

The Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping the Character of Elementary School Students

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Abstract:

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in fostering students' religious character from an early age, particularly at the elementary level, which serves as a crucial foundation for children's moral and spiritual development. Amid the challenges of globalization and the declining influence of religious values within family environments, the effectiveness of IRE implementation in instilling Islamic values has become an essential issue for in-depth investigation. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of IRE in shaping the religious character of elementary school students and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the process. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving IRE teachers, students, school principals, and parents, and then analyzed thematically using triangulation techniques. The findings reveal that the effectiveness of IRE is strongly influenced by teachers' exemplary behavior, the habituation of religious practices within the school environment, and family involvement, although challenges remain regarding instructional methods and the continuity of religious values outside the school setting. This study contributes to the development of a more integrative and contextual Islamic character education practice and offers direction for strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and communities in nurturing religiously devoted young generations from an early age.

Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education, Character, Learning Effectiveness, Elementary School Students.



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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the strategic instruments in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually superior but also has moral and spiritual integrity. In the midst of the rapid flow of globalization, modernization, and the development of information technology, children from an early age are faced with various challenges that erode religious and humanitarian values. Global phenomena such as moral crises, violence among students, and the tendency to consumptive and individualistic behavior make religious character education more relevant and urgent to be applied since primary education (Arif et al., 2024). In Indonesia, formal Islamic religious education (PAI) has become an integral part of the national education system, which aims not only to instill religious knowledge but also to shape attitudes and behaviors according to Islamic values (Nurizah & Amrullah, 2024).

However, the implementation of PAI at the elementary school level still faces various problems related to its effectiveness in shaping the religious character of students in real life. Empirical studies show that although students attend religious lessons regularly, their attitudes and behaviors do not always reflect Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social concern (Fahyuni et al., 2023). This gap is exacerbated by the weak integration between cognitive and affective learning, as well as the lack of exemplars from the school and home environments (Chusyairi et al., 2024). In addition, PAI teaching methods, which are still textual and less contextual, are often an obstacle in touching the spiritual dimension of students (Hasanah et al., 2024). In a conceptual framework, the effectiveness of PAI in shaping students' religious character can be reviewed through theoretical approaches such as character education theory by Lickona, which emphasizes three main components, namely moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions (Saepudin, 2023). In addition, the theory of educational effectiveness from Campbell (1970) underlines that effectiveness can be measured by the extent to which educational goals are achieved concretely in the behavior of students. The ideal PAI should touch on three domains of learning: cognitive (knowledge), affective (faith), and psychomotor (charity), as emphasized by Abuddin Nata. In the context of primary school-age children, this approach must take into account the characteristics of their cognitive development that are at a concrete operational stage according to Piaget, so learning needs to be provided through example and habituation (Nurmalasari & 'Ala, 2024).

This study aims to evaluate the extent of the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in shaping the religious character of students in elementary school. The formulation of the problem in this study is focused on two main things: (1) the extent of the effectiveness of PAI in shaping the religious character of elementary school students, and (2) what factors support and hinder this effectiveness. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy, where data is obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies of teachers, students, parents, and principals as key informants. Data collection aims to gain an in-depth understanding of practices, perceptions, and challenges in the implementation of PAI in the elementary school environment (Yunischa, 2018). The scientific contribution of this article lies in its empirical and holistic study in evaluating the effectiveness of PAI based on the direct experience of educational actors in elementary schools, which was still relatively rare in previous studies. This article offers a novelty in the approach to data triangulation between teacher perception, student behavior, and field observation, and emphasizes the importance of integration between subject matter, learning methods, teacher examples, and environmental support in the formation of religious character (Rizka et al., 2024). The findings of this study are expected to enrich the scientific literature in the field of Islamic education and character, as well as provide practical input for teachers, schools, and policymakers in improving the quality of PAI that is more contextual and transformative (Tabroni & Rahmawati, 2021).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is theoretically rooted in the paradigm of Islamic education, which aims to form a complete human being (*insan kamil*) through the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. One of the relevant theories is the theory of character education by Lickona, which divides character into three components: moral knowing, moral feeling,

