



Character Building Through Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

The phenomenon of moral decadence in Indonesia, such as the increase in criminal behavior, the decline of tolerance, and the weakening of religiosity, indicates a character crisis that requires serious attention from the education sector. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is considered to play an important role in shaping students' character; however, its implementation has often emphasized cognitive aspects. This study aims to describe the role and existence of PAI in character formation and to identify forms of PAI material implementation as a means of moral development in schools. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach through literature analysis and normative review of educational regulations, concepts of character education, and Islamic education theories. The data were analyzed through thematic categorization and conceptual interpretation. The findings reveal that PAI functions as a pillar of character formation through the internalization of spiritual, moral, and social values integrated into the subjects of the Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, and Tarikh. Future research is recommended to empirically examine the contextual, practice-based implementation of PAI in school settings.

Keywords: Character Education; Islamic Religious Education (PAI); Moral Development; Religious Values; Student Character Formation

Abstrak

Fenomena dekadensi moral di Indonesia, seperti meningkatnya kriminalitas, menurunnya toleransi, dan melemahnya religiusitas, menunjukkan adanya krisis karakter yang memerlukan perhatian serius dunia pendidikan. Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dipandang memiliki peran penting dalam pembentukan karakter peserta didik, namun implementasinya kerap lebih menekankan aspek kognitif. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan peran dan eksistensi PAI dalam pembentukan karakter serta mengidentifikasi bentuk implementasi materi PAI sebagai sarana pembinaan akhlak di sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui analisis literatur dan telaah normatif terhadap regulasi pendidikan, konsep pendidikan karakter, dan teori pendidikan Islam. Data dianalisis melalui pengelompokan tema dan interpretasi konseptual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa PAI berperan sebagai pilar pembentukan karakter melalui internalisasi nilai spiritual, moral, dan sosial yang terintegrasi dalam materi Al-Qur'an Hadis, Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqih, dan Tarikh. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan mengkaji implementasi PAI berbasis praktik kontekstual di sekolah secara empiris.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Karakter; Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI); Pembinaan Akhlak; Nilai Religius; Pembentukan Karakter Peserta Didik.



Introduction

The character crisis, marked by increasing antisocial behavior such as brawls, drug abuse, plagiarism, and the weakening of student religiosity, has become a striking social phenomenon in the context of formal education in Indonesia. This condition indicates that education has not fully succeeded in carrying out its function of character development optimally, so strategic and systematic efforts are needed to mitigate it. Character education through formal school channels is then seen as one of the main solutions in responding to this problem. In the context of Indonesia's predominantly Muslim society, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a central position as an instrument that bridges religious values with students' actual behavior. This is in line with the mandate of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that education is not only oriented towards mastery of cognitive aspects, but also directed towards developing individuals who are faithful, pious, have noble character, are independent, creative, and responsible.

Historically, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum was designed not solely to transfer religious knowledge, but rather to internalize moral, social, and spiritual values holistically in the lives of students. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials, which cover faith, morals, the Qur'an and Hadith, fiqh, and the history of Islam, have a strong normative and pedagogical foundation for strengthening students' character in an integral manner. Several studies have shown that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning contributes significantly to the formation of students' morals and character, both at the elementary and secondary levels, especially when learning emphasizes not only knowledge but also the inculcation of values in school life.(Furqon, 2024).

Character formation from an Islamic educational perspective cannot be understood as simply the instillation of normative moral values, but rather as a continuous process of internalizing values through habituation and real-life practice



in everyday life. Character education theory emphasizes three main domains: cognitive, which relates to understanding values; affective, which relates to attitudes and moral awareness; and psychomotor, which is reflected in actual behavior.(Anwar et al., 2024) This approach emphasizes that character education does not stop at knowledge of values, but must encourage students to understand the meaning of these values and reflect them in concrete actions.(Furqon, 2024).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, character formation is realized through a structured learning process by integrating Islamic values into all teaching and learning activities.(Anwar et al., 2024; Muzaini, 2019). A habituation approach, teacher role models as role models, and the integration of values into educational interactions are key strategies for character internalization. Various studies have shown that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning integrated with character education has proven effective in instilling the values of religiosity, responsibility, honesty, discipline, and tolerance in students, especially when these values are not only taught but also exemplified and practiced within the school environment.

