

Design Of The Implementation Of Islamic Religious Education In Strengthening The Religious Character Of Students In The Era Of The Independent Curriculum

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a central role in strengthening students' religious character as part of the mandate of national education, particularly within the context of the Independent Curriculum implementation. This study aims to describe and analyze the design of PAI implementation focusing on the integration of Islamic values in both classroom instruction and school culture to foster students' religious character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and the principal, and documentation of students' religious activities. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

The findings reveal that the design of PAI implementation within the Independent Curriculum framework involves value-based learning through participatory lectures, reflective discussions, and contextual case studies. The reinforcement of religious character is also carried out through school culture practices such as daily Qur'an recitation (tadarus), congregational Dhuha prayer, and the habituation of greetings and courteous behavior. The role of teachers as role models and the synergy between the school and parents are proven to be key elements in the success of the program. Nevertheless, challenges arise in the form of inconsistent teacher modeling and insufficient support from students' social environments.

The study concludes that an integrative and contextual design of PAI implementation, aligned with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum, can sustainably strengthen students' religious character if carried out consistently and collaboratively.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; Independent Curriculum; religious character; school culture; value-based learning



INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an important instrument in shaping students' religious character, instilling noble morals, obedience in worship, and upholding divine values in daily life (Dakir et al., 2015); (Taufik, 2020); (Ru'iya et al., 2023); (Muhamad et al., 2024); (Tsani & In'am, 2024). In the Indonesian education system, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not merely positioned as a normative subject, but it also plays a fundamental role in shaping the Pancasila student profile. PAI has the ability to internalize Islamic values through worship-based and moral-based learning practices, so that students' religious character can be formed comprehensively (Lubis, 2022); (Basri et al., 2022).

One effective strategy in the formation of religious character is to create synergy among all elements in the school (Taufik, 2020); (Ru'iya et al., 2023); (Muhamad et al., 2024); (Tsani & In'am, 2024). Collaboration among school members such as the principal, general teachers, administrative staff, and religious teachers is very important to create a conducive religious environment. The collective role of school members in instilling Islamic values such as greetings, smiles, and morning recitations can create a school climate that supports the character-building process of students (Hudri & Hunainah, 2021); (Ferdinan et al., 2025).

Religious character can not only be formed through school institutions but also through family support, especially from parents. Consistent parenting patterns in establishing worship routines at home, such as congregational prayers, Quran recitation, and religious discussions, have a positive impact on students' religiosity at school (Sari & Handayani, 2022). The synergy of character education between schools and families creates continuity in the formation of children's morals (Rahayu & Dewi, 2019); (Aningsih et al., 2022); (Rijal et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, the habituation of religious culture in schools has become an integral part of the character-building strategy. The implementation of a school culture based on Islamic values, such as the habit of reading the Qur'an, performing the dhuha prayer, and celebrating Islamic holidays. This culture not only becomes a routine but also a concrete form of internalizing religious values (Lutfiana et al., 2021)

On the contrary, the lack of attention to contextual PAI learning strategies often causes students not to personally connect with the values being taught.



Teachers must design learning that integrates real-life contexts with Islamic values, so that students not only understand theoretically but are also able to practice them in social interactions (Lutfiana et al., 2021)

Nevertheless, the challenges in implementing PAI as a means of character building through religion are not insignificant. One of the main obstacles is the lack of exemplary behavior from teachers in practicing religious values. PAI teachers who do not display strong religious behavior in their daily lives will find it difficult to be role models for students, making the religious messages in their teaching ineffective (Roza, 2021)

In addition, the school culture that does not emphasize Islamic values also becomes a hindrance. The success of religious character education is greatly influenced by the culture that lives and develops in the school, which is fostered from routines to unwritten regulations that are collectively adhered to (Fitria & Karnadi, 2023).. Schools that are weak in building a religious culture will have difficulty instilling religious values deeply.