and moral action. These three components are the foundation for building students' religious character through a holistic approach that emphasizes value learning and internalization in daily life (Nurizah & Amrullah, 2024). In the context of Islamic education, values such as faith, piety, and noble morals are instilled through a process of habituation, exemplarity, and continuous spiritual activities (Tabroni et al., 2022). Therefore, these theories become relevant as a conceptual framework for assessing the effectiveness of PAI in shaping the religious character of elementary school students. Various previous studies have examined the practice and results of the application of PAI in shaping students' religious character. A study by Fahyuni and Bandonu (2023) shows that habitual activities such as congregational prayers, reading the Qur'an, and morning alms have a significant contribution to the development of students' religious character (Fahyuni et al., 2023). Other research highlights the importance of integrating Islamic values into students' daily lives through environmental and school culture approaches such as 5S (smile, greeting, greeting, politeness, manners), as well as Islamic literacy activities (Hasanah et al., 2024). Meanwhile, an approach that emphasizes the internalization of values through daily activities such as memorizing prayers and short verses has also been proven to increase students' spiritual awareness (Yunischa, 2018). In the social-emotional context, PAI is also reported to support the development of competencies such as empathy, cooperation, and self-control (Chusyairi et al., 2024).

Although various studies have shown the effectiveness of PAI in shaping religious character, several research gaps have not been studied in depth. One of them is the lack of studies that combine data from various sources in a triangulative manner, namely from teachers, students, parents, and principals, to provide a comprehensive picture of PAI practices at the elementary school level (Rosuli & Amrullah, 2023). Most studies tend to focus on a single dimension, such as ritual activities or teachers' teaching methods, and have not touched on systemic aspects such as the role of the social environment, family, and school policies simultaneously. In addition, there is still little research that examines the effectiveness of PAI with a phenomenological approach that explores the subjective experiences of teachers and students in the process of forming religious character (Arinda et al., 2023).

This article takes a position to address these gaps by integrating various perspectives through a phenomenological approach, involving informants from various relevant parties in the primary school environment. In this way, this article not only confirms the previous findings but also broadens the scope of understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of PAI in shaping students' religious character. This research provides a conceptual contribution through an integrative framework that links the effectiveness of PAI, religious character, and habituation in the context of primary school-age children's development (Murod, 2022). In addition, a qualitative approach with data triangulation techniques allows cross-validation of field findings, which has not been widely done in similar studies. Methodological trends in previous studies show the dominance of a descriptive qualitative approach, with a focus on case studies and observations of social phenomena in schools. For example, a study by Yusuf et al. (2024) used a case study to analyze the contribution of PAI teachers in instilling Aswaja values through students' daily learning and interaction (Yusuf et al., 2024). Another study utilizes a systematic approach to examine the effectiveness of the PAI program in shaping eight student characters such as discipline, honesty, and religious (Wati, 2019).

In addition, the literature also shows that contextual learning methods such as *uswah hasanah*, *mauidzah*, and habituation have a significant role in the process of internalizing religious values (Zulhijra et al., 2024).

As a conceptual synthesis, this study combines the theory of educational effectiveness, Islamic character education, and the theory of children's cognitive development as the basis for analysis of the effectiveness of PAI in shaping students' religious character. Learning effectiveness is measured through six main indicators: appropriateness of objectives, learning methods, teacher competence, exemplary, support of the school environment, and learning evaluation. The religious character of students as the output of the process is understood through indicators of worship behavior, honesty, responsibility, respect for parents and teachers, and spiritual perseverance. Thus, this research is built on a conceptual foundation that integrates a multidimensional approach to religious and character education in the context of elementary school-age children (Saepudin, 2023).

