

Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in Developing Students' Religious Character

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students' religious character at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, Bandung Regency, as well as to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. The study is grounded in the recognition of IRE as a strategic instrument for fostering a generation that is faithful, pious, and of noble character amid the challenges of globalization, the influence of digital media, and shifting social values. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Research subjects included IRE teachers, the school principal, students, and parents, selected purposively. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model, which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that IRE at MTs An-Nur positively contributes to the development of students' religious character through a curriculum that incorporates Islamic values, teacher role modeling, participatory learning strategies, and a supportive school environment. However, its effectiveness is hindered by the limited integration of religious values into daily life, the influence of social media and popular culture, and the lack of synergy between school, family, and community. The study recommends strategies to enhance the effectiveness of IRE through the integration of Islamic values across all subjects, continuous professional development for IRE teachers, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and the use of technology as a medium for character education.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, religious character, learning effectiveness, MTs An-Nur

1 Introduction

In facing the challenges of globalization an era marked by shifting values education holds a strategic responsibility to shape a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally and spiritually grounded. Islamic Religious Education (IRE)[1]–[3], within the framework of the national education system, plays a critical role in developing students' religious character. IRE is not merely oriented toward

cognitive mastery of Islamic content, but also aims to instill spiritual values reflected in students' daily attitudes and behavior[4].

This is in line with the mandate of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the importance of developing students who are faithful, pious, and of noble character. Accordingly, IRE becomes a key instrument in promoting character education rooted in religious values. However, amidst the rapid currents of modernization, globalization, and uncontrolled exposure to social media, religious character education in schools faces increasingly complex challenges[5].

Students' religious character is increasingly undermined by consumerist and individualistic lifestyles, along with a lack of moral role models in family, school, and community settings[6]–[9]. Therefore, IRE must go beyond the delivery of content; it must foster personality development and spiritual awareness that can be internalized in real-life behavior. Effective learning is learning that reaches the affective and psychomotor domains not merely stopping at the cognitive level. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of IRE implementation in shaping religious character continues to face several obstacles[10].

Some of the key challenges include limited instructional time, monotonous pedagogical approaches, minimal involvement of family and community, and insufficient teacher competencies to support value-based learning. IRE teachers who lack a deep understanding of value internalization strategies risk turning religious education into a routine activity devoid of transformational meaning[11].

While previous studies have explored the role of IRE in character education, most remain conceptual or focus solely on particular teaching methods. Few have comprehensively examined the actual effectiveness of IRE in shaping students' religious character in real school settings, including the empirical identification of supporting and inhibiting factors. This gap forms the basis for the urgency of this study[12].

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' religious character by exploring how religious attitudes and behaviors are formed through the learning process, and identifying the factors that support or hinder its success. It offers a contextual perspective on the implementation of IRE in schools, particularly at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, Bandung Regency, as a strategic approach to strengthening the religious character of Indonesia's younger generation.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to assess the extent to which IRE can effectively function in building students' religious character amid the evolving challenges of the time. The reality at MTs An-Nur, and in similar educational institutions, shows that students' religious values are increasingly vulnerable to the influence of global culture, unfiltered information flows, and the weakening of social environments in fostering moral development. In this context, IRE remains one of the primary instruments expected to shape students' spiritual attitudes, ethics, and religious behavior in a meaningful way.

Although IRE is formally integrated into the national curriculum, its implementation particularly at MTs An-Nur does not necessarily translate into a significant impact on students' religious character. The lack of evaluation regarding the effectiveness of IRE implementation and the limited application of value-based learning approaches are

critical aspects requiring further investigation. This study is important because it provides factual insights into the real impact of IRE on students' religious character, while also uncovering the internal and external factors influencing its success.

Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of a more contextual, applicable, and student-relevant IRE learning model especially at MTs An-Nur, and more broadly within Islamic educational institutions as a response to the challenges of value-based character education in the contemporary era.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of how students' religious character is shaped through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) within its natural and social context. The case study design facilitated a detailed exploration of the implementation of IRE at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, Bandung Regency, and its impact on students' religious attitudes and behaviors particularly when the boundary between the phenomenon and its context is not clearly defined [13], [14].

The research subjects included IRE teachers, the principal, homeroom teachers, students, and parents. These informants were selected purposively due to their direct involvement in the learning process, character development, and observation of students' behavioral changes. This selection aimed to obtain rich descriptive data related to the effectiveness of IRE teaching strategies in developing religious character.

Data were collected using method triangulation, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation was conducted to directly capture teacher-student interactions during IRE lessons and to observe students' religious behavior in daily school life. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the informants' perceptions and experiences regarding the learning process and the religious values instilled. Document analysis involved reviewing lesson plans, school religious activity agendas, and other relevant records related to students' religious character [15].

In this qualitative approach, the researcher acted as the main instrument [16], actively engaged in data collection and interpretation in the field. To maintain validity and procedural consistency, supporting instruments such as interview guides, observation sheets, and document analysis formats were also utilized.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through the four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was addressed through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking. Transferability was supported by providing thick contextual descriptions. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through maintaining an audit trail and reflective journaling throughout the research process [17], [18].