The role of Islamic Religious Education as a medium for character formation can also be viewed from several important dimensions.(Fusvita Dewi, 2019b; Salisah, 2024) First, Islamic Education plays a role in internalizing moral and spiritual values derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, so that students are able to interpret religious teachings as a guide to life.(Nuriafuri et al., 2024). Learning the creed as a foundation of faith, along with the Qur'an and Hadith as sources of ethics and behavior, has been proven to have a significant influence on the formation of students' character in everyday life. Second, the habituation strategy and role models of Islamic Religious Education teachers have a strong influence on character formation, because teachers function not only as conveyors of material but also as role models whose behavior is observed and imitated by students.(Elsa, 2022).

In addition, the integration of character values in curricular and

extracurricular activities, such as the habit of praying together, carrying out worship on time, and socio-religious activities, is an effective strategy in strengthening the character of students.(Ginanjar, 2025)These practices demonstrate that character education through Islamic Religious Education will be more meaningful if implemented comprehensively within the school culture. Facing modern social realities marked by globalization and digitalization(Reksiana et al., 2024)Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is also required to be contextual and responsive. Several studies emphasize the importance of innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning so that it is not merely normative but also able to address the moral challenges facing students in the contemporary era.

Although various studies have confirmed the strategic role of PAI(Fusvita Dewi, 2019a; Trisoni, 2016)In character formation, there are still conceptual and empirical gaps that require further study. The integration of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum with character education in learning practices has not been fully effective, as Islamic Religious Education learning in many schools remains oriented towards cognitive achievement. Furthermore, the limited number of empirical studies that simultaneously combine teacher and student perspectives, as well as the limited number of studies on the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education learning based on real-life learning, indicate that there is still room for research.

Based on the description, this study aims to describe the role of Islamic Religious Education in the formation of students' character in schools, identify effective Islamic Religious Education learning strategies in internalizing character values, and explain the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning as a means of character development.

Research methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type.(Firman, 2018)A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth

description of how character education is implemented through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in schools. Descriptive research aims to describe phenomena, activities, and conditions as they are based on data obtained in the field.(Nurdiana, 2020).The techniques used in the research were observation, interviews, and documentation studies. The analysis techniques used were data reduction, data visualization, and conclusion drawing/verification.(Yurmaini et al., 2024).Results The results of the study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic role as a main pillar of character formation because it includes the transformation of spiritual, moral, and social values. The existence of Islamic Religious Education in the national curriculum is emphasized as a compulsory subject aimed at forming people who are faithful, pious, have noble character, and are able to face global dynamics. Islamic Religious Education materials, which include the Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah, Morals, Fiqh, and Tarikh, have been proven to have great potential in shaping student behavior when implemented through teacher role models, habituation, advice, attention, and reward-punishment. However, the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education is still hampered by learning that emphasizes cognitive aspects, limited learning time, and minimal integration of religious values in school life.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Character Education

Character Terms related to character are often linked and interchangeable with the terms ethics, morals, and/or values, and are related to moral strengths that have a "positive" rather than neutral connotation.(Nuriafuri et al., 2024). Therefore, character education can be understood more broadly as a process that develops the cultural values and character of a nation in students, so that they have values and character that become their identity.(Ginanjar, 2025). Students are expected to apply these values in their daily lives as members of society and as citizens who are religious, nationalistic, productive, and creative.



This concept should be taken seriously by the government and society as a solution to the real challenges facing the Indonesian nation recently, including numerous criminal acts, a decline in nationalism, the rise of racism, a decline in religious tolerance, and the loss of religiosity within society. This is crucial to ensure that cultural values...(Muchasan, 2018) Those that have begun to fade can be re-strengthened within society. One immediate step is to revise the curriculum within the national education system to focus on more concrete character education.

In Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, character education actually occupies an important position. We can see this from the national education goals which state that:

"National education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to enlighten the life of the nation, aiming to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble morals, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens." (Riri Nurandriani & Sobar Alghazal, 2022)

However, the learning process has so far focused solely on children's cognitive abilities, leaving the character education domain, as outlined in the national education goals, largely untouched. This is evident in the fact that graduation standards for elementary and secondary schools still place a greater weight on National Examination scores than on comprehensive evaluations of all subjects.

Character education is not simply a lesson to be recorded and memorized, and cannot be assessed quickly. Rather, it is a learning process implemented in all student activities, both at school, in the community, and at home, through habits, good examples, and continuous implementation. Therefore, the success of character education is a shared responsibility between the school, the community, and parents.