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy. This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the meaning and deep understanding of the subjective experiences of education actors in the context of the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping the religious character of elementary school students. Phenomenology allows researchers to explore social realities as experienced by individuals in real life, making them well-suited to understanding how religious values are internalized in school and family environments (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

The data sources used consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from PAI teachers, students, principals/homeroom teachers, and parents through in-depth interviews and participatory observations at SDN in Serang, Banten District. Meanwhile, secondary data includes school documents such as lesson plans, syllabi, religious activity programs, worship attendance records, as well as academic literature and Islamic education regulations. Data collection techniques are carried out through three main methods: non-participatory observation of students' learning practices and behaviors; semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents; and documentation studies to complement contextual information related to the policy and implementation of religious programs in schools (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection instruments are in the form of observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and document analysis formats developed based on PAI effectiveness indicators and student religious character indicators. The data inclusion criteria include informants who are directly involved in PAI learning at the elementary school level and official school documents relevant to the implementation of religious education. The exclusion criteria apply to informants who are inactive or have no direct connection to the implementation of the PAI, as well as documents that are not administratively verified. The unit of analysis in this study is the experience and views of the informants on the PAI learning process and the results on student behavior.

Data analysis was carried out by data reduction techniques, thematic categorization, and conclusion drawing through inter-source and inter-method triangulation. Thematic analysis

techniques are used to identify the main patterns and themes of informant narratives based on a phenomenological approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The validity of the findings was strengthened by triangulation techniques of sources and methods, as well as member checking to ensure the accuracy of the data representation (Nowell et al., 2017). The entire analysis process was assisted by NVivo 12 qualitative software to systematically encode data, map themes, and explore inter-category relationships (Zamawe, 2015). This approach was chosen to ensure the depth and sharpness of interpretation of the dynamics of Islamic religious education and the formation of religious character in the context of elementary schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study reveal four key themes that illustrate the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping the religious character of elementary school students. First, the conformity between the objectives and implementation of PAI shows that most teachers understand the main goal of PAI as forming noble morals and strengthening students' faith. However, its classroom implementation still leans heavily toward cognitive aspects such as memorizing prayers and Sharia materials, while affective and behavioral dimensions receive less attention. This imbalance is often due to curriculum demands and limited time, causing learning to remain normative and less contextual in practice.

Second, the theme of PAI learning strategies and methods highlights that teachers employ various approaches, including lectures, question-and-answer sessions, memorization, and workshop simulations. Among these, habituation-based activities such as collective prayers, Qur'an reading, and daily acts of kindness are the most effective in building students' religious discipline and moral awareness. The integration of Islamic stories and visual media further strengthens students' emotional connection with moral teachings, confirming the importance of practice-based learning in faith-based education.

Third, the theme of teacher exemplarity and the school environment emphasizes that teachers who consistently model good conduct and Islamic ethics play a crucial role in internalizing religious values. The school environment also serves as a supporting ecosystem through activities like weekly religious programs, student taklim assemblies, and mosque-based social involvement. The consistent application of the "5S culture" (smile, greet, salute, politeness, and manners) helps create a religious atmosphere that encourages moral growth.

Lastly, the theme of supporting and inhibiting factors identifies several internal and external elements influencing the success of PAI implementation. Key supporting factors include strong principal leadership, active parental involvement, and the alignment of school and home religious programs. Conversely, challenges arise from limited pedagogical training for PAI teachers, insufficient instructional hours, and minimal supervision of students' behavior outside the classroom. The diversity of students' social backgrounds also leads to varied engagement in religious activities. Interviews with parents further reveal that those who guide their children in prayer and Qur'an

recitation at home contribute significantly to the continuity of students' religious practices. Meanwhile, the lack of coordination between schools and parents weakens the holistic impact of PAI. Overall, the findings affirm that the combination of effective teaching, teacher exemplarity, supportive environments, and family participation is essential in shaping the religious character of students through PAI.

