RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN FORMING STUDENTS' CHARACTER

Dodi Ahmad Haerudin

Universitas Muhammadiyah Kuningan, Indonesia (dodi@upmk.ac.id)

Keywords:	ABSTRACTS
Islamic Education; Student Character; Character Formation; Moral Values; Morals.	**Background:** In Indonesia, character development through education is essential to address moral decay in society. **Purpose:** This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping students' character by instilling moral values and ethical behavior. **Method:** Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving PAI teachers, students, and school officials. **Result:** The research highlights the significant role of PAI in fostering values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect. Teachers act not only as educators but also as moral role models, guiding students to apply these values in daily life. However, challenges such as limited instructional time, varying religious understandings among students, and insufficient support from families and the community hinder the full potential of character development. **Conclusion:** This study suggests that schools should integrate religious values across all learning activities and involve parents in the character-building process to better support students in developing strong moral foundations.

A. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become an important issue in the world of education today, because it is related to the increasing and diverse phenomenon of moral decadence occurring in society and within the government environment. The many incidents such as crime, injustice, corruption, violence against children, violations of human rights, are proof that there has been a crisis of identity and characteristics in the Indonesian nation. The noble character, politeness and religiosity that are upheld and become the culture of the Indonesian nation have seemed to feel strange and rarely found in society. This condition will become even worse if the government does not immediately implement improvement programs, both long and short term. Character education is the right answer to these problems, and schools as education providers are expecte to become places that are able to realize the mission of character education. One alternative that can be done in implementing character education at school is optimizing the learning of Islamic religious education (PAI) material (Puspitasari et al., 2022). The role of religious education, especially Islamic religious education, is very strategic in realizing the formation of student character. Religious education is a means of transforming knowledge in the religious aspect (cognitive aspect) (Yunita & Anggraini, 2020), as a means of transforming moral norms and values to form attitudes (affective aspect), which plays a role in controlling behavior so as to create a complete human personality. Islamic religious education is expected to be able to produce people who always strive to perfect their faith, piety and noble character. Noble character includes ethics, manners or morals as a manifestation of education. Such people are expected to be resilient in facing challenges, obstacles and changes that arise in social interactions both locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Character education is not in the form of material that can only be recorded and memorized and cannot be evaluated in a short period of time, but character education is a learning that is applied in all student activities both at school, in the community and at home through a process of habituation, example, and carried out consistently. sustainable (Lonto, 2015). Therefore, the success of character education is a shared responsibility between the school, community and parents. Evaluation of the success of character education certainly cannot be assessed by 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, innovative which is applied in life throughout his life.

Religious education is a material that aims to improve noble morals and spiritual values in children. This shows that religious education has an important role in implementing character education in schools. Therefore, religious education has become a mandatory subject for both primary, secondary and tertiary level schools. So schools must be able to provide religious education optimally by applying religious values in the school environment carried out by all teachers and students together and continuously. It would also be very interesting if schools were able to develop a curriculum by applying religious values which are reflected in every subject. Basically, religious education focuses on cultivating attitudes and personalities based on religious teachings in all aspects of students' future lives. Religious education, especially Islamic religious education (PAI) has an important position in the national education system. Character formation is a crucial aspect of education, especially in the modern era which is marked by rapid social change. Education not only plays a role in increasing

