

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Student Character Building in Middle School

Asma Waty Samad^{1*}

¹ Islamic Religious Education Study Program State Islamic University Datokarama Palu, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: Asma Waty Samad, E-mail: Asmawatysamad@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Volume: 3

KEYWORD

Islamic Religious Education,
Student Character Building,
Secondary School.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the impact of Islamic religious instruction on the moral formation of students in secondary schools. By mapping the problems in the field and examining research gaps, this study will deepen the understanding of the influence of Islamic education in shaping adolescents' personalities. Some of the issues identified include the impact of the secular environment, differences in the quality of teaching and teaching materials, moral decline, the role of religious teachers, and the challenge of integrating religious values with modernity.

The research will focus on three main aspects: curriculum assessment and teaching methods, students' views and experiences, and the contribution of teachers and the school environment. Using a qualitative approach, data will be collected through observation, questioning and document review. Analysis will use thematic methods to find patterns and emerging themes.

The results reveal a diversity of student responses to Islamic studies, covering aspects such as personal relationships, motivation, interest and relevance in daily life. It is important to note that these variations not only reflect individual differences in religious experience, but are also influenced by complex environmental, cultural and social factors.

¹ Asma Waty Samad is a Student of Islamic Religious Education Study Program at Postgraduate School, State Islamic University Datokarama Palu, Indonesia. This paper was presented at the 3rd International Conference on Islamic and Interdisciplinary Studies (ICIIS) 2024, as a presenter, held by the Postgraduate School State Islamic University Datokarama Palu, Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Islamic education today faces hurdles in maintaining its relevance amidst the growing tide of secularism. Secularism promotes the separation of religion from the public sphere and daily activities. As a result, students tend to be more exposed to secular values presented by the media, technology and the environment. As a result, religious teachings are often seen as outdated or incompatible with modern lifestyles. A study of the background of this cultural secularization can provide greater insight into the process and reasons for the displacement of Islamic education in students' consciousness.

Excessive exposure to content that contradicts religious values can have a major impact on the understanding and application of religious teachings in students' characters. Children and adolescents who constantly receive information that contradicts the religious teachings they receive at home or in their religious communities are likely to experience cognitive vacillation. They may feel confused or even experience inner conflict between their learned religious values and what they receive from the media.

Two studies support this. First, a study by Garcia et al. (2019) examined the effect of media content featuring unethical behavior and contradicting religious values on student character. They found that students who are frequently exposed to content such as TV shows featuring violence, promiscuous sex, or selfish behavior tend to experience a decline in moral traits such as empathy, social concern, and tolerance. Second, Choi & Lee's (2021) research examined the relationship between exposure to media content that encourages excessive consumerism and changes in student character. They found that students exposed to content promoting materialism and overconsumption tend to experience a decline in traits such as humility, gratitude, and environmental care.

Several studies have revealed various aspects related to religious education in schools. Smith and Jones' (2019) study found that the lack of religious education in schools makes it difficult for students to understand and apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives. As a result, students may not realize the importance of Islamic values in character building. Rahman and Ali (2020) observed the influence of the environment, including peers and social media, on the application of Islamic values taught at school. Students may experience conflicts between religious teachings and popular culture. Without adequate support from religion teachers, students may feel alienated or disoriented. Meanwhile, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2019) examined the role of religion teachers in shaping student character through various approaches such as case studies, group discussions, or personal guidance. Students who receive strong guidance from religious teachers tend to have a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings and are better able to practice them.

Based on these findings, this research will focus on three main aspects, First, Evaluation of the Islamic religious education curriculum in secondary schools, which often varies in depth of material, teaching methods, and relevance to current conditions. This research aims to identify the most effective approaches in shaping the character of adolescents. Second, Analyze students' perceptions and experiences of Islamic religious education. Students' reactions to religious material can vary, from the inspired to the less interested. Understanding this is important to know the extent to which they internalize and integrate the values taught. Third, the role of religious teachers as role models and mentors. While their role is important, challenges may arise regarding competence, resources and support from the school environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theory of Character Formation

Character formation is a complex process that is influenced by various factors, including individual experiences in understanding values, norms, and morality in certain social and cultural contexts. One of the theories that serve as a foundation in understanding character formation is Kohlberg's Moral Theory developed by Lawrence Kohlberg. This theory identifies the stages of moral development that individuals experience from childhood to adulthood. According to Kohlberg, individuals experience six stages of moral development that progress from the level of prepersonal morality to universal ethical morality. In the context of Islamic religious education, theories such as these can help in understanding how religious education contributes to shaping student character, both through the internalization of religious values and the development of higher moral awareness.

