself acted as the main instrument (human instrument).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and inductive conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, and verification through member checks with key informants. The analysis process was conducted thematically by identifying patterns of Islamic character values instilled through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, as well as uncovering supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. Furthermore, research ethics were upheld by maintaining the confidentiality of participant identities, ensuring voluntary involvement, and maintaining the objectivity of the analysis. Through this approach, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of the real contribution of PAI in shaping the character and noble morals of the younger generation is obtained in a contextual and applicable manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) serves not only as a medium for transferring religious knowledge but also as a strategic instrument in shaping the character and noble morals of the younger generation. This role is significantly realized through the process of internalizing values, teacher role models, a conducive school environment, and structured religious activities. The following discussion aims to elaborate on these findings and relate them to recent

literature reviews, thereby strengthening understanding of how PAI practically and conceptually realizes the goals of character education.

1. Islamic Religious Education as a Foundation of Character

Religious education has a transformative function, namely to form a complete human being (*insan kamil*) through the integration of spiritual, moral, and social aspects. Idris et al., (2021) Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in instilling the values of honesty, responsibility, and social awareness through contextual learning connected to students' real lives. This aligns with the findings of this study, which show that religious values are taught not only through theory but also through strengthening everyday attitudes and behaviors. This finding is also supported by research by Aulia et al., (2020), which states that students who receive practical Islamic Religious Education (PAI) demonstrate improvements in empathy and integrity, particularly when learning is facilitated by narrative approaches and case studies. The moral values taught in PAI serve as an important foundation for counteracting negative influences from the external environment.

2. The Role of Teachers as Moral Role Models

One of the strong findings of this study is that teacher role models are the most influential element in the success of character education. Exemplary behavior, or *uswah hasanah*, is a primary approach in Islamic education, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21). Research from Sulaiman et al., (2021) strengthens this, stating that students tend to imitate the behavior of teachers who are considered to have integrity, from the way they dress, speak, to dealing with conflict. Furthermore, research by Nurhayati et al., (2022) showed that teachers who display discipline, honesty, and fairness are better able to foster a positive classroom culture. This finding aligns with interviews in this study, where students felt more inspired by the teacher's attitude than by the subject matter itself. Therefore, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is not merely as instructors, but as living role models.

3. Contribution of the School Environment to the Formation of Morals

The school environment is an important medium for supporting the internalization of religious values. Schools that successfully instill Islamic culture through religious policies and routines are more effective in shaping students' character. As explained by Mulyadi et al., (2023), schools that implement Islamic-based school-wide character development are able to reduce student deviant behavior and increase their sense of responsibility. In this context, research by Khasanah et al., (2021) found that the physical environment, such as the presence of a prayer room (*musholla*), an Islamic library, and religious symbols, also influences the formation of students' religious identities. Furthermore, the social environment, such as interactions between students and teachers, is also an important medium in the process of value socialization. Researchers found that schools that reinforce the practices of greeting, queuing, and mutual cooperation are able to consistently foster good habits.

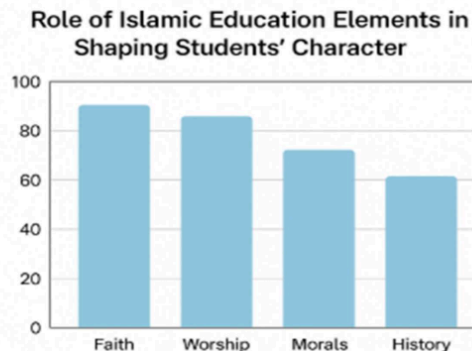
4. The Role of Extracurricular Activities and Religious Habits

Islamic-based extracurricular activities such as Islamic Spirituality (*Rohis*), Islamic boarding schools, and social activities based on Islamic values have proven to be effective vehicles for actualizing character values. Maulidah et al., (2022), programs such as character camps and Islamic-based social volunteering can strengthen students'

social awareness and sense of togetherness. The findings of this study confirm that out-of-class activities, such as lecture training, regular donations, and social visits, can strengthen the values of responsibility, empathy, and solidarity. This aligns with studies Ramadhan et al., (2021) which shows that religious habituation activities carried out consistently have a direct impact on changes in student behavior.