From the perspective of learning strategies, reflective and participatory approaches are essential so that students can contemplate the meaning of Islamic values in the context of their lives. The PAI learning model based on reflection and problem-solving, where students are invited to understand current issues with an approach rooted in religious values (Fitria & Karnadi, 2023)

Equally important, learning based on real practices such as Quran memorization activities, hadith studies, and congregational prayers has a direct impact on character formation. The study on the implementation of the tahfidz program in high schools found that students experienced significant improvements in aspects of discipline and spiritual responsibility (Samad et al., 2023).. Thus, the developed PAI is not only oriented towards the transfer of religious knowledge but also the formation of soul and character. For this reason, a comprehensive curriculum design, pedagogical approach, and synergy between teachers, students, parents, and the community are necessary to produce graduates who are not only academically intelligent but also spiritually strong.

Starting from these various issues, this research is designed to identify and analyze how Islamic Religious Education can function as a strategic means in shaping students' religious character. The main focus lies on learning practices, school culture, and collaboration across educational elements. The success of forming religious character can only be achieved if religious education is managed



comprehensively and cross-sectorally (Amal et al., 2022). This research aims to produce a contextual and applicable value-based Islamic education strategy map. The developed strategy includes active learning methods, value cultivation in the school environment, and the involvement of families and communities in the character education process.

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the Independent Curriculum era must go beyond cognitive teaching and focus on the holistic development of students' religious character. This study found that integrating formal learning with value-based activities such as Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, and school-wide religious routines can effectively internalize Islamic values. The role of PAI teachers is crucial, not only as instructors but as role models whose behavior influences students' moral development. Therefore, the learning model should emphasize reflection, practice, and real-life application to help students live the values they learn.

This research highlights the need to redesign character education strategies to be more inclusive, contextual, and rooted in local wisdom, especially amid global cultural challenges. A supportive school environment, consistent teacher exemplification, and collaboration with parents are essential to sustain character formation. The findings serve as a reference for educators and policymakers to develop religion-based education that is transformative and long-lasting ensuring that Islamic Religious Education becomes a meaningful vehicle for moral growth, not just a curriculum requirement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a type of descriptive qualitative research. This approach was chosen to deeply explore the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a means of character building for students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang.

The subjects of the research include Islamic Religious Education teachers, the school principal, and students. Data collection techniques were carried out through observations of learning activities and the school's religious culture, indepth interviews with teachers and students, as well as documentation studies of the school's religious programs and activities.

Data analysis uses an interactive model with stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data triangulation



technique is applied to ensure data validity through the comparison of observation results, interviews, and documentation.

This research aims to comprehensively describe the learning strategies, value cultivation, and synergy among school elements in shaping the religious character of students.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION Research Findings

A. Implementation of Islamic Religious Education through Formal Learning

Based on observations and interviews, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang has been carried out using an active and contextual learning approach. PAI teachers do not merely deliver religious theories textually but integrate interactive lectures, group discussions, case simulations, and problem-solving strategies into classroom activities.

In interactive lectures, teachers engage students in dialogues, reflective questioning, and conceptual clarification of Islamic values in everyday life. Group discussions are used to deepen students' understanding by exploring real-life Islamic themes such as honesty, social responsibility, tolerance, and environmental awareness. Value-based case studies are also applied to foster students' critical and reflective thinking. Teachers present relatable moral dilemmas such as honesty at school or ethics in social media use and guide students to analyze them through the lens of Islamic teachings.

Teaching materials are no longer treated as abstract concepts but are contextualized to students' daily experiences. For example, lessons on prayer are not limited to rituals and requirements but are linked to values like discipline, patience, and personal responsibility. Throughout each learning session, students are encouraged to reflect on religious values not only cognitively but also affectively. Reflection activities guide students to consider the meaning of worship, social relationships in Islam, the importance of kindness, and moral responsibility in society.

