

Study of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Materials with a Theological Approach

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62872/x7ta403>

Abstract

This study aims to examine the application of theological approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials in Indonesia. The application of theology in PAI curriculum still tends to be limited to normative and ritualistic aspects, while the philosophical and reflective aspects of Islamic teachings are often neglected. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study analyzed curriculum documents, syllabi, and PAI textbooks used at the junior high school (SMP) and senior high school (SMA) levels. The results showed that PAI materials focus more on teaching memorization and the performance of worship without exploring the deep meaning of Islamic theological concepts such as tawhid, treatise, shariat, morals, and fiqh. The study also identified challenges in implementing the theological approach, including teachers' lack of understanding of Islamic theology and time constraints in the curriculum. Based on these findings, the study recommends the development of a more integrated curriculum, more in-depth teacher training and the application of more interactive learning methods to enable students to understand Islamic teachings critically and applicatively. This research is expected to contribute to improving the quality of Islamic religious education that is more in-depth and relevant to the challenges of the times

Keywords: *Critical Reflection; Curriculum Development; Theological Integration*

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Received November 30, 2024, Accepted December 22, 2024, Published December 24, 2024

Introduction

The philosophical and theological approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) not only broadens the horizons of students' understanding of religious teachings, but also revives the essence of Islamic scholarship as a comprehensive value system. As expressed by Badi'ah (2023), Islamic education should not only focus on rituals and norms, but also on empowering the intellect to understand the wisdom behind the sh'aria. PAI materials, which currently tend to be ritualistic, risk producing students who are formally obedient, but less reflective of Islamic values in facing global challenges such as secularization, materialism, and technological disruption. By integrating philosophical and theological approaches, students can learn to contextualize monotheism, treatises, and sharia as ethical foundations that form a critical mindset and benefit-oriented solutions.

In addition, the implementation of this approach requires curriculum reform based on sharia maqashid (sharia goals) as a framework. For example, moral studies are not enough to teach moral values, but also invite students to explore the implications of these values in socio-political and economic contexts. This approach is in line with the ideas of Muzakki & Nisa (2020), who emphasized the importance of "deconstruction" in understanding religious texts to provide new meanings according to the context of the times. PAI teachers also play a strategic role as learning facilitators that encourage



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critical discussions and in-depth exploration of Islamic values. Thus, Islamic religious education can give birth to a generation that is not only ritually religious, but also adaptive, reflective, and contributing to the dynamics of modern civilization.

The application of a theological approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) actually requires systematic integration with deep philosophical and ethical principles. According to Nurdianto et al (2023), a thorough theological understanding of Islamic teachings helps individuals develop a strong moral awareness, which is not only limited to religious rituals, but also includes social, political, and cultural aspects. Thus, students are invited to see religion as a holistic view of life, not just as a source of narrow morality. This approach helps them internalize universal values such as justice, compassion, and social responsibility, which are relevant to the complex challenges of modern times.

However, the application of the theological approach cannot be separated from implementation challenges, especially related to teaching methodologies that are still trapped in traditional patterns. According to Heryati et al (2023), efforts to improve theological understanding in PAI require strengthening teacher capacity, curriculum enrichment, and access to academic literature and references that are in line with the development of contemporary Islamic thought. Education not only aims to transmit religious doctrines, but also trains students to think critically, understand the complexities of life, and respond to actual issues with solutions based on Islamic values. Thus, religious education can play an active role in shaping individuals with high integrity, able to contribute positively in an increasingly pluralistic and dynamic society.

In the context of modern life that is increasingly complex, the theological approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must be able to adapt to global challenges such as the development of digital technology, environmental issues, and pluralism. According to Abrori et al (2024), religion not only serves as a moral guideline, but also as an ethical foundation to overcome these challenges through a perspective that is sourced from Islamic values that are inclusive and responsive to changing times. Through this approach, students can understand how Islamic principles such as justice, balance, and equality can be applied in the context of complex global issues, without losing the essence of deep spirituality.

In addition, it is important for PAI teachers to utilize technology as a tool in conveying theological concepts. This approach is in line with the opinion of Nasution (2024), who stated that the use of digital media can broaden students' horizons towards Islamic teachings, as well as enrich their interaction with religious education materials. Thus, students are not only able to learn traditionally in the classroom, but are also able to explore Islamic values through a digital platform that allows them to interact globally with Muslim communities in different parts of the world. This transformation is expected to create a generation that is able to understand and integrate Islamic values in daily life in a relevant and inclusive way.