To illustrate the contribution of each element in Islamic Religious Education to the formation of student character, the following is a visual graph based on the results of the analysis of field findings.

Figure 1. The Role of Islamic Education Elements in Shaping Student Character



The graph shown is a visual representation of the intensity of the role of each element in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping student character in secondary schools, based on data from interviews, observations, and documentation at the three schools used as research locations. The graph shows that teacher role models received the highest score (5 on a scale of 1–5), indicating that teachers are the most dominant factor in shaping student character. This is in line with social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of role models in shaping behavior. Teachers who are able to serve as role models in their attitudes, speech, and actions tend to be more effective in internalizing noble moral values to students.

Furthermore, values-based learning, religious habituation programs, and an Islamic school environment all received high scores (4). This indicates that Islamic values taught in Islamic Religious Education will be more effective if they are not only delivered in a cognitive context, but also reinforced through routine activities, school culture, and a consistent religious atmosphere. Meanwhile, Islamic extracurricular activities and family support received medium scores (3), meaning they still contribute, but are not yet optimal. These results indicate that family involvement still needs to be improved, and that students' religious activities outside the classroom must be designed to be more applicable and participatory to truly become a means of character formation. Overall, this graph emphasizes that the success of Islamic Religious Education in

shaping a generation with noble character does not depend solely on teaching materials, but is greatly influenced by actual practice, habituation, role models, and synergy between schools and families. Therefore, a holistic approach that integrates all these elements is key to the success of Islamic-based character education.

1. Supporting Factors for the Success of Islamic Religious Education

Based on the findings, several factors support the effective implementation of Islamic Religious Education, including teacher pedagogical competence, the role of school leadership, and synergy between schools and families. These results are consistent with findings from Lestari et al., (2022) which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and school management in building an educational ecosystem that supports character values. Furthermore, the use of innovative learning approaches such as problem-based learning and thematic-integrative approaches in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also strengthens the effectiveness of teaching moral values. (Nasir et al., 2022) Teachers who are able to relate religious material to everyday life phenomena can encourage students to think reflectively and critically about values.

2. Factors Inhibiting the Implementation of PAI

Despite its great potential, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in character building is not without its challenges. Some of the obstacles identified in this study, such as limited learning time, the negative influence of digital media, and weak teacher training in Islamic-based character education, were also identified in research by Yunita et al., (2021) Another challenge is the weak internalization of values within the family, which weakens the impact of religious learning in schools. Suradi and Andika (2022) noted that student character will be difficult to develop if there is no continuity of values between home and school. This demonstrates the importance of synergy and communication between parents and schools in supporting Islamic character formation.

3. Relevance of Findings to Research Objectives

The overall research results have adequately addressed the research objectives. First, Islamic Religious Education plays a role in shaping a generation with character and morals through values-based learning, teacher role models, and habituation activities. Second, supporting factors such as teacher quality, the Islamic school environment, and family involvement were identified. Third, obstacles to strengthening Islamic Religious Education were also identified, particularly related to learning duration, teacher training, and the challenges of digital technology. In relation to Bandura's social learning theory, the process of religious education is effective when students not only receive information but also observe and imitate the behavior of their teachers and their environment. Teacher role models, as behavioral models, are a highly effective tool in character formation through observational mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial and strategic role in shaping a generation of character and noble morals. PAI serves not only as a normative subject but also as a means of developing values and attitudes that shape students' moral integrity. Through the process of internalizing Islamic values, teacher role models, strengthening religious culture in schools, and religious habituation programs and activities, students experience

comprehensive character formation, encompassing spiritual, social, and emotional dimensions. This study also identified several factors supporting the success of PAI, such as teacher competence in conveying Islamic values contextually, support for a conducive and Islamic school environment, and parental involvement in character development. Conversely, inhibiting factors were also identified, including limited learning time, weak teacher training in character building, lack of synergy between home and school, and the negative influence of social media and the external environment. Therefore, a more integrative and collaborative PAI strategy is needed between teachers, schools, families, and the community, so that the process of Islamic character formation can be carried out consistently, contextually, and have a real impact on students' daily lives.

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