

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CHARACTER BUILDING OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Melyani Sari Sitepu¹
Juli Maini Sitepu²

^{1,2}Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara
melyanisari@umsu.ac.id, julimaini@umsu.ac.id

Abstract: *Islamic religious education is essential in building students' character, especially at the elementary school level. In the context of education in Indonesia, which prioritizes the formation of national character, Islamic religious education is one of the effective means to shape attitudes, behaviors, and personalities that are by religious values. This study aims to analyze the contribution of Islamic religious education in building students' character in elementary schools, focusing on the moral and ethical aspects of its teaching materials. Through a qualitative approach, this study uses literature study methods and direct observation in several elementary schools that implement the Islamic religious education curriculum. The study's results indicate that Islamic religious education can influence students to develop positive attitudes such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and empathy for others. In addition, Islamic religious education also teaches deep spiritual values, which support students' moral development in everyday life. Based on these findings, it is recommended that Islamic religious education in elementary schools be further strengthened with a more contextual and integrative approach to be more effective in shaping students' characters with noble morals.*

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education, Character Building, Elementary School*

Introduction

Character Education has become a hot issue since implementing character education nationally at all levels of education starting from elementary school. In various scientific forums, character education has been widely discussed and debated.(Ani, 2014). In the context of basic education, student character development plays a vital role, because childhood is a phase of basic personality formation. Education is a series of ways of obtaining knowledge and self-development by humans continuously or sustainably.(Artha, 2016). The challenges of the globalization era, such as the influence of digital media, instant lifestyle, and moral crisis, make character education a strategic agenda in the national education system.

Learning is very important for a nation and state's existence because it can improve human resources. Facilitating the practice, development, training, and adaptation of students through organizing activities is very important for the learning process. The ultimate goal of all this work is to produce a new holy, intelligent, creative, independent, and morally upright generation. The National Learning System has set the following goals: "Becoming a religious person and believing in God Almighty, having noble character, healthy, educated, capable, independent,

democratic, innovative, and responsible as a citizen (Susilowati, 2022). This is in line with the vision. This idea argues that a person's educational experiences significantly influence their sense of self. (Kuswandi & Himayaturrohmah, 2018). In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a fundamental element that teaches religious knowledge and instills moral and spiritual values that underlie the formation of students' characters. Creating a perfect Muslim human being (*insan kamil*) is the main goal of Islamic Education. (Sirait, 2024).

Islamic Religious Education has a unique quality and nature as a planned process. This includes developing, expanding, and strengthening spiritual principles and the basis of faith in society. The whole person consists of the values of faith that are manifested in their outward and inward behavior. These principles serve as a foundation for motivating and enabling personal behavior (Yusri et al., 2023). Islamic religious education further guides and fosters students to understand, appreciate, and live according to Islamic principles. The main goal is to produce individuals who are pious and believe in God, and can realize that they are God's representatives on earth. and have a morally upright attitude. Islamic Religious Education does not only aim to transfer Islamic knowledge alone, but also functions as an instrument to shape students' character, morality, and spirituality. (Nadlrah Naimi, et al, 2025)

The Islamic religious education material presented in schools is still often repeated at the previous level. (Rahmania & Tabroni, 2021). In addition, Islamic religious education material is studied separately. It is not related to other fields of study so that Islamic religious subjects are not accepted as something alive and responsive to the needs of students and the challenges of changing times (Choli, 2015). Even the presence of Islamic religious education lessons can be guaranteed to be boring and less challenging (Rahmania & Tabroni, 2021).

The urgency of character education is increasingly prominent amidst various global challenges such as moral disintegration, cultural identity crisis, and the degradation of social values due to technological advances that are not accompanied by moral literacy (Ramadhan, 2024). Elementary school children are very vulnerable to the influence of the external environment, including social media and popular culture which are not always positive. In this case, character education functions as a fortress that shapes students into individuals who are ethical, responsible, and have integrity. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a fundamental element that teaches religious knowledge and instills moral and spiritual values that underlie the formation of students' character. (Jabar et al., 2021). This study will discuss how Islamic religious education in schools and the role of Islamic Religious Education in building the character of elementary school students.

Literature Review

Elementary School Education

Elementary School (SD) education is the initial stage in the formal education system that aims to provide basic knowledge and skills to children. In Indonesia, elementary education is mandatory for all children aged 6 to 12 years, by the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003. Education at the elementary school level has a very important role because at this age children are in a very rapid stage of cognitive, affective, and motor development. (Estari, 2020). Elementary school education aims to shape the character of children who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have good social, moral, and emotional skills. At the elementary school level, educators are tasked with instilling the basics of knowledge and skills

and forming students' character and social attitudes. In addition, elementary education is also the basis for further educational development. Elementary education is the foundation of the entire education system. **(Febriyana & Melyani Sari Sitepu, 2023)**.

