

## Analysis of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Curriculum in Public Schools in Developing Students' Religious

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in regular public schools in shaping students' religious character. This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. The data sources include the Islamic Religious Education and Character Education curriculum documents within the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as relevant scientific literature from books and journal articles. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis by examining the religious character values embedded in the PAI curriculum and their relevance to students' character development. The findings indicate that the PAI curriculum normatively incorporates various religious character values, such as faith, piety, honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and social care, which are integrated into learning outcomes and subject matter scope. However, the curriculum primarily functions at a normative level by providing direction and achievement indicators, while implementation aspects are largely delegated to schools and teachers. This indicates a gap between curriculum design and its practical implementation. Therefore, the PAI curriculum plays an important role as a foundational framework for developing students' religious character, although its effectiveness largely depends on pedagogical interpretation and the support of the educational environment.*

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## Introduction

Education is an essential instrument in shaping the quality of human resources, not only from intellectual aspects but also from moral and spiritual dimensions. In the context of national education, character building stands as one of the primary objectives of education, as stated in the Law on the National Education System. This legislation emphasizes that education aims to develop the potential of learners so that they become individuals who possess faith, piety, noble character, and a sense of responsibility in community life. Therefore, character education has become an integral part of the school educational process, including through the teaching of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in regular public schools holds a strategic position as

a primary instrument in the effort to shape students' morality and spirituality. Unlike Islamic school (*madrrasah*) educational institutions, which have specific divisions for religious subjects, the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in regular public schools is designed to cultivate students who possess religious understanding, spiritual attitudes, and behavior in accordance with Islamic values. Within the context of the national curriculum, PAI encompasses aspects of theology (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), ethics (*akhlak*), and social relations aimed at fostering faithful and pious individuals (Fauzan et al., 2019). PAI in regular public schools must be capable of integrating the aspects of Quran and Hadith, Theology and Ethics (*Akidah Akhlak*), Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and Islamic Civilization History into a single, compact curriculum structure with a limited time allocation (Hidayat & Asyafah, 2020). This condition demands a curriculum that does not merely transfer knowledge but also acts as a driving force in the transformation of students' religious character (Hasanah, 2022).

Religious character is a manifestation of divine values internalized in daily behavior, encompassing the dimensions of human relationships with God, fellow human beings, and the universe. Along with the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum), the focus of education has now shifted toward strengthening student profiles that possess spiritual depth and noble character (Fauzi et al., 2024). However, challenges in regular public schools are becoming increasingly complex with the current wave of digitalization, which triggers moral degradation. Consequently, the effectiveness of religious value content within the curriculum needs to be examined through a comprehensive study (Lubis, 2018).

A number of prior studies indicate that the success of character building highly depends on strategies for integrating Islamic values into school culture and classroom learning processes (Rosad, 2019). Furthermore, a multi-site study in public secondary schools shows that the effectiveness of strengthening religious character is heavily determined by teachers' innovation in translating the existing curriculum into practical activities (Sibolga, 2023). Nonetheless, studies specifically mapping the literature regarding character values within the PAI curriculum, particularly in regular public schools, still require updated perspectives to remain relevant to contemporary needs.

Therefore, this article aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of religious character values in the PAI curriculum at regular public schools while simultaneously mapping out strategies for its reinforcement through a literature review method. By examining various findings from accredited international and national scientific journals, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the PAI curriculum's contribution to addressing the challenges of character education in Indonesia.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. The choice of this method is based on the research objective, which is to describe and analyze the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in public schools and its role in shaping students' religious character. In line with the perspective of Zed (2014), library research is not merely an activity of collecting texts; rather, it is a scientific procedure involving the collection of library data, reading, note-taking, and systematically processing research materials to produce comprehensive conclusions regarding the phenomenon under study. This study is directed toward analyzing the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in shaping students' religious character in public schools through various relevant written sources. This approach allows the researcher to gain a profound understanding of the

concepts, curriculum content, and the role of Islamic Religious Education in supporting religious character building based on theoretical studies and prior research findings (Moleong, 2017).