This learning approach has shown that students are better able to connect Islamic teachings to their real-life behavior. They do not merely understand what is morally right in theory but begin to demonstrate those values in their social interactions both at school and at home. Thus, the implementation of Islamic



Religious Education at MTs Datarang, in terms of formal learning, has shifted from a textual to a contextual and applicative approach—proving more effective in shaping students' religious character in a tangible and sustainable manner.

B. Cultivation of Islamic Values in the School Environment

In addition to classroom-based instruction, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang systematically fosters students' religious character through the cultivation of Islamic values in daily school life. This cultivation is not limited to the implementation of religious programs but serves as a comprehensive effort to shape a religious *habitus* embedded in students' behaviors, attitudes, and ways of thinking.

1. Religious Habituation Programs

a. Daily Qur'an Recitation (Tadarus)

Tadarus Al-Qur'an is conducted every morning before formal lessons begin. This routine is designed not only to improve students' Qur'anic reading skills but also to nurture their spiritual character by starting the day with an act of devotion. The activity promotes punctuality, instills love for the Qur'an, and helps foster a spiritually uplifting atmosphere within the school.

- b. Congregational Dhuha Prayer
 - The regular performance of Dhuha prayer in congregation teaches students the significance of *sunnah* worship in daily life. More than a ritual, it helps form a consistent religious habit, strengthens peer solidarity, and reinforces a shared sense of goodness through collective worship.
- c. Commemoration of Islamic Holidays
 - Events such as the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday (Maulid), Isra' Mi'raj, and the Islamic New Year are held to revive the Islamic spirit and cultivate students' pride in their religious identity. Through sermons, Islamic arts performances, and religious competitions, students are encouraged to deepen their understanding of Islamic history and values while growing in their love for the religion.
- d. The 3S Culture: Salam, Smile, and Greeting

The 3S culture—Salam (greeting), Smile, and Sapa (verbal salutation)—is consistently practiced in daily interactions throughout the school. This



initiative aims to instill politeness, mutual respect, and a positive emotional climate. These values lay the foundation for shaping students into socially courteous and compassionate individuals.

2. The Process of Value Internalization

The religious habituation programs at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang are not designed as mere mechanical routines but are intentionally structured as a process of value internalization. According to character education theory, values become internalized through three essential stages:

- a. Cognitive recognition, where students understand the value intellectually;
- b. Emotional engagement, where students begin to feel the significance of the value in their personal lives;
- c. Consistent practice, where students integrate the value into their daily behavior.

At MTs Datarang, these stages are cultivated gradually. For instance, through the daily Qur'an recitation (tadarus), students move beyond merely knowing its importance to experiencing its spiritual benefits and eventually practicing it voluntarily as a part of their routine.

Observations indicate that the consistent implementation of Islamic value cultivation has contributed to noticeable positive character development among students:

- a. Improved discipline, particularly in time management, worship routines, and task completion.
- b. Enhanced moral behavior, seen in more polite speech and respectful interactions.
- c. Increased social openness, reflected in friendliness, empathy, and a caring attitude.
- d. Greater worship consistency, as students begin to perform religious duties not out of compulsion but from personal spiritual motivation.

This religious culture has successfully shaped a school environment that is both religious and humanistic, where Islamic values are not only taught but practiced collectively by the entire school community.



Nevertheless, challenges remain. These include varying levels of student engagement, external environmental influences that may conflict with school values, and inconsistent role modeling among teachers and staff. Thus, sustaining and enhancing this value culture requires the consistent commitment of all school members and active collaboration with students' families.

Ultimately, the cultivation of Islamic values within the school environment is not a supplementary activity but a central strategy in character education. When religious habits are built consciously and repeatedly, Islamic values can be deeply internalized in students' personalities, producing a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally grounded and spiritually resilient.

C. The Role of PAI Teachers and School-Family Synergy

In shaping students' religious character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang, the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers extends beyond delivering religious content—they serve as living role models. Exemplary behavior is a fundamental element in character education, as students learn not only from what is taught but also from what they observe and experience directly.