| Main Theme | Key Findings | Implications / Insights |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Conformity of Objectives and Implementation of PAI | Teachers understand that the main goal of PAI is to form noble morals and strengthen faith. However, classroom practices still focus more on cognitive aspects (memorization, theory) rather than affective and behavioral dimensions. | There is a gap between goals and implementation — learning tends to be normative, with limited contextual and holistic character formation. |
| 2. PAI Learning Strategies and Methods | Teachers use lectures, Q&A, memorization, and worship simulations. The most effective approach is habituation (daily prayer, Qur'an recitation, charity, pious routines) supported by visual and storytelling media. | Practice-based and experiential learning through habituation better fosters religious discipline, moral awareness, and consistency in worship. |
| 3. Teacher Exemplarity and School Environment | Teachers who act as role models (uswah hasanah) significantly influence students' religious attitudes. The school environment supports religious development through weekly programs, taklim assemblies, and mosque activities. The 5S culture (smile, greet, salute, politeness, manners) reinforces moral values. | The example set by teachers and a religiously oriented school culture are essential in internalizing Islamic values and shaping positive character. |
| 4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors | Supporting factors: strong principal support, active parental involvement, and alignment between school and home programs. Inhibiting factors: limited teacher training, short lesson hours, low behavioral supervision, and diverse student backgrounds. | Successful PAI implementation requires collaboration among schools, families, and leadership, as well as improved teacher capacity and time allocation. |
| 5. Parental Role and Family Continuity | Parents who guide children in prayer and Qur'an recitation at home sustain students' religious habits. However, some parents are unaware of school programs, creating lack of synergy between school and home. | Family involvement is crucial to maintain continuity of religious behavior and ensure consistent character development across environments. |
| 6. Overall Findings | Effective religious character formation occurs when teaching quality, teacher exemplarity, supportive environment, and family engagement work in synergy. | PAI's success depends on an integrated approach combining instructional, environmental, and familial factors for sustainable moral development. |

The results of this research are presented in thematic form according to the phenomenological approach used. The data analysis process produced four main themes that reflect the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping the religious character of elementary school students, namely: (1) Suitability of Objectives and Implementation of PAI; (2) PAI Learning Strategies and Methods; (3) Exemplary Teachers and School Environment; and (4) Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Formation of Religious Character. Each theme was compiled based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation from the main informants, namely PAI teachers, students, principals, and parents. Data from interviews with parents also showed that family involvement had a significant effect on the continuity of students' religious practices at home. Parents who actively guide children in prayer and reading the Qur'an tend to have children with a more consistent religious character. On the other hand, some parents admitted that they did not know about the PAI program at school, so there was no synergy between school learning and the home environment (Murod, 2022; Arinda et al., 2023). Field observations reinforce these findings, where students who consistently follow religious habits at school tend to show more positive behaviors in social interactions, such as not being rude, respecting teachers, and helping friends.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that Islamic religious education plays a crucial role in the formation of students' religious character at the elementary school level. The findings show that Islamic habituation practices such as congregational prayers, greetings-smiles, and prayer readings

before and after study have proven to be effective in instilling religious values in students' daily lives. This is in accordance with the formulation of the research problem that highlights the effectiveness of the implementation of Islamic religious education in shaping the religious character of students. The findings confirm that the formation of religious character through Islamic religious education includes not only cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor aspects holistically (Nurizah & Amrullah, 2024; Hasanah et al., 2024). In a theoretical context, these results can be interpreted using an Islamic value-based character education framework that emphasizes the internalization of values through habituation and example. This is in line with the concept of character education that combines the dimensions of Islamic values with contextual learning in the school environment (Tabroni et al., 2022; Furqon & Hanif, 2022). The integration of *aqidah*, *sharia*, and moral values into the curriculum and daily activities of the school forms a strong foundation in building students' religious character.