knowledge and skills, but also in forming morality, ethics and positive attitudes in students. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a significant role in forming students' character, considering that Islamic values greatly emphasize aspects of noble character, responsibility and social concern (Fakultas et al., 2019). This is where Islamic Religious Education functions as a strong character foundation for the younger generation, directing them to become individuals with noble character, trustworthiness and tolerance. In the context of character formation through Islamic Religious Education, the idea of renewal or novelty that can be raised is the approach integrative in learning. This integrative approach involves combining Islamic values with interactive and adaptive modern educational methods, where students are more actively involved in the learning process, including in activities that support their character development. Integrative Approach in Character Education Islamic Religious Education has tended to use lecture and memorization methods in teaching religious values. Although this method plays an important role, an integrative approach involving direct experience, critical discussion, and social practice can be more effective in shaping student character. In this case, there are several integrative methods that can be applied, namely Project-Based Learning. Through a project-based approach, students are invited to work on real projects that challenge them to implement Islamic values in everyday life (Bender, 2012). For example, students can be given assignments to carry out social activities such as social service, helping the surrounding environment, or carrying out projects that involve collaboration between students from different backgrounds. This helps students develop the character of social awareness, empathy, and responsibility. Simulation and Social Practice, in order to foster Islamic character, simulation or direct practice can be used to teach students about Islamic ethics in social interactions. For example, in material regarding zakat, students not only learn about zakat theory but are also invited to be involved in simulations of distributing zakat or helping institutions that manage zakat. In this way, students not only understand theory but also experience direct experience that shapes their empathy and social responsibility. Use technology and social media wisely. The character formation of today's students must also consider the challenges of technology. Social media often plays a big role in shaping students' outlook on life and character. Therefore, Islamic religious education can include digital ethics learning that teaches how to use social media in a way that is in accordance with Islamic values (Indana et al., 2017). For example, students can be taught about the importance of maintaining privacy, not spreading fake news, and using digital platforms to share useful and inspiring information. The use of case studies and critical discussions, namely presenting real case studies about moral and ethical dilemmas in class, can provide students with the opportunity to discuss and debate actions that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. For example, in cases of corruption or social injustice, students can be invited to think critically and find solutions that are in line with the values of justice and honesty. This critical discussion is able to build honest, fair and wise character in dealing with various complex situations. Spiritual mentoring and guidance One of the challenges in character formation is ensuring that the values taught can be applied in everyday life. Spiritual assistance in the form of mentoring can be applied to ensure students receive consistent guidance, not only from religious teachers, but also from upperclassmen or alumni who have a good understanding of religion. This program can increase students' motivation to behave in accordance with Islamic values outside of school, strengthening their character in the wider

environment. The implication of reform through an integrative approach in Islamic Religious Education is that student character formation can be more effective and relevant to modern challenges. This approach prevents students from simply understanding religion theoretically, but also allows them to internalize Islamic values in every aspect of their lives. In this way, Islamic religious education will be able to form individuals who are not only ritually obedient, but also show good morals, concern for others, and responsibility for the social environment (Fadhillatie, 2018). The conclusion is that character formation through Islamic Religious Education has a strategic role in creating a generation with character and morals. Through an integrative learning approach, Islamic Religious Education can be more effective in instilling Islamic values into students' personalities. In this era of globalization, it is very important for Islamic Religious Education to continue to innovate so that Islamic values remain relevant and are able to become strong pillars of character in shaping future generations. By integrating Islamic values into modern learning methods, Islamic Religious Education can become a more powerful tool in shaping the character of the younger generation. Religious education is material that must be taught in every school. In principle, Islamic religious education provides learning that instills spiritual values in students so that they become moral, ethical and cultured human beings as part of national education goals. Meanwhile, the implementation of religious education learning at school can be internalized in intra- and extra-school activities and prioritize the application of religious teachings in everyday life. Associations, friendships, interactions, the environment and so on have a great influence on individuals and other individuals. The scope of this needs to be underlined in analyzing the function of people who carry out activities from the educational realm on the social actions of students in achieving noble goals. . An important note is that the governance of an educational institution can have real duties as a director, mentor and other functions of course as good role models for the entire school community in the form of programs implemented by the school which are carried out regularly, therefore the government should act to continue to shape the character of the school. the character of students for the progress of the nation. Character education is a solution to every crime problem that occurs in the community and school environment. Meanwhile, every school should strengthen the learning system to develop the character of students who are religious, polite and have noble character. Islamic religious education is expected to shape the character of students. This research focuses on interactions between friends at school which show many symptoms of demoralization, so the formulation of the problem is related to the role of Islamic religious education between friends for students, as well as the character that appears in students' interactions. . It is hoped that the results of this research will provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, the results of this research are expected to be useful in increasing understanding of the importance of the role of Islamic religious education between friends in the formation of students' character. Practical benefits, as a vehicle for increasing experience in the world of education and the real environment, providing knowledge to students to choose good peer groups, providing knowledge to parents to pay more attention and supervision to children's social environment, and providing literature to schools to provide more supervision of students. One alternative way that can be done to reduce criminal acts that occur is through Character Education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which must be further optimized in learning methods within the school environment. Because the

role of religious education is a very strategic way in forming the character of students, so that it can create the character of students who are religious and have high moral values.