PAI teachers embody Islamic values through their daily conduct. Politeness, discipline, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and devotion are reflected in how they greet students, manage classrooms, enforce rules, provide counsel, and respond to social issues at school. This modeling functions as affective learning, shaping students' character through identification and internalization. Students tend to emulate teachers they admire, making it easier for Islamic values to become ingrained in their personalities compared to relying solely on theoretical instruction.

Beyond internal modeling, the synergy between school and family plays a crucial role in reinforcing religious character development. Strong character education requires value continuity between the school environment and the home. To support this, MTs Datarang implements several collaborative programs, such as:

- 1. Regular meetings between parents and teachers to discuss students' spiritual development;
- 2. Guidelines for religious practices at home, including family prayers, daily Qur'an recitation, and short surah memorization programs;



3. Character progress reports that include both academic and religious behavioral indicators as a basis for joint evaluation.

This active communication helps bridge the gap that may arise from differing value systems at home and at school. When the values instilled at school are reinforced at home, students experience consistent value exposure, making character formation more effective. Additionally, the school also acts as an enlightening agent for parents. Through Islamic parenting sessions and training, parents gain insights into supporting character education at home recognizing that the home is the child's first *madrasah*.

With strong synergy among teachers, the school, and families, the process of building students' religious character becomes a shared movement rather than an isolated effort. This collaboration creates a consistent, harmonious, and resilient educational ecosystem producing a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also noble in character, firmly grounded in Islamic values.

D. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

The success of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) implementation in shaping students' religious character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang is strongly influenced by several reinforcing support factors:

- 1. Strong Support from the School Principal
 The principal plays a vital role not only as an administrative leader but also
 as an ideological driver of Islamic values in the school. This support is
 evident in the development of character-based work programs, the
 integration of religious values into the school's vision and mission, and
 consistent support for teachers in organizing religious activities. The
 principal also actively monitors program implementation and recognizes
 students and teachers who demonstrate consistent religious behavior,
 fostering a spiritually conducive school climate.
- 2. Value-Based Extracurricular Activities
 Extracurricular programs serve as key instruments in reinforcing value internalization beyond classroom learning. Activities such as Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), Islamic music (hadrah), Islamic spiritual development (rohis), and community-based programs like charity and social service enable students to practice Islamic teachings in real contexts.



These programs strengthen the affective and psychomotor domains of religious character education.

3. Enthusiasm of Teachers and Students in Religious Activities
High motivation from both teachers and students in religious engagement
has cultivated a vibrant religious culture. Teachers voluntarily mentor
worship activities, while students participate enthusiastically in group
Dhuha prayers, Qur'an recitation, Islamic holiday celebrations, and
religious competitions. This collective enthusiasm shows that value
internalization has become part of the school's shared consciousness.

Despite the presence of strong supporting factors, several challenges remain that hinder the optimal implementation of PAI:

- 1. Inconsistent Student Participation in Religious Programs
 Some students show a lack of discipline in participating in routine religious
 activities, such as morning Qur'an recitation and Dhuha prayers. This
 indicates that not all students have developed intrinsic awareness of the
 importance of worship as part of character development. These behaviors
 are often influenced by both internal factors (e.g., maturity level) and
 external factors (e.g., lack of family support).
- 2. Inconsistency Among Teachers in Demonstrating Religious Role Modeling While teacher modeling is essential, there are still instances of inconsistency, where some teachers fail to consistently embody Islamic values in their daily conduct. For example, a lack of patience or fairness may reduce the credibility of role modeling and lead to value dissonance among students, undermining the effectiveness of character education.
- 3. Unsupportive External Environments
 Students' external environments, especially at home or in the broader community, often fail to reinforce religious practices taught at school. Some students come from families with limited attention to religious guidance or are exposed to peer environments that conflict with Islamic values. This mismatch creates barriers to the continuity of value internalization outside the school setting.