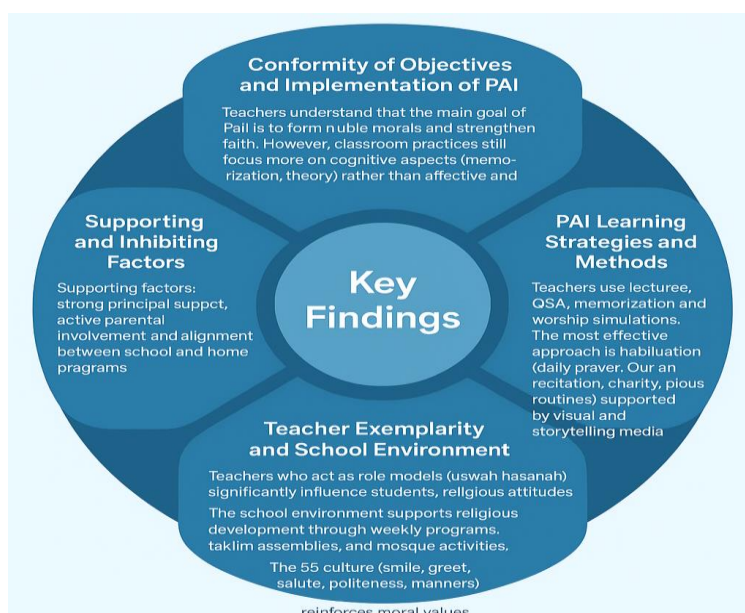


Figure 1. Key Findings – Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Shaping Students' Religious Character

When compared to previous findings, these results are consistent with the study of Gultom et al. (2025), which emphasized that the effectiveness of Islamic religious education is highly dependent on real practices, the quality of teachers, and the support of the learning environment (Gultom et al., 2025). Another study also found that synergy between school and family strengthens the internalization of Islamic values in students (Husnaini et al., 2020). However, some studies highlight challenges such as the lack of integration of character values in the curriculum and the lack of an active role of the school community (Alfarisy & Iswandi, 2025; Hilmi et al., 2023).

The contribution of this article lies in strengthening the empirical evidence that Islamic habituation strategies and the religious environment supported by teachers and school policies significantly shape student character. These findings enrich the literature on character education by offering value-based, implementable models that can be replicated in other primary schools,

particularly in the context of Islamic education. In addition, this article expands the discourse on how religious education not only transmits teachings but also shapes students' religious habitus in daily practice (Kuswara et al., 2021; Fuji & Renita, 2023). This research certainly has limitations. First, because it uses a descriptive qualitative approach, the results cannot be generalized widely to all contexts of Islamic education in Indonesia. Second, data collection that focuses only on observation and interviews has the potential to be limited in reaching the internal dynamics of students that are not explicitly visible. These limitations open up opportunities for future research to apply a mixed methods approach to measure the effectiveness of religious education interventions on students' religious behavior more quantitatively and longitudinally (Rizka et al., 2024; Nurmalasari & 'Ala, 2024).

The implications of these findings lead to the need to strengthen synergy between teachers, parents, and the school environment in shaping students' religious character from an early age. Schools can design an integrated curriculum based on Islamic values that not only teaches religious norms, but also practices them contextually and repeatedly. The determinant of the success of the implementation of Islamic character education also lies in the quality of teachers as moral role models and the school's ability to create a spiritual climate conducive to the growth of religious personality (Velita Bela & Santosa, 2023; Maulana El-Yunusi et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively reveals that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools has significant effectiveness in shaping students' religious character, especially through habituation strategies, teacher examples, and the creation of a school environment that supports Islamic values. The findings show that although there are limitations in the implementation and integration of the curriculum, religious practices that are carried out regularly and the role of teachers as moral role models are able to influence students' religious attitudes and behaviors in a real way. The involvement of parents and principals also plays an important role as a supporting factor, while the main obstacles revolve around the limitations of teacher pedagogic training and the disintegration between the school and home environments in instilling religious values.

Theoretically, this article contributes to strengthening the understanding that the success of Islamic religious education does not only depend on the quality of teaching materials, but also on the success of internalizing values through affective approaches and social praxis. Its practical contribution lies in providing an implemented framework for basic education institutions in designing a comprehensive and contextual religious-based character education strategy. This research also expands the academic discussion on Islamic-based character education through a phenomenological approach that focuses on the subjective experiences of education actors. As a follow-up, further research is recommended to use a quantitative approach or mixed methods to empirically measure the long-term impact of Islamic religious education on students' religious behavior in various cultural and geographical contexts. In addition, the development of education policies that systematically integrate the roles of families, schools, and religious communities needs to be considered so that the formation of religious character is not sectoral, but becomes a collective process that is sustainable and integrated with children's lives from an early age.

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