

## **ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN FORMING NATIONAL CHARACTER**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to analyze the challenges faced in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in public schools in the context of national character formation. The method used is a literature review which involves analysis of various sources such as books, journals, articles and other related documents. This research identified several main challenges, including PAI curriculum and materials, teaching methods, teacher qualifications and competencies, learning environment, technology integration, and evaluation and reflection. The results of the study show that the PAI curriculum often does not fully integrate national values, requiring more substantial adjustments. Teaching methods that are less interactive are also an obstacle in attracting students' interest in PAI learning. Varying teacher qualifications and a lack of adequate training programs add to the complexity of this challenge. On the other hand, the learning environment in public schools often does not optimally support a national atmosphere. The use of technology is also not optimal in PAI learning, which actually has the potential to increase student engagement and understanding. Finally, evaluation and reflection on the PAI program must be carried out periodically to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of education in forming national character. In conclusion, although there are various challenges, with a holistic approach and the right strategy, Islamic Religious Education in public schools has great potential in forming students' strong national character.

**Keywords:** Islamic Religious Education, Public Schools, National Character

### **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping the character and morals of students, especially in countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, such as Indonesia. However, the challenges faced by PAI in public schools are not simple. One of the main points is that public schools consist of students with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, which allows for potential clashes in values and norms (BERHANU, 2023).

Therefore, the integration of religious education in the public school curriculum is very important and must be carried out with an inclusive and adaptive approach.

On the other hand, equal distribution of the quality of religious education is a sensitive issue. Not all public schools have competent PAI teachers and adequate infrastructure to support religious learning effectively. This causes gaps in understanding and appreciation of religion among students (Gea, 2024). Differences in facilities and quality of teaching can influence student learning outcomes, which in turn will impact their ability to apply religious values in everyday life and form a strong national character (Rua, 2023).

Another implication of this challenge is the emergence of various approaches in instilling national values through PAI. In this context, public schools function as a forum for cultivating the spirit of nationalism alongside spirituality. Integrating the values of Pancasila, tolerance and pluralism as well as teaching the importance of togetherness in diversity is part of the responsibility of religious education in schools. This process requires the right strategy, so that students can understand religion not only as a ritualistic form but also as a moral foundation in social and state life (Chinnadurai et al., 2023).

These challenges require synergy between various parties, including the government, schools, teachers, students and the community. Innovation in teaching methods, improving teacher quality, and developing relevant and contextual curricula are several steps that can be taken to overcome this challenge (Said & Kicha, 2024). Thus, it is hoped that Islamic religious education in public schools will be able to contribute significantly in forming a strong national character and upholding moral and ethical values in national and state life.

The important role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping national character requires continuous evaluation of the existing curriculum. A good curriculum must be able to bridge students' spiritual needs with the social realities they face. Religious learning should not be disconnected from the national context, so the material taught must be able to awaken a feeling of love for the country and appreciation for plurality (Mahara, 2023). Therefore, explicitly enriching PAI material with national values is a necessity.

The transformation of teaching methods is another thing that should not be ignored. Many new methods can be applied to make religious education more effective, such as contextual approaches, project-based learning, and the use of digital technology. With a more interactive and

participatory method, it is hoped that students can better understand and absorb religious teachings while internalizing national values (Arora, 2022). PAI teachers also need to be equipped with adequate training to be able to apply innovative and adaptive teaching methods to current developments (Boland, 2022).

Apart from that, the synergy between formal and non-formal education in instilling national values through PAI is very important. Extracurricular activities such as scouting, social activities, and various forms of community service can be effective means for implementing the values taught in the classroom. Through active involvement in various activities, students can directly practice national values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation and social justice (Abhari, 2022).

Ultimately, evaluation of the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in shaping national character must be carried out periodically. This is to ensure that the expected goals can be achieved. Government, schools and communities must collaborate to assess and improve the approaches used (Nabila & Romadlon, 2024). In this way, it is hoped that Islamic Religious Education in public schools will not only be able to produce a religious generation, but also a generation that has a high commitment to national values, which are very important for the survival of the nation and state in Indonesia.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The study in this research is qualitative with literature. The literature study research method is a research approach that involves the analysis and synthesis of information from various literature sources that are relevant to a particular research topic. Documents taken from literature research are journals, books and references related to the discussion you want to research (Earley, M.A. 2014; Snyder, H. 2019).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Challenges in Implementing PAI in Public Schools**

One of the main challenges in implementing PAI in public schools is limited time allocation. The national curriculum provides relatively limited slots for religious studies compared to other subjects. This can hinder the delivery of material in depth and comprehensively. Students often have to grasp complex concepts in a short time, which can reduce the effectiveness of learning. This narrowing of time also has an impact on limitations in

implementing more interactive and participatory teaching methods (Sitorus, 2024).