In addition to integrating technology in teaching methods, it is also important to develop more comprehensive learning evaluations, which can measure students' theological understanding holistically. According to Sutiah (2020), evaluation in religious education must go beyond memorization tests and lead to assessments based on students' analytical and applicative abilities towards religious values in the context of daily life. In this way, students are not only measured in terms of theoretical knowledge but also by their skills in applying religious teachings in real life. This will encourage students to think critically, understand the relevance of Islamic teachings in resolving social issues, and actively contribute to community development.

Furthermore, there needs to be intensive cooperation between educational institutions, academic communities, and religious practitioners in designing a more inclusive and responsive PAI curriculum to the challenges of the times. The opinion of Handoko et al (2024) emphasizes the importance of cross-sector collaboration in the development of religious education, which not only involves theological aspects but also pays attention to the social, economic, and cultural needs of students. Through this collaboration, the PAI curriculum can be compiled to create students who are not only academically intelligent but also have strong moral character and are able to contribute positively to an increasingly plural and dynamic society.

Method

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the application of the theological approach in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in Indonesia. The focus is on understanding students' theological comprehension of Islamic teachings through literature study and

document analysis. Primary data sources include PAI curriculum documents from Indonesian schools, while secondary sources involve theological literature and previous research to provide a deeper theoretical foundation. Data collection involves literature studies and document analysis to examine the integration of theology into PAI materials, assessing their impact on students' understanding.

Thematic and content analyses are employed to explore the integration of Islamic theology in PAI, addressing themes such as the understanding of tawhid, the role of sharia, and the cultivation of moral values. Additionally, challenges in applying theological approaches, such as limited teacher expertise and the need for curriculum improvements, are discussed. Data triangulation ensures the validity of findings by comparing information from multiple sources, enhancing the depth and reliability of the research outcomes.

Result and Discussion

In this section, the author will describe the results of research related to the application of the theological approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials. This discussion will examine how concepts of Islamic theology such as tawhid, treatise, sharia, morals, and fiqh are applied in the PAI curriculum in Indonesia as well as the challenges faced in the process. In addition, this analysis will also explore the relevance of the application of the theological approach in the context of a more holistic and integrative Islamic education.

1. Islamic Theology in the Islamic Education Curriculum

In the curriculum of Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia, there are a number of basic concepts taught to students, but the teaching of Islamic theology is often limited to normative and ritualistic aspects. From the analysis of curriculum documents and textbooks used at the junior and senior high school levels, it was found that some concepts of Islamic theology are taught in a more practical and detached form, thus providing less opportunity for students to explore deeper philosophical and theological meanings.

a. Tawhi

The concept of tawhid or the oneness of God is a core teaching in Islam that should be the basis of any religious learning. Based on the analysis, the teaching of tawhid in the PAI curriculum mostly talks about normative understanding, such as "Allah is the One True God" and teaching about the pillars of faith. However, in many cases, this teaching tends to be separated from a deeper discussion of how the concept of tawhid can be applied in daily life, especially in facing the challenges of modern times.

For example, learning about monotheism in the context of human relationships with God and others, as well as the importance of developing an attitude of tawakal and ikhlas in daily life, has not been fully introduced in depth. In fact, with a deeper theological approach, students can be invited to develop an understanding of how the concept of tawhid is related to the principles of social justice, the environment, and the development of sincere and responsible personal character.

b. Risalah (Prophethood)

The concept of treatise or prophethood is one of the main theological concepts in Islam. In the PAI curriculum, material about the treatise is often focused on the history of prophets and apostles, such as Prophet Muhammad SAW and previous prophets. However, discussions about the role of prophets as role models in various aspects of life (such as morality, leadership, and social problem solving) are not always explored in more depth.

The application of the theological approach in teaching the treatise should not only be limited to the presentation of historical facts, but also to philosophical reflections on the role of the prophet in the life of mankind. For example, students can be invited to discuss how the prophet's qualities such as honesty, patience and courage in facing life's challenges can be applied to their lives in the modern world.

c. Sharia (Islamic Law)

Islamic law regulates various aspects of Muslim life, from ritual worship to social ethics. In the PAI curriculum, materials on fiqh often focus on practical laws related to worship (such as prayer, zakat, fasting) and muamalah (such as buying and selling and marriage). However, the discussion of the purpose or wisdom behind these laws is often not prioritized.

