

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CHILDREN'S CHARACTER FORMATION

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Abstract

This research explores the fundamental role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as a strategic instrument in constructing noble character personalities in children amidst the dynamics of contemporary digital transformation. Utilizing a qualitative approach with a comprehensive literature review method, this study profoundly analyzes the mechanisms of internalizing Islamic values in the character formation process of the younger generation. The research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education plays a vital role as a spiritual foundation in instilling principles of morality such as honesty (shiddiq), trustworthiness (amanah), intelligence (fathonah), and communicative ability (tabligh), which are integrated into both intracurricular and extracurricular learning. Essential Islamic character values include patience, integrity, empathy, responsibility, and discipline, which shape the students' holistic personality. Effective implementation in the digital era necessitates adaptive strategies that integrate learning technology with pedagogical approaches based on the values of the Qur'an and Hadith, through synergistic collaboration between educators, families, and the community. This study offers a theoretical contribution to the development of a contemporary Islamic education paradigm that is responsive to the challenges of modernity while maintaining the authenticity of Islamic teachings in forming a generation with noble character, high individual and social piety.

Keywords: Character Building, Islamic Religious Education (IRE), Islamic Values



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INTRODUCTION

The massive transformation of the digital era has brought fundamental changes across various dimensions of community life, including in the aspects of education and the character formation of the younger generation. The phenomenon of globalization, accompanied by the widening penetration of information technology, creates complex challenges in the effort to form children's character rooted in noble religious values (Ahyar et al., 2023). Contemporary conditions show an alarming moral degradation among children and adolescents, reflected through increasing cases of bullying, misuse of social media, a decline in interaction ethics, and a weakening of the appreciation of religious values in daily life. This reality signifies a significant urgency to optimize the role of Islamic Religious Education as a foundation in shaping children's personalities to be characterized, moral, and possess strong spiritual integrity (Abdulrahman & Fikrianto, 2025). Character education from an Islamic perspective is a comprehensive process that is not solely oriented toward the transfer of cognitive knowledge, but rather emphasizes the internalization of noble moral values sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith as the guidelines for the Muslim community's life (Kuttikat et al., 2025). The conception of Islamic education positions character building as the ultimate goal that must be achieved, where the educational process is systematically designed to produce individuals who are not only intellectually smart but also possess balanced emotional and spiritual maturity.

In this context, Islamic Religious Education functions as a strategic instrument in instilling fundamental values such as honesty (*shiddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), intelligence (*fathonah*), and good communication ability (*tabligh*), which are the pillars of Islamic character (Yurtseven et al., 2025). The implementation of character education based on Islamic values requires a holistic approach that harmoniously integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, thereby producing educational outcomes who not only master knowledge but also possess high individual and social piety (Awad, 2024). A review of academic literature shows that the discourse concerning the role of Islamic Religious Education in character formation has been the focus of intensive study in recent years. Various empirical studies reveal that effectively implemented Islamic Religious Education learning significantly contributes to the development of students' religious character (Ibrahim, 2024). The internalization of religious values through systematic learning processes, habitual religious rituals, and the role modeling of teachers as central figures in the education process is proven capable of shaping positive behavior and noble character in children.

Studies conducted in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era indicate that Islamic Religious Education must undergo a methodological transformation to remain relevant to the times, without eliminating the essential fundamental values that constitute the spirit of Islamic education itself (Mistar, 2025). Learning approaches that integrate technology with Islamic values are seen as an adaptive strategy that can increase the effectiveness of learning while strengthening the process of children's character formation amidst the rapid dynamics of social change. Previous research has made important contributions to understanding the dynamics of character education through Islamic Religious Education (Rahmawati & Mustafa, 2024). A study explored the efforts of Islamic Religious Education teachers in forming religious character with a neuroscience approach, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the brain's mechanism in the process of internalizing religious values (Galieva & Gibadullina, 2022). The findings of this research indicate that an approach considering the neurological aspect can optimize the learning and character formation process. Meanwhile, another study analyzed the relevance of character education in the context of Islamic education for building an Islamic-character generation, emphasizing the crucial role of family, school, and community in the character formation process.