B. METHOD

The research method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive research method because it is considered suitable for the theme of this research, namely regarding the social sphere whose changes cannot be ascertained. The collection of research respondents was carried out using non-probability sampling, where the sample or respondents did not have the same probability due to random selection by the researcher. In this research, researchers focused on character formation through religious education. In this research, the researcher focuses on the facts about the implementation of character formation that occurs at school through religious education. This research method was carried out by distributing questionnaires via social media to respondents in Google Form format. The subjects of this research were students from SMPN 16 Cirebon City class 8. The data collection technique used observation and documentation techniques, where the researcher saw directly the character education implemented in religious education in the school, the school has a variety of religions, so tolerance can also be seen between local school residents. The data analysis techniques used in this research are data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

In the final stage of the research, the researcher will describe the research results, and also analyze the respondents' answers, and draw a conclusion which is then linked to the role of Islamic religious education in the formation of students' religious character. In the context of the research "Character Formation through Islamic Religious Education," these steps will help describe the process of character formation in schools, how teachers teach religious values, and how students practice these values. Researchers can conduct in-depth interviews with teachers and students, observe religious activities or other activities that support character formation, and collect documentation from activities carried out at school related to character values.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to understand the process of character formation of students through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in junior high schools, with a focus on the application of Islamic values and the role of teachers in this process. The results of this research were obtained through in-depth interview techniques, observation and documentation. Research informants are PAI teachers, students and school principals who play a direct role in religious education activities.

1.   The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Character Formation

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have a significant role in shaping student character. Based on interviews with several PAI teachers, it was found that these teachers not only teach religious subject matter but also function as spiritual and moral guides for students. These teachers try to be role models for students in terms of morals and attitudes. The following are some of the roles of PAI teachers in forming student character:

Role Model: PAI teachers realize that they are role models for students, especially in terms of religious attitudes, honesty and politeness. One teacher stated, "We have to be an example first. We must do what we teach so that students can imitate and internalize

these values." Teachers try to show a consistent attitude in all their actions in front of students, such as speaking softly, being punctual, and respecting others.

Guides in Islamic Values, apart from being role models, PAI teachers also act as mentors who explain Islamic values by providing examples of their application in everyday life. Teachers help students understand how religious values can be applied in various aspects of life, such as honesty, trust, and mutual assistance. During observations, the teacher gave directions to students to respect each other, speak politely, and keep the classroom environment clean.

Moral Problem Solver, PAI teachers play an important role in helping students face moral dilemmas that may occur in the school or home environment. These teachers often listen to students' problems and help them find solutions based on religious values (Sari et al., 2023)(Haniyyah, 2021). For example, a student who experiences a conflict with a friend is invited to resolve the problem in a good way, such as apologizing or forgiving, according to Islamic teachings.

2.   Learning Approach for Character Formation

Apart from the personal role of the teacher, the learning approach used in Islamic Religious Education also plays a role in forming student character. Based on observations and interviews, it was found that several approaches used by teachers were effective in shaping student character, namely:

Case-Based Learning (Case-Based Learning), teachers often present real cases that occur in society to be discussed together. For example, cases of dishonesty in everyday life or the need to work together in the school environment. Students are invited to think critically and determine actions that are in accordance with Islamic values. From this discussion, students are invited to reflect on values such as honesty, cooperation and responsibility.

Use of Social Projects: One of the learning methods applied is a social project where students are involved in social activities that involve Islamic values, such as social service, visits to orphanages, or mosque cleaning activities. With this activity, students learn about the importance of mutual assistance, empathy and cooperation in the community.