The data analysis technique applied in this study is descriptive-analytical content analysis. The data analysis process refers to the qualitative analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which encompasses three simultaneous streams of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher sorts and simplifies information from various journal articles to focus specifically on the components of the PAI curriculum and the process of religious character building. Furthermore, in the data display stage, the researcher constructs narrative descriptions that compare and synthesize conceptual findings from the selected literature. The final stage is conclusion drawing, where the researcher formulates a comprehensive and objective overview regarding the implementation profile of the PAI curriculum in shaping students' religious character in public schools.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Concept of Religious Character in Islamic Education

Religious character is one of the important dimensions of education that is oriented toward the holistic development of students' personalities. Religious character is not only interpreted as an individual's obedience in performing ritual worship, but also encompasses attitudes, behaviors, and life values that reflect religious teachings in everyday life. In the educational context, religious character serves as the foundation for the formation of students' morals and ethics so that they are able to act in accordance with religious, social, and humanitarian norms.

According to the concept of character education, religiosity is one of the main values that should be instilled in students from an early age. Religious character is related to obedience in practicing religious teachings, tolerance toward followers of other religions, living harmoniously, and demonstrating behavior that reflects spiritual values in social life (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017). Thus, religious character is not only related to the relationship between humans and God (*ḥabl min Allāh*), but also the relationship between humans and fellow human beings (*ḥabl min al-nās*) and their social environment.

From the perspective of Islamic education, religious character is closely related to the concept of *akhlaq* (morality). Islamic education views character formation as a process of internalizing values aimed at producing individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character. Therefore, the formation of religious character is not sufficient through mastery of cognitive religious aspects alone, but also requires habituation, role modeling, and spiritual experiences in everyday life (Majid & Andayani, 2012). Religious education that only emphasizes theoretical aspects has the potential to produce students who understand religious teachings conceptually but are not yet able to implement them in real behavior.

Religious character is also understood as the foundation for the formation of other character traits. According to Lickona (2012), character education aims to develop individuals who possess *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. In the context of religiosity, these three aspects are reflected in the ability to understand religious values, possess moral awareness, and realize them in concrete actions. Therefore, religious character education is an important component in building students' integrity, responsibility, honesty, discipline, and social concern.

The values of religious character in Islamic education can be identified through several indicators, including faith and piety, honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, noble

character, and social concern. These values become an important foundation in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum because they aim to shape students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess spiritual and moral maturity in social life (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

## 2. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Curriculum in Public Schools

Normatively, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in public schools has a strong juridical foundation. Through Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology emphasizes that national education aims to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty and possess noble character. Furthermore, Article 37 paragraph (1) stipulates that religious education is a compulsory subject at all levels of primary and secondary education. This provision indicates that PAI occupies an important position within the Indonesian education system as a means of character formation for students. Therefore, the PAI curriculum is designed not only as a medium for the transfer of knowledge but also as a means of value internalization and the formation of students' religious character (Majid & Andayani, 2012).

In its implementation, PAI curriculum policies continue to evolve alongside changes in the national curriculum. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, Islamic Religious Education and Character Education are directed toward strengthening students' spiritual, moral, and social competencies through more contextual and student-centered learning. The Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran / CP*) of PAI emphasize the formation of students who possess a moderate understanding of religion, noble character, and the ability to apply Islamic teachings in daily life (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Thus, the PAI curriculum focuses not only on mastery of cognitive religious aspects but also on strengthening students' religious character.

The content of the PAI curriculum includes several main areas, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, *aqidah* (creed), *akhlaq* (morality), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and the history of Islamic civilization. Each area contributes to the formation of students' religious character. *Aqidah* materials function to instill faith and belief in Allah SWT, while *akhlaq* materials are directed toward shaping commendable behavior such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and respect for others. On the other hand, *fiqh* materials help students understand worship practices as a form of spiritual strengthening, while the history of Islamic civilization provides exemplary models through important figures and events in Islamic history (Fauzan et al., 2019).

According to Fauzan et al. (2019), the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Indonesia is oriented toward forming religious individuals by emphasizing a balance between spiritual, moral, and social aspects. The curriculum not only regulates teaching materials but also contains educational objectives directed toward forming individuals capable of practicing religious teachings in everyday life. This demonstrates that the PAI curriculum in public schools has strong relevance in supporting the formation of students' religious character.