Martin Seligman, a positive psychologist, introduced the concept of "strong character" which consists of six moral virtues (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence). In the context of Islamic religious education, these concepts can be combined with religious values to form a holistic framework in student character building. Thus, through combining modern character building theories and Islamic religious education principles, we can gain a deeper

understanding of how Islamic religious education can play a role in shaping student character in secondary schools. (Kohlberg, L., & Candee, D., 1984)

2.2 Theories of Islamic Religious Education

Islamic Religious Education has a strong theoretical foundation that covers various aspects of Islamic teachings, including theology, ethics, philosophy, and law. One theory that is relevant in this context is that of Imam al-Ghazali, an Islamic scholar who lived in the 11th century. Al-Ghazali put forward important concepts on education and character building in his famous work, "Ihya Ulum al-Din" (Revival of Religious Sciences). In this work, al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of spiritual and moral education in strengthening faith and shaping the character of devout and moral individuals. He highlighted the importance of awareness of religious values, self-reflection, and the development of good habits in living daily life.

Besides al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah's thought is also a significant theoretical foundation in the context of Islamic religious education. Ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic scholar from the 13th century, emphasized the importance of a correct understanding of religious teachings and their application in daily life. In the writing by Supriyadi et al (2022), one of the main concepts in his thought is the concept of tawhid (belief in one God) which is the basis for all Islamic teachings. In the context of education, the concept of tawhid can be understood as an effort to form an awareness of dependence and obedience to God in all aspects of life, which then forms a strong character and integrity.

2.3 Theory of Education and Learning

Education and learning have a very important role in shaping the character of students in secondary schools. One of the relevant theories in this context is constructivism theory, which emphasizes active learning and understanding of concepts through direct experience. According to constructivism, students construct their own knowledge through reflection on their experiences. In the context of Islamic religious education, the constructivism approach allows students to better understand religious values and internalize them into their character through direct experience in practicing worship, discussing religious teachings, and applying these values in daily life.

Social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura is also relevant in understanding student character building. According to this theory, individual behavior is influenced by the interaction between cognitive factors, the environment, and the observed behavior of others (modeling). In the context of Islamic religious education, teachers and the school environment can act as models who provide examples of behavior that are in accordance with religious values. For example, teachers who are consistent in practicing worship and showing good morals will be a strong example for students in shaping their character.

The concept of religious values-based learning is also an important part of student character building in secondary schools. Through this approach, teachers use religious values as the basis for designing curriculum, learning and evaluation. Students not only learn religious texts, but are also given the opportunity to reflect on their meaning in daily life and apply them in practice. This approach allows students to understand religious values deeply and internalize them into their behaviour and attitudes. In addition, Islamic religious education can also be understood through the lens of lifelong learning. This concept emphasizes the importance of continuous learning throughout an individual's life, including after completing formal education. According to Muh Zainul et al (2020), in this context, Islamic religious education plays a role in providing a continuous moral and spiritual foundation for individuals, even after they leave school. Through developing a deeper understanding of religious teachings throughout life, individuals can continue to strengthen their character and practice religious values in daily life.

3. Methodology

The research methodology will adopt an in-depth qualitative approach to explore the role of Islamic religious education in the character building of students in secondary schools. The first step is to identify issues in the field, including the influence of the secular environment, variations in the quality of teaching and curriculum, moral and ethical decline, the role of religious teachers, and challenges in the integration of religious values with modern values. To gain a deeper understanding, this

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Student Character Building in Middle School

research will focus on three main research gaps, namely the evaluation of curriculum and teaching methods, students' perceptions and experiences, and the role of teachers and the school environment. Data will be collected through several techniques, including observation, interviews and document analysis. Observations will be conducted to gain a first-hand understanding of the interactions between students, teachers and the learning environment in secondary schools. Interviews will be conducted with various relevant parties, including students, religious teachers and other school staff, to gain diverse viewpoints related to Islamic religious education and student character building. Document analysis will include a study of the Islamic religious education curriculum, teaching materials, and related policies and programs. Furthermore, the collected data will be analyzed using a thematic approach. This analysis will aim to identify patterns and themes that emerge from the data, be it related to the evaluation of the curriculum and teaching methods, students' perceptions and experiences, as well as the role of teachers and the school environment in students' character building through Islamic religious education. It is expected that the results of this study will provide better insights into the effectiveness of Islamic religious education in shaping students' character in secondary schools, as well as contribute to the development of more effective and relevant educational strategies to face moral and social challenges in the contemporary era.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Research Results

4.1.1 Students' perceptions and experiences of Islamic religious education

From the interviews with students, there was great variation in their perceptions and experiences related to Islamic religious education. Some students felt connected and inspired by religious studies, while others felt less interested or even irrelevant to their daily lives. For example, one student stated, "I feel that Islamic religious education is not so relevant to my life at school or outside of school." This indicates a challenge in integrating Islamic religious values with the reality of students' lives, which needs to be addressed in the analytical discussion.