Data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [19], which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection to maintain sensitivity to the dynamics in the field.

This study was conducted from February to April 2025, encompassing the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis, and reporting. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a contextual understanding of the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' religious character within the madrasah environment.

3 Results

3.1 The Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in Schools

Based on research conducted at MTs An-Nur, located in Pacet District, Bandung Regency, the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students' religious character is influenced by four key components: curriculum, teacher competence, learning strategies, and the school environment. These four components form an integrated learning system that contributes to the internalization of religious values within students.

First, in terms of curriculum and learning materials, it was found that the IRE curriculum explicitly includes religious character values in its core competencies and achievement indicators. However, in practice, the delivery of content tends to remain theoretical and lacks contextual relevance. This is reflected in a statement by one IRE teacher:

“Character values are actually included in the curriculum, but sometimes students don't grasp the meaning because the delivery is still general and not linked to their real-life experiences.” (*IRE Teacher, interview, March 10, 2025*)

Analysis of lesson plans and syllabi revealed that values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance are listed as learning objectives, but not all are translated into concrete and affective learning activities.

Second, the competence of IRE teachers is a critical factor in successful character formation. Teachers who act as role models through their speech and behavior have a greater influence on students than those who merely deliver instructional content. Observations indicate that teachers who demonstrate consistency between what they teach and how they act tend to earn more respect and are more readily emulated by students. This supports Zubaedi's (2011) argument that effective character education is rooted in teacher role modeling.

Third, regarding teaching strategies and methods, contextual and participatory approaches were found to foster greater affective engagement among students compared to lecture-based methods. Teachers who employed group discussions, simulations, or value-based social projects created more dynamic and meaningful learning experiences. This was confirmed by one student who stated:

“I prefer when religious lessons involve discussion or activities. It feels more connected, and we better understand why we should be honest or patient.” (*Grade IX student, interview, March 11, 2025*)

Fourth, a supportive school environment serves as a reinforcing factor for religious character formation. At MTs An-Nur, activities such as congregational prayer, daily sermons (kultum), Friday Qur'anic studies, and habits like greeting and collective prayers are embedded within the school culture and help reinforce spiritual values. Documentation shows that religious activities are integrated into the school's academic calendar, providing students with opportunities to practice religious teachings in daily life.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the effectiveness of IRE is not solely determined by curriculum content, but by how that curriculum is implemented by competent teachers, using contextual learning strategies, and supported by a conducive school environment. These results align with the theories of Lickona (2012) and Tilaar (2002), who emphasize the importance of synergy between content, process, and environment in character education.

3.2 Challenges in Shaping Religious Character

Although Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds significant potential for shaping students' religious character, findings from the study at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, Bandung Regency, indicate that several challenges continue to hinder its effectiveness. These challenges arise from both internal aspects of the learning process and external influences that shape student behavior.

First, there is a lack of integration between IRE content and students' real-life experiences. Many students are able to answer questions about Islamic values cognitively but do not demonstrate internalization of those values in their daily behavior. One teacher noted:

"In theory, the students understand the concepts of honesty, trustworthiness, and responsibility. But outside the classroom, for example in terms of discipline or manners of speaking, there's still a lot lacking." (*IRE Teacher, interview, March 12, 2025*)

Observations of student behavior in the school environment also revealed a disconnect between their understanding of religious material and its application in social interactions. This indicates that IRE has yet to fully engage students' affective and psychomotor domains.

Second, social media and popular culture have become significant external challenges. Digital media often promotes permissive and consumerist content that contradicts Islamic values taught in school. Students are more exposed to modern lifestyle trends that prioritize popularity and instant gratification, which can diminish their interest in religious values. A homeroom teacher remarked:

"What they see on social media often has a stronger influence than the advice of teachers or parents. This is a major challenge for IRE." (*Homeroom teacher, interview, March 13, 2025*)

Third, the lack of synergy between school, family, and community weakens the impact of religious character development. Despite the school's efforts to organize structured religious activities, inconsistency in values and parenting at home often undermines these efforts. Character education cannot stand alone within the school; it

requires continuity and reinforcement at home and in the broader community. This was affirmed by the principal:

“We do our best to shape students’ character at school, but if there’s no control at home or worse, conflicting values then the results will not be optimal.” (*School Principal, interview, March 14, 2025*)

In sum, these challenges illustrate that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in fostering students’ religious character is not solely determined by curriculum content or teaching strategies. It is also significantly shaped by the social and cultural environment surrounding the students. Therefore, a more integrative and collaborative approach involving schools, families, and communities is essential to create an educational ecosystem that sustainably supports religious character development.

3.3 Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE)

Based on field findings at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, Bandung Regency, several strategies can be implemented to improve the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students’ religious character. These strategies emerged in response to the challenges encountered during the implementation of IRE and reflect the need for a more holistic and collaborative approach.