Other research examined the role of Islamic Religious Education in building children's character in the digital era, especially in the context of legal protection against various threats faced by children in the virtual world (Al-Barakat et al., 2025). The study emphasizes that Islamic Religious Education not only serves as a means of teaching moral norms but also as an instrument to equip children with the legal knowledge and awareness necessary to protect themselves in a high-risk digital environment. Although various studies have been conducted to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education in children's character formation, there are still significant research gaps in the academic literature that need to be addressed (Karakuş & Erzen, 2023). First, most existing research tends to be descriptive and has not comprehensively analyzed the specific mechanisms of how Islamic Religious Education values are transformed into internalized character in children's daily behavior. Second, there are limited studies exploring the integration between the traditional approach of Islamic Religious Education and contemporary pedagogical methodologies that are responsive to the characteristics of the digital generation.

Third, not many studies have deeply analyzed the synergistic role between the family, school, and community environments in forming an education ecosystem conducive to the formation of Islamic character in children (Bekmirzayev, 2025). Fourth, studies on the evaluation of the effectiveness of character education programs based on Islamic values are still inadequate, making it difficult to identify best practices that can be replicated in different contexts. These gaps indicate the need for more comprehensive and integrative research to understand the complexity of the process of children's character formation through Islamic Religious Education. Based on the identification of these research gaps, this study offers significant novelty in several aspects (Fauzi et al., 2025). First, this research develops an integrative conceptual framework that connects classical Islamic character education theory with modern pedagogy approaches, resulting in a more holistic and applicable learning model. Second, this study deeply explores the process of internalizing Islamic religious values in children's character formation by simultaneously considering the cognitive, affective, spiritual, and social dimensions. Third, this research analyzes the optimal strategy for the role of Islamic Religious Education in facing the challenges of the digital era, offering practical solutions that can be implemented by educators and parents. Fourth, this study provides a theoretical contribution to the development of the body of knowledge of contemporary Islamic education through the synthesis of various perspectives and approaches that have previously been fragmented in academic literature.

Based on the background description and the identification of research gaps above, the formulation of problems in this research is: (1) What is the role of Islamic Religious Education in forming children's character? (2) What are the essential Islamic character values that need to be instilled in children through Islamic Religious Education? (3) What is the effective implementation strategy for Islamic Religious Education in forming children's character in the digital era? Corresponding to the problem formulation, the objectives of this research are: (1) To analyze and describe the role of Islamic Religious Education in children's character formation based on the perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith, (2) To identify the essential Islamic character values to be instilled in children through Islamic Religious Education, (3) To formulate an effective and relevant implementation strategy for Islamic Religious Education in the context of children's development in the digital era.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the repository of Islamic educational knowledge, particularly in the aspect of children's character formation, through the development of an integrative and comprehensive conceptual framework (Yusuf et al., 2023). The results of this research can serve as an academic reference for the development of theory and practice of character education based on Islamic values that is more systematic and measurable. Practically, this research provides benefits for various parties. For educators and Islamic

Religious Education teachers, the results of this research can serve as a guide in designing and implementing effective learning to shape students' character. For parents, this research provides insight into the importance of the role of Islamic Religious Education within the family as the primary basis for children's character formation. For educational institutions, the results of this research can be a basis for formulating policies and development programs for character education based on Islamic values. For educational policymakers, this research can be a consideration in formulating national education policies that place greater emphasis on the aspect of character formation and religious moral values (Septoyadi et al., 2023). More broadly, this research is expected to contribute to the effort of creating Indonesian youth who are not only academically excellent but also possess strong character, noble morals, and high integrity based on the values of Islamic teachings.

RESEARCH METHOD

The following sections detail the methodology employed in this study, which focuses on the synthesis of academic literature.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a library research design, focusing on an in-depth exploration of various academic literature, scholarly works, and documentary sources relevant to the research topic (the role of Islamic Religious Education in children's character formation). The library research method was chosen because it allows the researcher to conduct a comprehensive analysis of theories, concepts, and findings from previous studies without involving the collection of primary data from the field (Chofifah et al., 2025). This design emphasizes the subjective, contextual understanding and synthesis of existing knowledge.

Research Target/Subject

The subject of this study is the secondary data obtained from various library sources. These sources include nationally and internationally accredited scientific journals, reference books in the field of Islamic education and character formation, articles in academic seminar proceedings, and official documents. The target literature is defined by its high scientific credibility and validity, specifically targeting publications within the timeframe of 2020 to 2024 to ensure the information reflects the latest developments in academic discourse.