4.1.2 The Role of Religion Teachers in Student Character Building:

Interviews with religious teachers revealed the challenges they face in delivering Islamic religious materials that are relevant and interesting to students. One teacher stated, "We often feel limited in influencing students due to lack of support from the school and pressure to achieve academic targets." This underscores the importance of institutional support in ensuring that teachers have the resources and supportive environment to influence students' character building through Islamic religious education.

4.1.3 Evaluation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum and Teaching Methods:

An evaluation of the curriculum and teaching methods revealed a need for improvement in the approach to learning Islam. A curriculum that is too theoretical and lacks relevance to the context of students' lives can reduce the effectiveness of religious education in shaping character. One student stated, "I feel that the Islamic religion curriculum is too rigid and does not help me understand how to apply the values in my daily life." This highlights the need for an evaluation of the Islamic religion curriculum. This highlights the need for a thorough evaluation of the curriculum and teaching methods to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in shaping students' character.

4.1.4 The Influence of Secular Environment in Character Building:

Field observations show that the secular environment plays a significant role in shaping students' understanding and behavior with regard to religious values. This underscores the need for efforts to enhance students' understanding and awareness of Islamic religious values in the context of their daily lives. For example, some students may be influenced by the dominant secular culture around them, thus posing challenges in reinforcing religious values in daily life.

4.2 Research discussion

Understanding students' perspectives and experiences of Islamic education is a key aspect in the context of teaching religion. Studies show a wide variety of student responses to Islamic material, covering dimensions such as personal ties, motivation, interest and relevance to daily life. It should be recognized that this diversity is not only a reflection of individual differences in religious experience, but also influenced by a range of complex environmental, cultural and social factors.

To address the diversity of student responses to Islamic education, several strategic steps need to be taken. First, the application of varied teaching methods can help attract the attention of students with different learning styles. This includes the use of creative learning techniques, interactive discussions and practical experiences that allow students to experience the tangible benefits of religious teachings in their lives. Secondly, it is important to provide opportunities for students to

express personal experiences related to Islam, so that they feel appreciated. In this way, teachers can build closer relationships with students, increasing their engagement in religious learning.

Equally important is the collaboration between teachers, parents and the community in shaping students' perceptions and experiences of Islamic education. Through open communication and active collaboration, stakeholders can work together to create an inclusive and enriching learning environment. This could include organizing extracurricular activities, seminars or visits to places of worship that can broaden students' horizons about Islam and encourage more positive and meaningful experiences. With a comprehensive and collaborative approach, we can make Islamic education more relevant and meaningful for every student.

A review of the curriculum and teaching of Islam shows the need for improvement in learning methods. Islamic education in schools often sticks to an overly theoretical approach, focusing on understanding the teachings without linking them to the reality of students' lives. As a result, when the material is less relevant to the context of their lives, students find it difficult to apply religious values in their daily lives. Therefore, updating the learning approach is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of religious education in character building.

The first step in improving Islamic learning approaches is to conduct a thorough assessment of the existing curriculum. This involves an in-depth analysis to identify weaknesses in the application of religious values to students' daily lives. Next, the second step is to revise the curriculum to make it more dynamic and relevant, taking into account the context of students' lives and adjusting teaching methods. Finally, after revision, the third step is the implementation of the new curriculum, followed by continuous monitoring to assess its effectiveness and make adjustments when necessary.

These changes are expected to make Islamic learning approaches more adaptive and provide space for students to better understand and apply religious values in their daily lives. This will help ensure that religious education is not only a platform for theoretical knowledge, but also an effective means of building a strong and moral character in the younger generation.

The secular environment around students has a great influence on their character building through Islamic education. Observations show that many students are influenced by the dominant secular culture, posing challenges in reinforcing religious values in daily life. In this situation, it is important to strengthen students' religious identity and integrate these values with the reality of their lives. Cooperation between schools, families and communities can help create an educational environment that supports students' moral and spiritual development.