Evaluation of the success of character education cannot be assessed with formative or summative tests expressed in scores. However, the benchmark for the success of character education is the formation of students with character; moral,

cultured, polite, religious, creative, and innovative, which are applied in life throughout their lives. Therefore, there is no precise evaluation tool that can immediately indicate the success of character education. Character configuration as a totality of psychological and socio-cultural processes can be grouped into: Olah Hati (Spiritual and emotional development), Olah Pikir (Intellectual development), Olah Raga dan Kinesthetic (Physical and kinesthetic development), and Olah Rasa dan Karsa (Affective and Creativity development). These four psychosocial processes (olah hati, olah pikiran, olah olahraga, and olah rasa dan karsa) are holistically and coherently interconnected and complementary, which culminate in the formation of character that embodies noble values.

Character education is one of the right ways to develop character building for the younger generation; a generation that has high knowledge equipped with faith and piety to God Almighty, behaves well, is skilled, creative, independent, and becomes a democratic and responsible citizen.

The Existence of Islamic Religious Education in the National Education System

The curriculum is part of the learning system that functions to realize the goals of national education. Therefore, in Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 36, the curriculum in Indonesia is structured within the framework of increasing faith and piety, increasing noble morals, increasing potential, intelligence, and interests of students, diversity of potential, regions and environments, demands of regional and national development, demands of the world of work, demands of science and technology and art, religion, dynamics of global development, national unity and national values.(Asadori & Wahyuni, 2024).

To support the implementation of the curriculum framework above, the following article (Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 37) explains that the curriculum must include: religious education, civics, language, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, arts and culture, physical education and sports, skills/vocational education, local content.

Religious education is a subject aimed at fostering good morals and spiritual values in children. This demonstrates that religious education plays a crucial role in the implementation of character education in schools. Therefore, religious education is a compulsory subject at all levels of school, from elementary to secondary and even higher education. Schools need to implement religious education effectively through the continuous, collaborative application of religious values within the school environment by all teachers and students.

Another very interesting aspect is if schools could design a curriculum that integrates religious values into every subject. Essentially, religious education focuses on instilling attitudes and personality traits based on religious teachings in various aspects of students' future lives. Therefore, instilling religious values should be present in all subjects and be a shared responsibility for all teachers.

The content of the religious education curriculum is explained in the Appendix to Law No. 22 of 2006, including the Islamic religious education curriculum with the learning objective of producing people who always strive to perfect their faith, piety, and morals, and actively build civilization and harmony in life, especially in advancing a dignified national civilization. Such people are expected to be resilient in facing challenges, obstacles, and changes that arise in social interactions both locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Furthermore, the scope of Islamic religious education includes the following aspects: the Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah, Morals, Fiqh, Islamic History and Culture.(Anie, 2018).

Religious education, especially Islamic religious education (PAI), has a significant role in the education system in this country.(Ginanjar, 2025) Religious education is considered essential for all schools. Islamic religious education fundamentally aims to provide lessons that instill spiritual values in students, enabling them to become individuals with morals, ethics, and culture, in line with national education goals. Furthermore, religious education in schools can be implemented through various activities both inside and outside the classroom, with a greater emphasis on applying religious teachings to everyday life.(Hall, 2024).

Islamic Religious Education Material in Schools as a Form of Character Building for Students

The above description demonstrates that education plays a crucial role as an agent of change in shaping children's character, and Islamic religious education plays a crucial role in this process. However, a problem has arisen where Islamic religious education in schools is viewed solely as theoretical knowledge without practical application in everyday life. Consequently, the goal of Islamic religious education as a tool to develop students' noble character is not being achieved effectively.

The idea that Islamic religious education is not a material that is a graduation requirement for students also has an impact on the depth of understanding of the material.(Wahidin et al., 2022)This makes Islamic Religious Education (PAI) considered an unimportant and merely supplementary subject, with PAI lessons taking place only in class and scheduled for two hours a week, and the more pathetic evaluation only carried out through written tests.

The teaching model for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) should be changed immediately. Teachers, who are key to successful learning, must understand that their responsibility for achieving Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education extends beyond the cognitive aspect. Equally important is raising awareness among students that religious education is a necessity, fostering a strong commitment to applying religious knowledge in their daily lives.(Aly, 2015)This is where teacher creativity is essential in delivering the material, where Islamic Religious Education should not only be taught in class, but teachers also need to motivate and support religious learning outside the classroom through religious activities and create a religious school atmosphere that is not limited to class hours.