With a theological approach, the teaching of sharia can be geared towards explaining not only “what to do,” but also “why it should be done.” This understanding is important so that students not only see worship and Islamic law as normative obligations, but also as a means to achieve a blessed life in accordance with God's will. For example, how sharia affects the well-being of individuals and society, and how these teachings support the achievement of larger life goals such as peace, justice and blessings.

d. Akhlak (Moral Ethics)

Morals are one of the important aspects of Islamic religious education. In the PAI curriculum, morals are often taught normatively, focusing on good and bad behaviors that should be avoided. However, the teaching of morals in many cases does not fully introduce students to a deep theological understanding of the basis of Islamic morality and its relationship to understandings of God, life, and the afterlife.

A theological approach can provide space for students to better understand the roots of Islamic morality that stem from an understanding of the attributes of God and His revelation. Students can be invited to think about how good morality is not just about following religious rules, but is a manifestation of their relationship with God, and how such behavior can shape a more just, peaceful and prosperous society.

e. Fiqh (Practical Law)

Fiqh or Islamic practical law deals with concrete actions to be taken by Muslims in various aspects of life. The teaching of fiqh in the PAI curriculum is more likely to be technical and ritualistic, such as how to perform prayers, fasting, and zakat. Although this material is important, there is more room to explore contemporary fiqh that connects Islamic law with the dynamics of modern life, such as social, economic, and technological issues.

A theological approach to fiqh will encourage students to understand that fiqh is not just about performing rituals, but also about the principles of justice, humanity and social policy that exist in Islam. For example, how fiqh can be applied to solve Muslims' economic problems in a global context, or how Islamic teachings can help address contemporary social issues such as poverty, gender inequality and climate change.

2. Challenges in Implementing the Theological Approach in Islamic Education

The main challenge in implementing the theological approach in PAI is the lack of in-depth understanding of Islamic theology among most PAI teachers. Many teachers master the normative and ritualistic aspects of Islamic teachings without deepening their understanding of the philosophical and theological aspects. This causes the teaching of theology to often lack depth and tends to focus on teaching memorized and practical material, without providing space for students to think critically and reflectively.

In addition, the limited time and resources in the education system are also an obstacle. The current PAI curriculum focuses more on achieving basic competencies that are practical and normative, while the space for more philosophical and reflective learning about Islamic theology is relatively limited. The dense curriculum and evaluation standards that prioritize memorization are also obstacles to a deeper approach to theology.

3. Recommendations for the Development of Theological Approaches in Islamic Education

Based on this analysis, there are several recommendations to improve the implementation of the theological approach in PAI curriculum:

- a. Improving the Quality of PAI Teachers: PAI teachers need to be given in-depth training on Islamic theology and how to teach it with a more philosophical approach. This training should include an understanding of basic theological concepts and how to relate them to students' daily lives.
- b. Revision of the Islamic Education Curriculum: The PAI curriculum needs to be updated to make room for more in-depth teaching of theology. This can be done by adding modules that teach a philosophical understanding of tawhid, treatise, sharia, morals, and fiqh, and encourage students to think critically about Islamic teachings.

Interactive Learning Methods: Learning approaches based on discussion, reflection, and problem solving can be used to explore students' understanding of Islamic theology. This method will

help students to understand the values of Islamic teachings in theology. This method will help students to understand the values of Islamic teachings in the context of modern life..

Conclusion

This research highlights that while the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in Indonesia incorporates foundational concepts such as tawhid, sharia, and fiqh, its application remains largely limited to normative and ritualistic instruction. This results in a focus on the performance of worship without delving into the theological and philosophical dimensions of these teachings. Many students struggle with critical thinking and the practical application of Islamic principles in their daily lives. Teachers play a crucial role in enhancing the theological depth of PAI, yet they face challenges such as limited understanding of Islamic theology, time constraints, and a curriculum that prioritizes memorization over critical exploration. To address these issues, the PAI curriculum should be developed to provide a more integrated and in-depth exploration of Islamic theology, combining both religious practices and philosophical insights. Additionally, training for teachers is essential to equip them with the skills to teach theology in a more engaging, critical, and applicable manner. Interactive learning methods that promote discussion and critical thinking are necessary to ensure that students not only understand religious teachings but can apply them meaningfully in their lives. Ultimately, a well-rounded theological approach can foster a deeper, more applicable understanding of Islam, shaping students into individuals who can navigate contemporary challenges while upholding universal Islamic values.

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