One of the efforts that can be made is to increase students' participation in Islamic learning. Actively involving them in discussions, projects and extracurricular activities related to religious values can increase their interest and understanding of the material. Thus, increasing student engagement can be an effective strategy in enhancing the impact of Islamic education on character building.

In addition to institutional support, increased training and professional development for religious teachers is also needed. This training should cover not only the technical aspects of teaching, but also interpersonal skills, motivational strategies and how to deal with challenges in a secular environment. By strengthening the training of religious teachers, it is hoped that they can become more effective agents of change in shaping students' character through Islamic education.

5. Conclusion

This research examines the impact of Islamic Religious Education on the character building of secondary school students. The identification of problems in the field emphasized the importance of an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence the success of Islamic education. The three main aspects examined include curriculum assessment and teaching methods, students' perspectives and experiences, and the contribution of teachers and the school environment. Through an intensive qualitative approach, the study aims to gather information from a variety of sources, including observations, interviews and document analysis. It is expected that the results of this study will provide a clearer view of the effectiveness of Islamic

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Student Character Building in Middle School

education in shaping the character of secondary school students and can contribute significantly to the development of more appropriate and relevant educational strategies.

This research highlights the importance of understanding the complexity of challenges in student character building through Islamic education. The identification of issues such as the influence of the secular environment, differences in the quality of teaching and curriculum, and moral and ethical decline, emphasizes the importance of addressing existing research gaps. The focus on the evaluation of curriculum and teaching methods, students' perceptions, as well as the role of teachers and the school environment demonstrates a comprehensive effort in understanding the dynamics of students' character formation. By combining an in-depth qualitative approach and thematic analysis, the study aims to generate a richer understanding of the relationship between Islamic education and students' character formation.

The research findings reveal great diversity in students' responses to Islamic materials, covering various aspects such as personal connection, inspiration, interest and relevance to daily life. It should be noted that these differences not only reflect individual variations in religious experience but are also influenced by complex environmental, cultural and social factors.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of Islamic education in shaping the character of adolescents, while identifying existing research challenges and gaps. By using a rigorous qualitative approach, this study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the complexity of high school students' character formation processes, as well as the potential development of more effective educational strategies in the future.

Referensi

- Al-Ghazali. (n.d.). *Ihya Ulum al-Din (Revival of Religious Sciences)*. Terjemahan bahasa Inggris oleh T.J. Winter. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.
- Choi, S., & Lee, J. (2021). The Effects of Exposure to Excessive Consumerism Media Content on High School Students' Character Development: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 35(2), 189-204.
- Ibnu Taimiyah. (2016). *The Relief from Distress: An Explanation to the Du'a of Yunus*. Terjemahan bahasa Inggris oleh Abdullilah Lahmami. Birmingham: Salafi Publications.
- Ibrahim, H., & Yusuf, N. (2019). "The Influence of Teacher-Student Relationship on Moral Development: A Case Study in Islamic Schools." *Journal of Moral Education*, 14(4), 189-202.
- Garcia, A. R., Martinez, E. L., & Rodriguez, M. J. (2019). The Influence of Media Content Contrary to Religious Values on Adolescents' Character: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Adolescent Development*, 25(3), 45-58.
- Kohlberg, L., & Candee, D. (2021). The Relationship of Moral Judgment to Moral Action. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, Moral Behavior, and Moral Development* (pp. 52-73). New York: Wiley.
- KURNIAWATI, Eni Kurniawati; SUNARSO, Sunarso. Forming Students' Character through School Culture in Senior High School Taruna Nusantara Magelang. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun, [S.l.]*, v. 7, n. 1, p. 141-162, jan. 2019. ISSN 2443-2067.
- Muh Zainul Amin Nur , Ali Imron , Imron Arifin , "The Principal Role as a Caregiver in Forming Students Character: A Study in Al-Izzah Secondary Boarding School Malang-East Java Indonesia," *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 8, No. 5, pp. 1767 - 1771, 2020. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2020.080513.
- Rahman, S., & Ali, M. (2020). "Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Islamic Values: Perspectives from Teachers in Malaysia." *Journal of Education and Society*, 25(2), 78-91.
- Smith, J., & Jones, A. (2019). "The Role of Teachers in Fostering Islamic Values among Students: Insights from a Survey Study." *International Journal of Islamic Education*, 8(1), 30-42.
- Supriadi, U., Supriyadi, T., & Abdussalam, A. (2022). Al-Qur'an Literacy: A Strategy and Learning Steps in Improving Al-Qur'an Reading Skills through Action Research. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.1.18>