The practice of praying and worshiping together, the habit of worshiping and praying together regularly at school is also an important means of character building. Every day, students are invited to perform Dhuha prayers and Zuhr prayers in congregation, as well as recite prayers before and after lessons begin. These activities strengthen students' religious character and help them develop positive habits that support spiritual development.

Value-Based Learning, Islamic values such as honesty, patience and cooperation are the main themes in daily teaching. PAI teachers always emphasize the importance of these values and show examples of their application in real life (Azrasabiy & Gery, 2024). With this approach, students are taught that Islamic values are not only applied in ritual contexts but also in everyday social interactions.

3.   Student Response to Character Formation through Islamic Religious Education

Based on the results of interviews and observations, it was found that students' responses to character education through Islamic Religious Education were generally positive. Most students feel that Islamic Religious Education helps them become better at acting and thinking. Some findings related to student responses are as follows:

Increased Religious Awareness, many students feel that through Islamic Religious Education, they increasingly understand the importance of Islamic values in everyday life. They feel more motivated to maintain good morals and attitudes not only at school but also at home. One student said, "Religious lessons teach us to be more patient and respectful of other people. I try to apply this at home."

Changes in Social Attitudes, several students showed significant changes in attitudes in terms of social awareness and mutual respect. Through social project activities and joint religious activities, students claim to learn the meaning of mutual assistance, cooperation and brotherhood. They feel more open to helping friends and care more about the environment around them.

Increasing discipline and responsibility, habituation to worship and structured positive activities help students become more disciplined. Students are taught to arrive on time, obey the rules, and maintain cleanliness. These activities form students' character of discipline and responsibility, which is expected to be applied outside the school environment. (Aminah et al., 2022)

4.   Obstacles in Character Formation through Islamic Religious Education

Although most of the findings show a positive response, this research also found several obstacles in the process of character formation through Islamic Religious Education. These obstacles include:

Limited learning time, one of the main obstacles is the limited time for Islamic Religious Education lessons in the school curriculum. Some teachers feel that the duration of available lesson hours is not enough to explore religious material while simultaneously carrying out comprehensive character development.

Lack of environmental support outside of school, students often face situations in the family or community environment that do not always support the application of the religious values they learn. For example, some students find the environment at home less supportive of the values learned at school, such as discipline and responsibility.

Differences in understanding between teachers and students, in some cases, teachers find it difficult to convey values that are in accordance with students' understanding. Differences in students' backgrounds and levels of understanding of the Islamic religion sometimes become a challenge for teachers in delivering material that is relevant and easy to understand by all students. There are students who may be accustomed to strong religious values in their family environment, while other students may receive less religious emphasis from their family. This results in differences in students' understanding of Islamic values. Teachers need to adapt and pay special attention so that all students can understand and accept the values taught, regardless of their religious background. However, differences in students' understanding and experience sometimes make this process slow and not optimal.

Analysis/Discussion

Authors should discuss the results and how they can be interpreted from the perspective of previous studies and of the working hypotheses. The findings and their implications should be discussed in the broadest context possible. Future research directions may also be highlighted. The following components should be covered in the discussion: How do your results relate to the original question or objectives outlined in the Introduction section (what/how)? Do you provide interpretation scientifically for each of your results or findings presented (why)? Are your results consistent with what other