Research Procedure

The data collection procedure was carried out through a systematic search of published literature in academic databases. This process involved applying strict source selection criteria covering the substantive relevance to the research focus, the methodological quality of the publication, the credibility of the publisher, and the timeliness of the publication (Bahrun et al., 2023). The analysis stages, adapted from content analysis, include data reduction to select the most relevant information, data presentation in the form of a coherent narrative description, and conclusion drawing based on the synthesis of findings. The source triangulation technique (comparing, verifying, and confirming information from different literature) was applied throughout the procedure to ensure data validity and credibility.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary instruments are the academic databases and the selection criteria used to identify valid literature (Julianto et al., 2025). The type of data used is secondary data sourced from various library materials. The key data collection technique employed was a systematic literature search, which involved applying filters based on substantive relevance, methodological quality, publisher credibility, and timeliness (2020 to 2024). This systematic technique ensures the integrity and currency of the information base used for the analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis process uses the content analysis method with a descriptive-analytical approach. All data collected are systematically categorized based on central themes and sub-themes relevant to the research problems (Mahfud et al., 2023). The data are then analyzed deeply and critically to identify conceptual patterns, relationships between variables, and the theoretical and practical implications (ter Avest, 2022). The final step is conclusion drawing based on the synthesis of findings from various literature sources, which must be scientifically justifiable and contribute significantly to the field of Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Children's Character Formation. Islamic Religious Education holds a strategic and fundamental position in the process of children's character formation, oriented towards divine values and noble morality (Naseh et al., 2022). Based on an analysis of various literature, it is found that Islamic Religious Education serves as the main foundation for instilling moral and ethical values in individuals from an early age, where these values become a solid basis for the formation of a strong-character and integrated personality in facing various life dynamics (Bensaid, 2021). The role of Islamic Religious Education is not limited to merely transferring religious knowledge; instead, it encompasses a broader dimension, namely the formation of spiritual awareness, the development of social sensitivity, and the habitual practice of worship integrated into daily life. Allah SWT states in the Qur'an:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

Meaning: "And indeed, you (Muhammad) are of a great moral character." (QS. Al-Qalam: 4)

This verse affirms that the formation of noble character (akhlaq mulia) is the main objective of the Islamic message brought by Rasulullah SAW (Prophet Muhammad). In the context of the digital era, which is full of moral challenges and the degradation of religious values, Islamic Religious Education becomes a vital defense mechanism to protect the younger generation from negative influences that can erode their character and personality (Pratiwi et al., 2025). The implementation of Islamic Religious Education is carried out through two main channels: intracurricular activities, where teachers integrate character values into the entire learning process of religious subjects such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Islamic cultural history, Arabic language, Aqidah (creed), and Akhlaq (morality); and extracurricular activities, which include digital literacy-based Qur'an reading programs, Qur'an memorization programs, khitabah (speech) activities, hadrah (Islamic music) arts, and calligraphy, all designed to strengthen the internalization of Islamic values within students.

Through systematic and structured learning approaches, Islamic Religious Education is capable of forming various dimensions of positive character in children, including religious character reflected in obedience in worship and awareness of God's presence in every life activity, honest character which is the pillar of personal integrity, a fondness for reading as a manifestation of the spirit of seeking knowledge, a responsible attitude in carrying out trusts (amanah), independence in making decisions and solving problems, appreciation for achievement as motivation to continue developing, social awareness that encourages empathy and solidarity toward others, and a hard work ethic which is the key to success in achieving goals (Dalimunthe et al., 2023). Noble character (Akhlaq mulia) is the core of Islamic Religious Education, serving as the barometer for measuring the high or low degree and dignity of a person before Allah and fellow human beings.