First, there must be an effort to strengthen value-based character education through the integration of Islamic values across all subjects. Religious values such as honesty, responsibility, modesty, and mutual respect should not be confined to IRE classes alone, but should be embedded throughout the broader curriculum. This approach reinforces value internalization, as students experience consistent messages across different learning contexts. As one teacher expressed:

“If all teachers incorporate religious values not just the IRE teachers students will get used to them and see them as part of life, not just part of a lesson.” (*Bahasa Indonesia Teacher, interview, March 14, 2025*)

Second, continuous professional development for IRE teachers is essential. Teachers need ongoing training to strengthen pedagogical skills, deepen their understanding of adolescent development, and apply contextual approaches to value education. Training focused on participatory methods, case-based learning, and value reflection techniques has proven effective in helping teachers deliver content in more creative and relevant ways.

Third, stronger collaboration between schools, parents, and communities is vital to support students’ religious character development. Schools should maintain close communication with parents about their children’s religious attitudes and involve community members in social-religious activities that reinforce practical applications of Islamic values. Programs such as Islamic parenting workshops, family Qur’anic study sessions, and community service through local mosques are examples of concrete collaborative efforts.

Fourth, the use of media and technology in religious instruction is a relevant strategy for today’s digital-native generation. IRE teachers can utilize audiovisual media, digital

da'wah content, and interactive learning platforms to deliver religious values in engaging ways that align with students' realities. This also serves as a counterbalance to the negative influence of social media by offering inspiring and educational religious alternatives.

The implementation of these strategies not only strengthens the substantive effectiveness of IRE but also helps build a comprehensive support system for fostering students' religious character. This approach aligns with the concept of ecosystem-based character education, which emphasizes the involvement of multiple stakeholders in nurturing students' moral and spiritual development.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious character. However, its implementation faces systemic and cultural challenges. In general, the effectiveness of IRE in character development does not depend solely on curriculum content and teacher competence, but also on the support of the school environment and an educational ecosystem involving families and communities.

In terms of curriculum, although the core competencies of IRE explicitly integrate character values, the implementation in practice remains heavily focused on cognitive approaches. This supports the critique by muhaimin [20], who argues that Islamic education in schools tends to be normative and has yet to fully engage students' affective and psychomotor dimensions. The lack of value contextualization in real-life situations limits the effectiveness of religious character internalization. This affirms the importance of transformative pedagogy, which places experience and practice at the heart of the learning process [21].

Teacher competence is a critical determining factor. IRE teachers with strong personal integrity and who serve as role models have a significant impact on student behavior. In line with Bandura's [22] Social Learning Theory, students tend to imitate the behavior of authoritative figures. When teachers consistently demonstrate alignment between words and actions, religious values are more naturally internalized through the modeling process.

However, teacher effectiveness is also shaped by the instructional strategies they employ. The study found that lecture-based methods still dominate, while participatory approaches such as discussion, case studies, or project-based learning are not yet optimally utilized. This highlights the need to strengthen contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approaches so that religious values are not only communicated but also experienced directly by students.

From an environmental standpoint, schools that support religious routines such as congregational prayers, daily sermons (kultum), and social-religious activities significantly contribute to the reinforcement of students' religious character. This aligns with Lickona's [23] concept of building a moral community within schools as a character-building ecosystem. However, without reinforcement from families and communities, this process becomes imbalanced. The lack of harmony in values between

home, school, and social media presents a real challenge to value internalization, as emphasized by [24].

The influence of digital media and popular culture also poses significant obstacles to religious character development. Students who are frequently exposed to permissive and hedonistic content via social media often experience value dissonance. This represents a new challenge in the digital age, in which teachers are required to wisely leverage technology as a medium to convey positive values.

In response to these challenges, the findings suggest that enhancing the effectiveness of IRE requires a systemic approach. Key strategies include the integration of Islamic values across all subjects, continuous capacity building for teachers through professional development, and active involvement of parents and communities in character education. This aligns with the concept of ecosystemic character education, which emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in the value education process[25].

From a policy perspective, these findings also underscore the need to strengthen the role of madrasahs in designing Islamic value-based character education programs that are applicative, locally relevant, and responsive to digital-era challenges. In doing so, Islamic Religious Education will not merely function as a normative subject, but as a strategic instrument in the nation's character development agenda.

5 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at MTs An-Nur, Pacet District, makes a significant contribution to the development of students' religious character. However, its effectiveness is influenced by various internal and external factors. Internally, the IRE curriculum incorporates relevant character values, yet its implementation remains predominantly cognitive and lacks contextual application. The pedagogical competence and role modeling of IRE teachers are decisive factors for success, particularly when the values taught are consistently demonstrated through real-life behavior.

External factors such as a supportive school environment, regular religious activities, and synergy between school, family, and community also determine the success of religious value internalization. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including the limited integration of religious values into daily life, the influence of social media and popular culture, and insufficient family support.

This study underscores that improving the effectiveness of IRE requires a holistic strategy, which includes integrating Islamic values across all subjects, providing continuous professional development for IRE teachers, fostering intensive collaboration with parents and the community, and creatively utilizing technology as a medium for character education. Through a comprehensive and collaborative approach, IRE can function optimally as an instrument for shaping a younger generation that is faithful, pious, and of noble character.

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