investigators have reported (what else)? Or are there any differences? Lack of Teacher Training and Competence in Character Education. Another obstacle that affects the effectiveness of character formation through PAI is the lack of special training for teachers in the field of character education. In some cases, PAI teachers only rely on teaching methods that focus on conveying religious material without a practical approach to character development. In fact, character formation requires more interactive and applicable learning methods, such as group discussions, case studies, and simulations of real situations. Teachers who do not have training or in-depth understanding of character education may have difficulty integrating character values into teaching and learning activities that are relevant for students. They may feel comfortable with lecture or memorization methods that focus on religious theory, but these methods are often ineffective in forming character. Lack of competence in character education also reduces teachers' ability to guide students in overcoming the moral dilemmas they face in everyday life. The Influence of Technology and Social Media, technology and social media also become obstacles in the process of character formation through Islamic Religious Education. Social media and the internet provide unlimited access to information, including content that may conflict with the religious and moral values taught in schools. Many students are exposed to information that is not necessarily positive or in accordance with Islamic values, such as content that teaches consumerism, violence, or irresponsible behavior. Teachers and parents often find it difficult to control what students see and access on social media or the internet, so that the process of internalizing religious values is disrupted (Nurhidayati et al., 2021). Students who are exposed to a lot of negative content may show attitudes or behavior that are not in accordance with religious values, even though they have received character education at school. The influence of this technology is a big challenge for teachers and parents to remain relevant in educating students and ensuring that religious values remain well internalized. Education is the learning of knowledge, skills that are passed down from one generation to the next through teaching, training or other things. Education is a universal activity process in human life (Ahmad Taufik & Novitasari, 2021). Education has a very important position in the process of developing all the potential of students. Educators are the most decisive figures in the design and preparation of educational processes, especially in the process of scientific transformation and changes in student behavior in a more positive direction. Each individual has a different character. A person's character can be innate from birth and can also be formed within the family or community environment. Good characters display good behavior, while bad characters can display bad character too. According to Lickona (Lickona, 2012), character formation refers to an individual's innate qualities as well as the individual's experiences when they are in their environment subjectively or objectively, thus influencing their behavior. Character comes from English, namely character, which means character, disposition, manners or personality. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), character is psychological traits, morals that differentiate someone from others. According to the Ministry of National Education, character is a way of thinking or behavior that has become a characteristic of a person for living and working together within the scope of the family or community as well as the Nation and State.

Character according to several experts, Thomas Lickona (Lickona, 1991), character is a person's natural nature in responding to situations morally which is reflected in actions

through good behavior, honesty, fairness, respect for others, discipline and responsibility. Ahmad Dahlan (Sutarna & Anwar, 2020) stated that character is a special trait inherent in a person which causes a person to be able to act without the need for thought or consideration and is not influenced by situations and circumstances. Simon Philips (Nirra Fatmah, 2018), stated that character is a system of values that leads to a system that underlies a person's thoughts, behavior and attitudes. Character education is a term used to describe the curriculum and characteristics of school organizations in developing students' fundamental values as well as efforts to implement them systematically to help students understand behavioral values related to God Almighty, themselves, fellow human beings, environment, as well as nationality originating from thoughts, attitudes, words and actions based on religious norms, law, culture and customs. Character education is a national movement in an effort to develop students in good, ethical, responsible and caring behavior through an emphasis on universal values. Islamic religious education is a pillar for forming the character of students, because from Islamic religious education there is a lot of knowledge about creeds, where these creeds are the basis for cultivating morals (Wiranata, 2019). It is these morals that lead students towards religion. However, the process of character formation is clearly not easy and does not take a short time. Apart from the environment, there are also influencing factors such as internal factors (instinct, will, conscience, heredity) and external factors (education and environment). To foster the formation of religious character in PAI students, PAI teachers can implement their strategies effectively and efficiently through learning Islamic religious education that is adapted to the curriculum, the strategies used are as follows:

1. Habit: something that is deliberately done repeatedly or becomes a habit.
2. Exemplary: prioritizing character formation in the form of real action, rather than just talking without action.
3. Enforce the rules