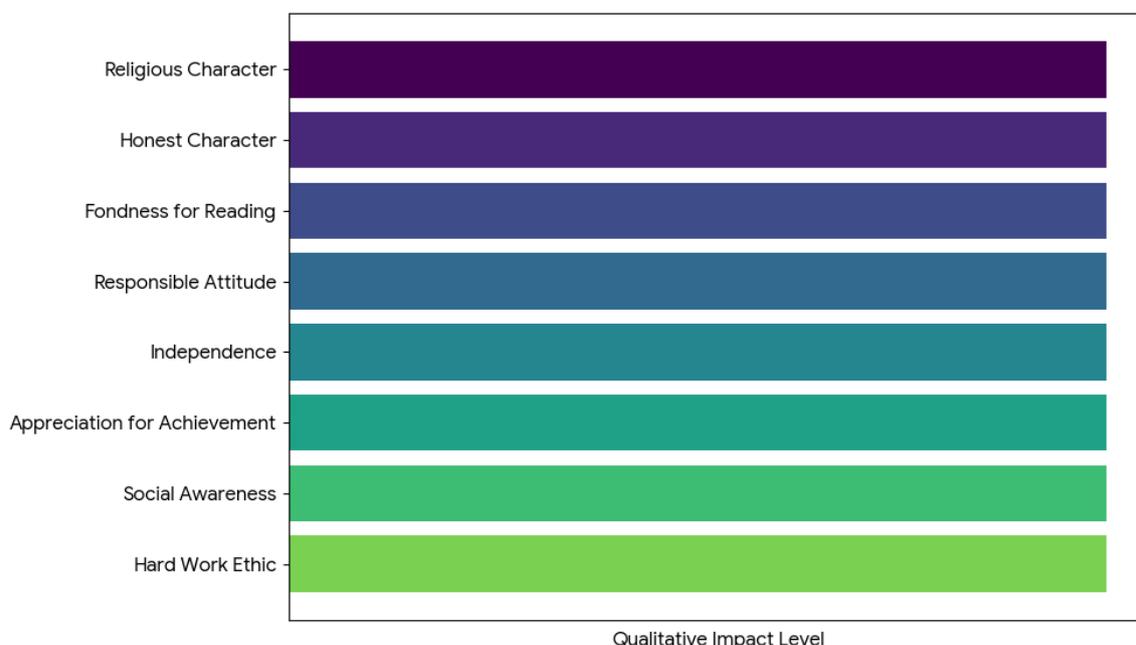


Figure 1. Dimensions of Positive Character in Islamic Religious Education

Essential Islamic Character Values to be Instilled in Children (Mobolaji & Akinyemi, 2022). The concept of akhlaq (morality) in Islam encompasses a highly comprehensive dimension, covering behavioral patterns towards Allah reflected in faith (iman), piety (taqwa), and obedience in worship; behavioral patterns towards fellow human beings manifested through mutual respect, appreciation, helping one another, and doing good deeds; and behavioral patterns towards the universe which demonstrate ecological awareness and responsibility in preserving the environment. The cultivation of students’ morality is carried out through consistent and sustainable habituation strategies, where the Islamic Religious Education teacher becomes a role model (figur teladan) who implements noble moral values in every interaction with students, such as habitually greeting before and after learning as a manifestation of the value of politeness and respect, demonstrating courteous behavior and speech, using gentle and polite language that reflects refined manners, and fostering mutual respect and appreciation for differences among students. Rasulullah SAW said:

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

Meaning: “Indeed, I was sent to perfect noble character.” (HR. Ahmad)

This Hadith shows that the main mission of Rasulullah SAW was to perfect human morals, making character education the essence of Islamic teachings. The Islamic character values that need to be instilled in children cover a very broad and comprehensive spectrum, reflecting the holistic teachings of Islam in forming a perfect human being—spiritually, morally, intellectually, and socially (Rayson, 2023). The first value that serves as a foundation is patience (sabar), which teaches children to have mental and emotional resilience in facing various trials, challenges, and difficulties in life with steadfastness and without giving up easily. The value of integrity becomes an important pillar that shapes honesty, consistency between words and actions, and a commitment to always hold onto the truth, even in difficult situations. The value of empathy teaches children to have social sensitivity, the ability to understand the feelings and conditions of others, and encourages caring and helping those in need. Other fundamental values taught through Islamic Religious Education include honesty (shiddiq) which is a manifestation of strong faith and high personal integrity, responsibility (amanah) which reflects a trustworthy attitude in carrying out every task and obligation assigned, discipline which demonstrates the ability to self-regulate, obey rules, and be consistent in fulfilling commitments, and mutual respect which is the basis for creating harmony and peace in community life.