In elementary education, children are equipped with moral values that become the basis for them in living their next life which is reflected in their character. Therefore, character education must be instilled from an early age. Character education in elementary schools has a very important role in shaping children's personalities. At this stage, children are in a very critical period of development, where moral and ethical values can be firmly embedded. Through character education, students are taught values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy and respect. **(Pratiwi, 2025)**. Effective character education can help students develop positive attitudes, social skills, and decision-making abilities. In addition, character education also contributes to the formation of a conducive and harmonious learning environment. In this digital era full of social and moral challenges, teachers must have the latest and most interesting innovations, and make character education more relevant. Teachers and parents must work together to ensure that children get the right guidance in developing their character. **(Pipit Putri Hariani MD, 2019)**.

Islamic Education

Religious education is a material that aims to improve noble morals and spiritual values in children. This shows that religious education is important in implementing character education in schools. Therefore, religious education has become one of the compulsory subjects in elementary, middle and high schools. So schools must be able to provide religious education optimally by implementing religious values in the school environment which are implemented by all teachers and students together and continuously (Salsabilla & Putri, 2022). Islamic religious education is a deliberate effort to teach, train and guide students to respect other religions while helping them believe, understand, appreciate and appreciate the values of the Islamic religion (Yusri et al., 2023). Islamic religious education in principle provides learning that instills spiritual values to students so that they become moral, ethical, and cultured human beings as part of the goals of national education. Islamic education teaches noble values that serve as guidelines for life. The Qur'an in Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1-5 teaches the importance of knowledge and understanding of God. The Messenger of Allah SAW also said, "The best people among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it" (HR. Bukhari) (Kusumastuti et al., 2024).

Regarding character, Islamic education has existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, through Allah's command that the first and foremost task of the Prophet is to perfect the morals of his people. The substantive meaning of character is the same as the concept of morals in Islam, because both discuss human behavior. Morals are often also called the science of behavior or temperament, because with this knowledge will be obtained knowledge about the virtues of the soul, how to obtain them, and how to cleanse the dirty soul **(M.Qorib, 2020)**. Meanwhile, what is meant by character is the distinctive good values (knowing the value of goodness, wanting to do good, truly living a good life, and having a good impact on the environment) that are embedded in oneself and manifested in behavior. Character coherently radiates from the results of the mind, heart, practice, and feelings and will of a person or group of people **(Sitepu & Amelia, 2021)**

Method

This type of research is a literature review, which is a research conducted by collecting and analyzing relevant and credible literature sources related to the theme being studied. The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive, aiming to systematically describe the form of transformation, challenges, and role of Islamic religious education in character building of elementary school students based on academic literature review. According to (George, 2008), Literature review allows researchers to evaluate and synthesize the results of previous research to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

The data sources in this study were obtained from accredited national journal articles and reputable international journals, academic books and the latest scientific literature, seminar proceedings and research results related to the transformation of learning and digitalization of Islamic Religious Education. Data collection techniques in this study were carried out through keyword identification, literature search, literature selection and data organization. The data that has been collected was analyzed using the content analysis method, through the stages; Data reduction, Categorization, Interpretation, Systematic presentation (Yusuf, 2024)

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of the literature study conducted, two main points were found, namely (1) How is Islamic religious education in schools (2) what is the role of Islamic religious education in building the character of elementary school students. The following is an explanation of the findings.

Islamic Religious Education in Schools

Islamic education can be identified as: 1) all activities carried out by a person or an institution to help a person or group of students in instilling Islamic teachings and/or developing Islamic values; 2) all phenomena or events of encounters between two or more people that have an impact on the instillation of Islamic teachings and/or the growth of Islamic values in one or more parties; and 3) all educational institutions based on all their educational programs and activities on Islamic views and values (Rahmadani, 2024). In the GBPP PAI in public schools it is explained that Islamic religious education is a conscious effort to prepare students to believe, understand, appreciate and practice Islam through guidance, teaching, and/or training activities by paying attention to the demands to respect other religions in the relationship of harmony between religious communities in society to realize national unity. Learning Islamic education in schools is expected to be able to form a religious character. Where Islamic religious education can form personal piety and at the same time social piety so that religious education is expected not to: 1). Foster a spirit of fanaticism; 2). Foster an intolerant attitude among students and the Indonesian people; and 3). Weaken the harmony of religious life and national unity (Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 1996). As a result, Islamic religious education is expected to be able to create Islamic brotherhood in a broad sense, namely brotherhood *fi al-'ubudiyah*, brotherhood *fi al-insaniyah*, brotherhood *fi al-wathaniyah wa al-nasab*, and brotherhood *fi din al-islam*. (Muhammad Haris, 2015).

In general, Islamic religious education in schools aims to increase students' faith, understanding, appreciation and practice of the Islamic religion. Learning is related to how to teach students or how to make students learn easily and be motivated by their abilities to learn what is actualized in the curriculum as the needs of students. (Putri, 2024). Therefore, learning attempts to describe the values contained in the curriculum by analyzing the learning objectives and characteristics of the content of the field of study of religious education contained in the curriculum. Furthermore, activities are carried out to select, determine, and develop appropriate learning strategy methods to achieve the learning objectives set according to existing conditions, so that the curriculum can be actualized in the learning process so that learning outcomes are realized in students (Zain et al., 2024).