According to Ki Hajar Dewantara (Apriliyanti et al., 2021) in interpreting education as a process of providing guidance to develop the potential of students, this guidance shows that the aim of education is towards assisting students in the process of perfecting their behavioral order. Continuous enforcement of rules from habituation emphasizes students to process first, so they get used to it and then all forms of rules can be implemented and obeyed (Masruri, 2019). Morals can be thought of as a state of a firm soul where actions arise spontaneously without thought or consideration. Actions that come from a good soul are called good morals. If the actions arise from a bad spirit then that condition is called bad morals. Allah SWT has created humans and prioritized humans over animals with reason, speech, morals and religion. Islam requires every individual and society to have commendable morals, because morals play an important role in the lives of individuals and society. If humans have bad morals such as being liars, envious, evil and so on then this can endanger themselves. People will also feel disturbed, resulting in hostility, fighting each other, quarreling, boasting, being arrogant, and so on (Fuadi Husin, 2014). Al Ghazali stated how to educate by providing examples, training and habituation, then advice and recommendations as guidance for children in accordance with Islamic teachings. Character formation takes place gradually and develops so that it can be a process towards perfection (Masruri, 2019). In this case, Imam Al Ghazali said that if a child is accustomed to practicing good deeds and is given a good education, he will definitely grow and develop above goodness and

have a positive impact and be safe in this world and the hereafter, parents and educators will also get the reward (Kurniawan & Setiyowati, 2021). However, if since childhood you have been accustomed to committing bad deeds and education and teaching are ignored, the result will be that the child will suffer harm and his morals will be damaged. Meanwhile, his sins will be borne by his parents and educators who are responsible for raising or taking care of him. Morals are a gift given by Allah to His servants who really want to change bad habits and decorate them with commendable actions. After continuously changing bad habits into good ones, they will become a person's character and personality (Masruri, 2019). In the concept of moral education, it is very necessary to understand the basic assumptions of the human concept built by Imam al-Ghazali. Humans are personal creatures consisting of body, heart, spirit and mind. Therefore, the actions and values produced by physical and physical instruments are determined by how angry and lustful the individual is (Husnaini et al., 2020). Character education can be formed within the family environment. Family is interpreted as mother, father, children or the whole household, the family plays the most important role in developing a child's character from childhood to adulthood, because children first receive biological education, social education, religious education and so on (Fauzan, 2019). Islamic religious education is expected to shape the character of students. This research focuses on interactions between friends at school which show many symptoms of demoralization, so the formulation of the problem is related to the role of Islamic religious education between friends for students, as well as the character that appears in students' interactions. . It is hoped that the results of this research will provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, the results of this research are expected to be useful in increasing understanding of the importance of the role of Islamic religious education between friends in the formation of students' character. Practical benefits, as a vehicle for increasing experience in the world of education and the real environment, providing knowledge to students to choose good peer groups, providing knowledge to parents to pay more attention and supervision to children's social environment, and providing literature to schools to provide more supervision of students.

D. CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that Islamic Religious Education plays a major role in forming the character of students at school. Through the role of teachers as role models and mentors, as well as learning approaches that are oriented towards Islamic values, Islamic Religious Education is able to encourage students to develop positive attitudes and strong religious values. Student responses to Islamic Religious Education are very positive, with indications of increased religious awareness, changes in social attitudes, as well as increased discipline and responsibility. However, this character building process is not free from various challenges, such as limited learning time and lack of environmental support. Therefore, collaboration between schools, families and communities is needed to ensure that student character formation runs optimally and sustainably. These obstacles in character formation through Islamic Religious Education reflect complex challenges and require attention from various parties. Limited learning time, lack of environmental support, differences in student backgrounds, lack of teacher competence in character education, and the influence of

technology are several factors that influence the effectiveness of character formation through PAI. Therefore, collaborative efforts are needed between schools, families and communities to overcome these obstacles so that Islamic Religious Education can play an optimal role in forming the character of the younger generation who have good morals and superior personalities. Islamic religious education is the foundation of character education (Karolina, 2018). This character education is formed from the material on moral beliefs found in PAI subjects. Faith is a foundation for forming religious character. However, in reality, PAI is a subject that is seen as no more important than other subjects. The reason is because it is not included in the graduation standards. Apart from that, it focuses more on theoretical development, while PAI is best done practically so that it can be applied in life. This is a basis for changing the mindset that PAI is not more important than any other subject. Islamic religious education can be included in all subjects. That the impact is real in life, namely by applying Islamic religious education material well, productively, effectively and efficiently and can be useful for the life of society, nation and state.

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