Furthermore, the implementation of the PAI curriculum in public schools also requires the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in the learning process. Religious education should not merely emphasize theoretical understanding but must also be followed by the habituation of religious attitudes and real-life practice. Therefore, the success of the PAI curriculum in shaping religious character is greatly influenced by how the curriculum is translated into contextual and meaningful learning activities for students.

### 3. Religious Character Content in the PAI Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum PAI document explicitly includes religious values such as faith and piety, as well as noble character, as the foundation of learning. Character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and social concern are also present both explicitly (for example, Core Competency 2 in the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes “honesty, discipline, care, tolerance, peace, responsibility, etc.”) and implicitly in PAI learning outcomes (such as self-discipline through noble behavior and concern for humanity).

Afni et al. (2025) state that PAI plays a strategic role in instilling values of faith, morality, and spirituality through a holistic approach, while Faiza et al. (2026) show that the integration of religious values (honesty, tolerance, solidarity) in the curriculum effectively builds students’ character. Fauzan et al. (2019) emphasize that the ideal PAI graduate is religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, and devoted to worship. A comprehensive analysis demonstrates consistency between curriculum documents and the literature: both highlight the role of PAI in internalizing religious values as well as general character traits (honesty, responsibility, tolerance).

**Table 1.** Mapping of Values in Curriculum Documents

Value	Merdeka Curriculum (Learning Outcomes)	2013 Curriculum (Core Competencies/Basic Competencies, Ministerial Regulation 2016)
Faith and Piety	Believing in and being devoted to Allah SWT	KI-1: Appreciating and practicing religious teachings
Noble Character	The Merdeka Curriculum directs students toward noble character ( <i>makarim al-akhlaq</i> )	Implicit in KI-2: courtesy, cooperation
Honesty	Character value integrated into learning outcomes	KI-2: honesty explicitly stated
Discipline	Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes self-discipline through noble behavior	KI-2: discipline explicitly stated
Responsibility	Learning outcomes encourage responsibility in <i>aqidah</i> and <i>fiqh</i>	KI-2: responsibility explicitly stated
Tolerance	PAI learning outcomes: tolerance as the foundation of religious life	KI-2: tolerance explicitly stated
Social Concern	Learning outcomes: concern for humanity (PAI & Character Education rationale)	KI-2: concern (cooperation, collaboration)
Worship/Religious Practice	Learning outcomes emphasize love for the Qur’an & Hadith and active worship	KI-1 & KI-2 in general (KI-1 practicing religious teachings)

Based on the mapping of religious character values presented in Table 1, it can be observed that both the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum place strong emphasis on strengthening students' religious character. Values such as faith and piety, noble character, honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, social concern, and religious practice constitute important components of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum. This finding indicates that the development of religious character remains a primary objective of Islamic education despite changes in national curriculum policies.

However, there are differences in the way these values are presented. The 2013 Curriculum tends to state character values more explicitly through the Core Competencies (Kompetensi Inti/KI), particularly KI-1 and KI-2, which directly specify the spiritual and social attitudes expected of students. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum integrates religious character values into the Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran/CP*) in a more contextual and flexible manner. This approach reflects a shift from a curriculum model focused on prescribed competencies toward one that emphasizes the integrated development of competencies and character.

These findings suggest that, substantively, there is no significant difference between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum regarding the religious values they seek to cultivate. The primary distinction lies in the way these values are organized and presented within the curriculum documents. Therefore, the success of religious character formation depends not only on the inclusion of such values in the curriculum, but also on the ability of teachers and educational institutions to translate them into contextual, sustainable, and meaningful learning practices.