Aqidah (creed) learning plays a central role in instilling strong religious character values in children, where through a deep understanding of tauhid (monotheism), faith in Allah, angels, holy books, prophets, the Day of Judgment, and destiny, children are equipped with a solid spiritual foundation that will guide them in making decisions and behaving in accordance with Islamic teachings (Sukman & Bustami, 2025). The learning of the Qur'an and Hadith serves as a comprehensive and authentic source of life guidance, providing clear directions on how a Muslim should live their life, interact with others, and carry out religious obligations with full awareness and sincerity. Akhlaq (morality) learning becomes a practical guide that regulates good and bad behavioral patterns, providing clear moral standards about praiseworthy and blameworthy actions, so that children have the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, and choose the path approved by Allah in every aspect of their lives. Islamic Religious Education is also very important in shaping the religious character of students, which is the foundation for the development of all other personality aspects, formed through learning that guides students to know and understand the fundamental elements in Islam based on the Qur'an and Hadith as comprehensive life guidance.

Implementation Strategy of Islamic Religious Education in Children's Character Formation in the Digital Era. The implementation of Islamic Religious Education in forming children's character in the digital era requires strategies that are adaptive, innovative, and capable of responding to the rapid dynamics of information technology development without eliminating the essential fundamental values of Islamic teachings (Nurhayati et al., 2024). The digital era brings significant changes in the mindset, behavior, and social interaction patterns of the younger generation, where digital technology can be a double-edged sword: on one hand, it provides easy access to information and learning, but on the other hand, it also brings various threats such as the negative influence of social media, content that is inconsistent with Islamic values, and a reduction in students' focus and concentration during the learning process. Allah SWT states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا

Meaning: "O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire." (QS. At-Tahrim: 6)

This verse affirms the obligation of parents and educators to protect and guide children from various dangers, including moral threats in the digital era. The integration of Islamic Religious Education with digital technology is a key strategy proven to enhance the effectiveness of learning while strengthening the character formation of students, enabling them to face the challenges and dynamics of life in the modern era while holding firm to Islamic values (Tengku Kasim et al., 2024). An approach that combines technology with religious teaching can increase the appeal of learning, make the material more interactive and easily understood, and assist students in facing the complex moral challenges in the digital world that is full of temptations and tribulations.

Effective implementation strategies include the use of various interactive digital tools such as digital Qur'an learning applications, e-learning platforms for Islamic religious subjects, engaging and inspiring learning videos, and the utilization of social media to disseminate informative Islamic-themed educational content (Rahmatullah et al., 2024). Project-based learning methods also become a highly effective approach where students are actively involved in meaningful religious projects, such as creating digital da'wah (preaching) content, designing social programs based on Islamic values, or developing simple applications useful for religious learning.

The proactive role of the teacher is a crucial factor in the success of implementing Islamic Religious Education in the digital era, where the teacher functions not only as an instructor but also as a facilitator, motivator, and role model who inspires students to implement Islamic values in daily life (Wan et al., 2025). Synergistic collaboration between teachers, families, and the community is an essential prerequisite for ensuring the effectiveness

of Islamic Religious Education implementation, as children's character formation cannot be done partially but requires support and consistency from the entire education ecosystem (Sayan & Günel, 2022). The adaptation of Islamic Religious Education with a holistic strategy that combines technology integration and moral education is critical for fostering students' character that aligns with Islamic values amidst the unstoppable currents of globalization and the digital revolution, thereby producing a generation that is not only competent in utilizing technology but also possesses high spiritual and moral awareness in using it for the good and benefit of the community (Charki et al., 2022). The main goal of Islamic Religious Education is to shape the students' personality, reflected in behavior and mindset that are always oriented toward Islamic values, enabling them to live life with full awareness, responsibility, and commitment to the religious teachings they believe in, under all conditions and situations.

CONCLUSION

Based on a comprehensive analysis of relevant academic literature, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds a fundamental and strategic role in constructing children's character through the internalization of divine values and noble morality sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. This character formation process is executed holistically by integrating cognitive, affective, spiritual, and psychomotor dimensions through systematic intracurricular learning and extracurricular activities. The essential Islamic character values that need to be transmitted to children include patience, integrity, empathy, honesty (shiddiq), responsibility (amanah), discipline, and mutual respect, which shape a highly religious and moral personality. Effective implementation of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era necessitates adaptive strategies that integrate learning technology with pedagogical approaches based on Islamic values, supported by the synergistic collaboration between educators, families, and the community as a conducive educational ecosystem to produce a generation that is not only intellectually competent but also possesses solid individual and social piety.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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