The Role of Character Education in Character Building

Islamic religious education has a very important role in building Islamic character (Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Islamic Religious Education is the foundation for the life of the Muslim community. With religious education as a vehicle for the formation of human character with high morals (Afriany et al., 2023). In Islamic education, it is inseparable from morals and ethics. Good morals will form good characters, especially in the community environment. The Prophet has taught Islamic religious education to his people that Islam refers to knowing Allah, behaving well and even forming good characters according to what was taught by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Nowadays, students have begun to forget good morals as in social society. Students now tend to be indifferent to their environment and their social soul is increasingly lacking and indifferent and cannot be told by their parents. With the problems of children's character education, researchers are interested in examining the importance of Islamic religious education in the formation of social character in children (Faizin, 2020).

Islamic religious education teaches harmony, balance and balance in human relations with Allah SWT, oneself, other creatures and the environment (Hablun minallah wa Hablun minannas), and efforts to realize Hablun minallah and Hablun minannas are through the function of Islamic religious education (Rozak, 2023). The objectives of Islamic Religious Education are based on Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. For Muslims, Islamic teachings are a philosophy and outlook on life. As Indonesian citizens who are predominantly Muslim, Pancasila is the philosophy and outlook on life, and from Pancasila originate the objectives of National Education formulated in the MPR Decree and the Education Law. Thus, it means that the objectives of teaching Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia are firmly based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet which Pancasila supports (Habib & Prabowo, 2024).

The purpose of teaching Islamic religious education must contain things that can grow and strengthen faith and encourage the pleasure of practicing Islamic teachings. For this, efforts are needed to form materials that will enrich students with some knowledge, enable them to internalize and develop the knowledge, and make the knowledge they learn useful. This goal should include providing and instilling religious knowledge (cognitive) and skills in practicing religious teachings (psychomotor). (Satiadharmanto et al., 2024). It can be concluded that the main objective of Islamic Religious Education Learning is the formation of personality in students which is reflected in their behavior and also their mindset in everyday life, so Islamic Religious Education learning is not only the responsibility of the teacher alone, but it requires

support from the entire community at school, society, and more importantly parents. Schools must be able to coordinate and communicate Islamic Religious Education learning patterns to several parties that have been mentioned as a series of communities that support each other and care for each other for the formation of good character in students (Sipahutar et al., 2023)

Character formation is directly related to the stages of its development. These stages are divided into three stages, namely the external character stage (children's character), the conscious character stage (adolescent character) and the internal control stage over character (adult character). In the external stage, the methods used are direction, habituation, role models, reinforcement (rewards), weakening (punishment), and indoctrination. While in the conscious behavior stage, the method used is instilling values through dialogue aimed at convincing, guidance not instruction and involvement not coercion. And in the internal control stage over character, the method applied is the formulation of a personal life vision and mission, as well as strengthening direct responsibility to Allah. The stages above are based more on nature than age. (Kamila, 2023). Islamic religious education is a pillar of character education because Islamic religious education contains moral (affective) and religious values. It is from learning these moral (affective) values that children become religious beings.

Islamic religious education involves various methods to instill Islamic character values in students. One method that is often applied is through examples given by teachers. Teachers not only act as teachers of material, but also as role models in attitudes and actions. Teachers can provide real examples of how Islamic teachings are applied in everyday life by showing noble morals, such as honesty, patience, and caring for students. In addition, educational advice from teachers is one effective way to strengthen students' understanding of religious values. Through this approach, religious education is not only a theory in the classroom, but also a living practice in the school environment (Judrah et al., 2024). The position of Islamic religious education in schools is very important to help shape students' character, by teaching religious values. The role of all elements of the school, especially the role of parents, is very important in supporting the achievement of school goals in realizing character formation, and this realization cannot be separated from the scope of Islamic religious education

Conclusion

Islamic religious education is not only a conveyor of religious knowledge, but also a shaper of students' morals, morality, and character. The process of forming Islamic character involves aspects such as instilling religious values, internalizing Islamic teachings, and developing spiritual intelligence. Islamic religious education is considered an educational system that allows individuals to direct their lives by the ideals of Islam. The goal is to create a complete human being, faithful, devoted to God, and able to realize his existence as Allah's caliph on earth. The challenges of religious education in forming character are the lack of orientation to morals and morality, changes in the times and their problems, and the influence of diverse family and community environments. Therefore, efforts are needed to develop strategies relevant to changing times, strengthen the role of teachers in fostering student character, and reform the Islamic religious education curriculum to suit the needs of modern society. Islamic religious education is expected to play a significant role in forming a society with moral responsibility and strong Islamic character.

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