In summary, the interplay between supporting and inhibiting factors greatly influences the effectiveness of PAI implementation. Structural support through school programs becomes more impactful when combined with consistent teacher role modeling and value reinforcement at home. Conversely,



teacher inconsistency and weak family engagement may diminish the positive impact of well-designed programs.

Therefore, a systemic and collaborative approach is needed—one that strengthens not only the internal school environment but also extends character development efforts into students' external environments, particularly the family and surrounding community.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang reflects a strategic transformation in character education, aligning with the vision of the Independent Curriculum. This study confirms that the formation of students' religious character is not limited to cognitive instruction but must encompass emotional engagement and behavioral habituation. Through value-based instructional strategies, such as interactive lectures, group discussions, and contextual case studies, students are enabled to internalize Islamic teachings in ways that are meaningful and applicable to their everyday lives. This is consistent with the view that effective Islamic education must integrate real-life relevance into its pedagogical design to foster holistic development.

Supporting this finding, prior studies emphasize that PAI should not merely focus on religious knowledge transmission but also serve as a vehicle for nurturing students' moral integrity and spiritual depth (Dakir et al., 2015; Lubis, 2022; Tsani & In'am, 2024). The habituation of religious practices—such as daily Qur'an recitation, congregational Dhuha prayer, and Islamic holiday commemorations—proves effective in embedding Islamic values in students' daily behavior. These routines create a structured environment that supports spiritual growth and the development of a religious habitus. As argued by Lutfiana et al. (2021), such school-based religious culture serves as a concrete mechanism for value internalization beyond theoretical learning.

Another key element highlighted in this study is the vital role of PAI teachers as role models. The effectiveness of PAI heavily relies on the teachers' consistency in embodying the values they teach. This supports Roza's (2021) claim that the absence of authentic modeling undermines the credibility and impact of religious education. Students are more likely to absorb values when



they observe them being practiced consistently by respected adults in their immediate environment.

Additionally, the synergy between school and family further reinforces students' character development. Family involvement in religious routines at home complements school-based efforts, creating a unified framework of moral expectations. This confirms earlier research that highlights the significance of parental support and continuity of religious values between school and home (Sari & Handayani, 2022; Rahayu & Dewi, 2019).

Despite these strengths, several challenges inhibit the optimal implementation of PAI. These include inconsistent participation among students in religious programs, inadequate role modeling by some educators, and a lack of value reinforcement in students' external environments. These findings echo Fitria & Karnadi (2023), who assert that the success of religious education is closely tied to the strength of the school's value-laden culture. Therefore, a systemic and collaborative approach is needed—one that bridges instructional strategies, school culture, and community engagement to build an ecosystem conducive to religious character formation.

In conclusion, the findings affirm that PAI, when implemented reflectively and contextually, serves as a transformative force in developing morally strong and spiritually resilient students. This requires consistent effort, synergy among stakeholders, and a deep commitment to making Islamic values a living culture rather than mere instructional content.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Datarang illustrates that the formation of students' religious character requires an integrative and holistic approach. The study found that combining value-based learning strategies, daily religious habituation, consistent teacher role modeling, and active school-family collaboration significantly contributes to the internalization of Islamic values among students. Through contextual teaching methods, reflective practices, and routine spiritual activities, students are not only cognitively engaged but also emotionally and behaviorally aligned with Islamic teachings.

The success of this character-building process is supported by strong institutional leadership, value-oriented extracurricular programs, and the



enthusiasm of both teachers and students. However, the effectiveness of PAI implementation still faces challenges, such as inconsistent teacher exemplification, varying levels of student discipline, and unsupportive external environments. Therefore, sustaining the impact of Islamic Religious Education demands a systemic and collaborative effort that involves all educational stakeholders—including schools, families, and communities—to create a consistent, value-based ecosystem that nurtures morally upright and spiritually resilient future generations.

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