Another challenge is the quality of human resources, especially PAI teachers. Not all schools have PAI teachers who are competent and well trained. In some areas, especially in remote areas or with less access to education, there is often a shortage of teachers who truly understand religious material and national values that should be internalized (Zondo & Mncube, 2024). Apart from that, existing teachers also need to continue to develop themselves by attending various training and seminars to enrich the teaching methods they use.

Public schools often have students with very diverse backgrounds, both social, economic and religious. This can be a challenge in adapting a PAI approach that is inclusive and non-discriminatory. Differences in the level of religious understanding among students can also be an obstacle; some students may have a deep understanding of religion from their family environment, while others may be just starting to understand the basics. PAI teachers need to be smart in managing these differences so that every student can feel well accommodated without anyone feeling marginalized (Martinez-Valle & Figueroa-Lara, 2024).

The use of technology and learning media that is less than optimal is also a challenge in implementing PAI. In this digital era, technology should be utilized to make learning more interesting and effective. However, not all schools have adequate facilities, such as stable internet access or digital learning devices. In fact, teachers also need to have sufficient digital literacy skills to be able to use technology as a PAI learning aid. This limitation can reduce the attractiveness and effectiveness of religious learning which should be more dynamic and contextual (Khrebtova, 2024).

Applying religious values in daily activities in public schools is also a challenge in itself. Consistency in integrating Islamic values into all school activities, including outside study hours, is often difficult (Hakim & Astuti, 2024). For example, in terms of maintaining cleanliness and order, teaching good manners, and respecting other people. When these values are not applied consistently, students can be confused and feel that religious lessons are just theory without real application in everyday life.

Support from the school environment and parents also plays an important role in the successful implementation of PAI. An unsupportive school environment, such as a lack of prayer room facilities or special time for religious activities, can be a significant obstacle (Sephiawardani &

Bektiningsih, 2023). Apart from that, the role of parents in supporting religious education at home is no less important. When the values taught at school do not align with those at home, students can experience cognitive dissonance which impacts their understanding and practice of religion.

Another challenge lies in the PAI learning assessment and evaluation system. Evaluation of religious learning cannot only be seen from cognitive aspects, such as knowledge of religious material, but must also include affective and psychomotor aspects, such as behavior and application in daily life. Developing an assessment instrument that is able to measure these three aspects fairly and objectively is a challenge in itself. Assessments that only focus on cognitive aspects can make students only pursue grades without understanding the meaning and importance of internalizing religious values in life (Moorthy, 2022).

A contextual approach and relevance of material are also important aspects in implementing religious education in public schools. The subject matter presented must be relevant to students' daily lives and able to answer the challenges of the times. Teachers must be able to relate religious teachings to contemporary issues so that students can see their relevance and application in real life. If the material being taught feels irrelevant or too theoretical, students tend to be disinterested and become less motivated to learn more deeply about religion (Bakhri & Sofyan, 2022).

By overcoming these various challenges holistically, it is hoped that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in public schools can run more effectively and be able to form students' characters who have noble morals and have a deep and applicable understanding of religion.

### **The Impact of Challenges on the Formation of Students' National Character**

Challenges in implementing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in public schools can have a significant impact on the formation of students' national character. When religious material is not presented in an interesting and relevant way to contemporary life, students may feel alienated and reluctant to internalize the national values contained in religious teachings (Asmuni, 2023). As a result, they may not develop a strong sense of love for the country, tolerance and national spirit. Difficulties in consistent application of religious values can also cause students to experience confusion and lack of understanding about the importance of harmony between religious life and social life as citizens.

Apart from that, less than optimal support from the school environment and parents can make the situation worse. When the educational environment does not support effective religious learning, students can lose the opportunity to develop inclusive and tolerant national character (Bandung et al., 2023). For example, a lack of space for inclusive religious activities can limit interactions between students from different religious backgrounds. Support from parents that is inconsistent with the values taught at school can also hinder the formation of strong national moral and ethical character, such as mutual respect, cooperation and a sense of social justice.

An assessment system that only emphasizes aspects of cognitive knowledge without paying attention to practical applications in everyday life can make students only focus on numerical values, not on internalizing actual national values. If students are not given the opportunity to apply religious values in a social context, they may not fully understand the importance of the spirit of nationality and unity (Kayange, 2023). In the long term, this can give rise to a young generation that lacks a sense of responsibility, trust, and the ability to coexist in the cultural diversity that is the nation's wealth.

Apart from internal challenges, external influences also have a big role in shaping students' national character. The influence of social media and globalization can broaden students' horizons, but can also threaten cultural integrity and nationalism. Information and foreign culture obtained from the internet and mass media are often not in line with local and national values, which can result in a shift in values and identity. Without proper screening and understanding, students can be exposed to content that promotes excessive individualism, materialism, and a lack of respect for local culture and authority (Cole, 2023).