#### **4. The Role of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Curriculum in the Formation of Students' Religious Character**

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in public schools has strong relevance to the formation of students' religious character because it substantively contains objectives, learning materials, and learning outcomes that are oriented toward strengthening spiritual and moral values. Within the national education system, PAI is not only directed at developing students' religious knowledge but also at nurturing individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character. This indicates that the formation of religious character has become an integral part of the orientation of the PAI curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

In the Merdeka Curriculum, the strengthening of religious character is also reflected in the Learning Outcomes of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, which emphasize the balanced development of students' spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. The curriculum is designed to ensure that students not only understand Islamic teachings theoretically but are also able to internalize these values in their daily lives. Thus, the structure of the PAI curriculum demonstrates a clear orientation toward the formation of students' religious character (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

In addition to being reflected in learning objectives and content, the relevance of the PAI curriculum to the formation of religious character can also be observed through its learning approach, which positions religious education as a means of developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in an integrated manner. According to Majid and Andayani (2012), PAI learning should ideally not only produce a conceptual understanding of religion but also foster students' moral awareness and religious behavior. Therefore, the PAI curriculum has significant potential to shape religious character when it is understood as a process of value education rather than merely the delivery of religious knowledge.

The findings of this study indicate that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

curriculum in public schools has clearly emphasized the formation of religious character through its objectives, learning outcomes, and content areas, which include aqidah (Islamic creed), akhlaq (morality), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), the Qur'an and Hadith, and the history of Islamic civilization. Within the curriculum documents, religious character is reflected in the emphasis placed on values such as faith, piety, noble character, honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and social concern as expected learning outcomes for students. Therefore, from a normative perspective, the PAI curriculum provides a strong conceptual foundation for the development of students' religious character (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Fauzan et al., 2019).

However, further analysis shows that the curriculum tends to operate primarily at the level of determining indicators and learning objectives rather than providing detailed explanations of operational mechanisms. In other words, the curriculum answers the question of what should be achieved but does not thoroughly explain how religious values should be systematically actualized within educational processes. As a result, the formation of religious character in practice depends heavily on the interpretations of educational institutions, teachers' abilities to translate curriculum objectives into practice, and the supporting school culture. From a curriculum theory perspective, this suggests that the curriculum functions as a normative framework, while practical implementation requires more concrete pedagogical elaboration to achieve educational goals effectively (Majid & Andayani, 2012; Samani & Hariyanto, 2017).

This tendency also explains why much of the existing literature on PAI and religious character focuses more on implementation aspects, such as religious habituation, teacher role modeling, and school culture, rather than on the curriculum structure itself. Yet, the curriculum serves as the primary foundation that determines the direction and substance of education. Therefore, the examination of the PAI curriculum should not stop at identifying the religious values contained within it but should be extended to a critical analysis of the adequacy of its implementation guidelines so that these values do not remain merely normative indicators. In this context, the PAI curriculum can be understood as a conceptual foundation for the formation of religious character, while its success ultimately depends on pedagogical interpretation, school culture, and the synergy of the broader educational environment (Lickona, 2012; Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

##### **5. Challenges in Implementing the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Curriculum in the Formation of Students' Religious Character**

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## Conclusion

Conclusion Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in public schools plays a strategic role in the formation of students' religious character. Substantively, the PAI curriculum incorporates various religious character values reflected in its learning objectives, learning outcomes, and content areas, including *aqidah* (Islamic creed), *akhlaq* (morality), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the Qur'an and Hadith, and the history of Islamic civilization.

Values such as faith, piety, honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and social

concern have been integrated into the curriculum structure as part of its character education orientation. This indicates that, from a normative perspective, the PAI curriculum provides a strong foundation for the development of students' religious character.

Nevertheless, the PAI curriculum primarily functions at the normative level as a framework that determines educational directions and learning outcome indicators, while its implementation largely depends on the interpretation of educational institutions, teachers, and the broader educational environment. Therefore, the successful formation of students' religious character is determined not only by the curriculum itself but also by the synergy between the curriculum, instructional practices, and the social educational environment.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed. First, for curriculum developers, it is recommended that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum should not only emphasize the establishment of normative learning outcomes but also provide clearer guidance on the contextual implementation of religious character values in order to facilitate their integration into educational practices by schools.

Second, for Islamic Religious Education teachers, the findings of this study may serve as a conceptual reference for understanding that the PAI curriculum already incorporates comprehensive religious character values. Therefore, teachers are expected to translate these values into meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to students' lives while remaining within the framework of the existing curriculum.

Third, for future researchers, further studies are needed that focus not only on curriculum document analysis but also on examining the relationship between curriculum design and its implementation in practice. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the PAI curriculum in fostering students' religious character.

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