The main objective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is to

shape the personality of students, which is reflected in their behavior and mindset in everyday life. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is not only the responsibility of Islamic Religious Education teachers alone, but also requires support from the entire school community, the community, and more importantly, parents. Schools must be able to coordinate and communicate Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning patterns to the various parties mentioned as a series of communities that support and care for each other in order to form students with noble character and morals. The success of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in schools is also determined by the application of appropriate learning methods. In line with this, Abdullah Nasih Ulwan provides the concept of inclusive education in children's moral education, which consists of 1) Education by example, 2) Education by customs, 3) Education by advice, 4) Education by giving attention, 5) Education by giving punishment.(Nadliroh, 2024).

Ibn Shina in *Risalah al-Siyâsah* stipulates that the professionalism of a teacher is determined by his intelligence, religion, morals, charisma and authority.(Wahidin et al., 2022). Therefore, one of the important educational processes is role modeling. The behavior and character of teachers are a reflection of valuable learning for students. Indonesian educational figure Ki Hajar Dewantara said that teachers should adhere to the principle "ing ngarso sung tulodo ing madyo mangun karso" (in front, set an example, in the middle, provide guidance, and behind, provide encouragement). This role modeling is one method that teachers should apply in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Teachers must be able to apply religious values in their own lives before teaching them to students. Because they will become real role models for students.

Education related to character or morals cannot be taught solely through knowledge but must be applied through daily habits. After being a good example, teachers need to encourage students to consistently behave positively in their daily lives. Therefore, in addition to assessing, teachers also play a role as supervisors of student behavior at school, making support from all parties crucial. In the habit-

building method, students are equipped with the ability to adapt to good behavior anywhere, anytime, and with anyone.

The desired teaching process in moral education focuses more on educating than simply teaching. Educating means a learning process that focuses more on guidance and advice. Guidance and advice mean guiding students to understand values that can serve as real-life examples, not just imparting knowledge.

Educating with attention means continuously monitoring and following children's daily behavioral development. This can also serve as a basis for evaluation for teachers to assess their learning success. The most important aspect of the Islamic Religious Education learning process is positive behavioral changes in daily life as a result of the implementation of the knowledge gained.

As a form of teacher appreciation for student achievement, positive feedback is needed, namely through awards and sanctions. Awards are given to celebrate student achievement, while sanctions are imposed if students violate established rules. However, sanctions here do not necessarily involve violence or demeaning students, but rather focus on educational punishment. The method of rewards and sanctions is important in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning to maintain students' motivation to learn.

Providing knowledge about correct aqidah is the main basis for instilling morals in children(Hamdani Pratama & Zulkarnain Abdurrahman, 2025)This demonstrates the importance of Islamic religious education in schools, as it serves as the foundation for learning other disciplines, shaping children with character, religious beliefs, and broad knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that the implementation of Islamic religious education in schools is a key pillar of character education. Religious education teaches the importance of cultivating morals, starting with religious awareness in children. It teaches aqidah (Islamic faith) as the foundation of their religion, teaches the Quran and Hadith as

guidelines for their lives, teaches fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) as a guide to religious law, teaches Islamic history as a living example, and teaches morals as a guide to behavior to judge what is good and bad.

Conclusion

Instilling character values in children from a young age contributes to creating a generation of people with good character. They are the nation's future leaders, expected to develop a civilized nation, uphold noble values with good character, and become highly knowledgeable individuals, equipped with faith and piety. Therefore, Islamic religious education (PAI) in schools is crucial as a way to build student character. The process of character formation in children will be more effective if it stems from an awareness of religious values, not simply following societal customs.

The indicator of success in character education is when an individual understands good things (knowing the good) (cognitive), then loves good things (loving the good) (affective), and then carries them out (acting the good) (psychomotor).

Meanwhile, steps that schools can take to optimize Islamic Religious Education learning include: 1) requiring professional teachers, who have expertise, good morals, and can be role models for their students, 2) teaching is not only done in class but also supplemented with religious extracurricular activities that are carried out seriously as part of learning, 3) requiring students to carry out certain worship at school with teacher guidance (for example, carrying out congregational Dhuhur prayers regularly), 4) providing appropriate worship facilities for religious activities, 5) prioritizing good morals in schools carried out by the entire school community (for example with greetings, greetings, and smiles programs), 6) every teacher should be able to apply religious education in all materials taught as part of comprehensive character education. If these points can be implemented, then the goal of national education to create a generation that

believes in and fears God Almighty, has good morals, is healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and is a democratic and responsible citizen can be achieved.

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