In addition, a curriculum that is too dense and emphasizes academic aspects, but pays little attention to character education, can be a challenge in forming national character. When the main focus of education is on achieving academic grades, students may lack the formation needed to develop strong character, including national values such as solidarity, mutual cooperation, and love of the homeland. A curriculum that lacks balance can cause important aspects of national character education to be neglected (Magezi & Madimutsa, 2023).

However, although these challenges are real, there are various strategic steps that can be taken to overcome them. Improving the quality of religious education that is more contextual and interactive, as well as integrating national values in various subjects, can help strengthen students'

national identity (Utami et al., 2024). Apart from that, collaboration between schools, families and communities is crucial to creating an environment that supports the formation of national character. Increasing digital literacy and providing real examples from community leaders and role models can also help students to develop strong national character amidst the rapid flow of globalization (Pickard et al., 2022).

### **Strategic Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges in PAI to Improve the Formation of National Character**

First, it is important to revitalize the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum so that it is more contextual and relevant to everyday life and the challenges of the times. The PAI curriculum should not only focus on cognitive and memorization aspects, but also provide space for the development of practical skills and a deep understanding of national values. Interactive and project-based teaching, such as involvement in social and community activities, can teach students to practice Islamic values that are in line with the principles of nationalism, such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and concern for others (Meutia et al., 2024).

Second, PAI teachers must have their capacity strengthened through continuous training that focuses on creative and inspiring learning methods that can foster national character. Teachers need to be given insight into effective ways to integrate national values in every lesson, as well as understand how technology and social media can be used as positive educational tools. The training must also include strategies for dealing with various negative influences from globalization, so that teachers can become important pillars in efforts to protect students from ideologies that conflict with national values (Goselfa & Shodiq, 2024).

Third, multi-stakeholder involvement is very important for the success of forming national character through PAI. Schools need to work together with families and communities in developing extracurricular programs and religious activities that uphold national values. Activities such as field trips to historical places, discussions with community leaders or religious leaders, and community service programs can strengthen feelings of love for the country and togetherness among students (Yamini et al., 2022). Apart from that, the government also needs to support it through policies that strengthen national character education, as well as routine monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation in every school.

Fourth, it is important to create a conducive learning environment at school so that students can internalize national values optimally. Schools must act as miniature communities by adopting national practices in everyday life, such as routine flag ceremonies, commemoration of national holidays, and introduction to local culture (Subur et al., 2022). Apart from that, a school atmosphere that is inclusive and respects diversity will also help students understand and accept differences, which is one of the main pillars in forming a strong national character.

Fifth, the integration of technology in PAI learning can be an effective strategy to attract student interest and enrich learning material. Digital platforms and interactive learning applications can be used to present PAI material in a more interesting and easy to understand way (Silalahi et al., 2024). For example, educational videos, podcasts with religious scholars or inspirational figures, and educational games related to national values can enrich students' learning experiences. However, it is important to ensure that the digital content is well curated and in accordance with religious and national values.

Finally, it is important to carry out regular evaluations and reflections to ensure that the strategies implemented in PAI learning are working as intended. This evaluation can involve feedback from students, teachers, and parents, as well as direct observations of changes in student attitudes and behavior (Nayak et al., 2022). Thus, corrective steps can be taken immediately if problems or obstacles are found. Educational research and studies also need to be carried out to develop and update learning strategies that are more effective and relevant in order to shape national character amidst the dynamics of societal development and the challenges of globalization.

## **CONCLUSION**

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has an important role in shaping the national character of students in public schools. However, there are a number of challenges that need to be overcome to achieve this goal effectively. The conclusion from this analysis is as follows: The PAI curriculum is often not sufficiently integrated with national values, requiring adjustments and additions of relevant content. Learning material also needs to be presented in a way that is interesting and easy for students to understand to increase their interest and understanding. PAI teaching is still often focused on conventional methods that are less interactive. Innovation is needed in using more engaging methods and technology, such as group discussions, use of digital

media, and project activities that combine religious and national values. PAI teachers play a key role in shaping student character. Therefore, increasing teacher competence and insight into national character education is very necessary. Regular training programs and workshops can be the main solution. The school environment must support the formation of national character. This can be achieved by creating an inclusive atmosphere, holding regular flag ceremonies, and introducing local culture through various school activities. The use of technology in PAI learning can increase student interest and understanding. Using applications and digital platforms to present interesting material is an important strategy to implement. Periodic evaluation of PAI learning methods and results needs to be carried out to ensure the effectiveness of education in forming national character. Feedback from various parties as well as educational research and studies play an important role in continuous improvement. Overall, Islamic Religious Education in public schools has great potential in shaping students' national character if these challenges can be overcome with the right strategy. A holistic approach that involves all aspects of learning and the environment will support the internalization of strong national values in students.

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