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# The Synergy of Islamic Religious Education Learning and Religious Culture in Revitalizing Character Education at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk Boyolali

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## ABSTRACT

The central issue examined in this study is the decline in students' character, reflected in the weakening of moral standards, religious values, and social responsibility. This condition demands an educational approach that not only emphasizes cognitive development but also addresses affective and behavioral aspects. This study aims to describe the efforts to internalize the values of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), the implementation of religious culture, and the synergy between the two as a strategy to revitalize character education at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that: (1) the internalization of IRE values is conducted through the integration of values in learning, encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action; (2) the implementation of religious culture through activities such as Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, and teacher role modeling creates a supportive school environment for character formation; and (3) the synergy between IRE learning and religious culture is realized through the integration of theoretical instruction in the classroom with real-life practices in the school environment that are persuasive and humanistic. This synergy has proven effective in revitalizing character education, as Islamic values are not only understood conceptually but are also internalized and practiced in students' daily lives.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a crucial issue in education, as the character crisis among students intensifies. This crisis is reflected in weakening moral values, declining religiosity, low social responsibility, and diminished respect for teachers and parents [1]. The rapid development of information technology has exacerbated this situation by providing widespread access to diverse information and lifestyles that are not always aligned with

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moral and religious values. This situation demonstrates that education that emphasizes only cognitive aspects is insufficient to shape students' holistic character [2].

Islamic religious education is crucial for guiding and developing moral character in character education. Islamic education is a component of character education that is closely linked to morals. Islamic religious education plays a key role in shaping student behavior by instilling values such as faith, piety, honesty, responsibility, and caring for others. Through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, students are expected not only to understand Islamic concepts theoretically but also to practice them in their daily lives. Therefore, internalizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values is a crucial step in revitalizing character education, ensuring that these values are truly ingrained and shape students' personalities [3]. However, the internalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values cannot be optimal if delivered only through classroom learning. A conducive educational environment is needed through the development of a religious culture so that these values can be internalized and continuously practiced by students.

Thomas Lickona defines character education as a deliberate effort to help individuals understand, pay attention to, and implement core ethical values. This description identifies stages of development encompassing aspects of moral understanding (moral knowing), moral feeling (moral feeling), and embodiment in concrete behavior (moral action). This process also provides a solid foundation for building integrated, comprehensive, and sustainable character education [4]. Abdul Mujib also argues that character education is a process of shaping a person's behavior and personality in accordance with predetermined criteria. Essentially, it is an effort to foster the spiritual and physical development of children, moving from their natural traits toward a better future. Character education aims to improve the quality of educational outcomes, focusing on the formation of morals and the development of moral intelligence [5].

In addition to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, character formation is also strongly influenced by the religious culture that develops within the school environment. This religious atmosphere is created through the habituation of a religious atmosphere that is routinely practiced over a long period of time, thereby fostering a collective awareness among all members of the madrasah community to practice religious values daily [6]. Developing a religious culture means creating a religiously nuanced atmosphere that shapes a lifestyle within the madrasah community grounded in Islamic teachings and religious values, both in daily activities and in social skills within the madrasah environment. This situation indicates that religious education cannot be delivered solely at the cognitive level; it must be deeply internalized in students' attitudes and behaviors. Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in character formation by instilling the values of faith, honesty, and responsibility. However, comprehensive character formation cannot occur solely through classroom learning; it is strongly influenced by the religious culture that develops within the school environment [7].

Previous research by Faisiol Nur et al. (2023) showed that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning contributes significantly to the formation of students' character, especially when accompanied by teacher role models. Awareness of character education can be generated by activating or adapting educational methods at home, at school, and in the

community to strengthen the role and function of the mass media [8]. Another study by Eka Pertiwi (2022) also emphasized that religious culture, such as congregational prayer, Quranic recitation, and the habituation of Islamic attitudes, can create a school climate conducive to students' moral development [9]. However, most of these studies still view Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and religious culture as two independent aspects. Therefore, this study takes a novel position by examining in more depth the form of synergy between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and religious culture as a unified strategy in revitalizing character education.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe: (1) efforts to internalize Islamic Religious Education values in shaping students' character; (2) implementation of religious culture in the madrasa environment; and (3) forms of synergy between Islamic Religious Education learning and religious culture as a strategy for revitalizing character education at "MTs Nurul Islam Musuk". This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich scientific research on character education grounded in Islamic values through the integration of learning and school culture. In practice, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for educators, madrasa principals, and educational policymakers in designing effective, contextually relevant, and sustainable character education strategies in the madrasa environment.

## 2. METHOD

The research method used was a field study. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a series of methods to explore and understand the meaning that a group of people or several individuals associate with social issues or human problems [10]

Ardiansyah and his colleagues, citing Creswell, explain that there are three methods for collecting data in qualitative studies. First, in-depth interviews in which researchers ask appropriate questions related to the research focus, yielding data in the form of informants' thoughts, perspectives, and reasons. Second, observation, which involves directly observing research subjects to obtain information about real conditions at the location, including behavior and speech. Third, documentation, which involves collecting data through searching various written sources or archives related to the research focus [11].

The research was conducted at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Islam Musuk educational institution in Boyolali. Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Islam Musuk, Boyolali, is an educational institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. MTs Nurul Islam Musuk is a secondary education institution under the auspices of Islamic education located in Musuk. This Islamic junior high school (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) implements a learning process that combines the central government curriculum with Islamic teachings, aiming to produce students with virtuous, intelligent, and religious character. MTs Nurul Islam Musuk is committed to developing students' character through learning activities, fostering worship habits, and integrating religious culture into school life, so that students excel not only intellectually but also solidify their faith and morals.

The presentation and discussion of this research are combined by connecting field findings, theoretical analysis, and previous studies. Information was obtained through conversations with the madrasah principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, observations of religious activities, and supporting documents at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk. Initially, the researchers sought to understand efforts to instill Islamic Religious Education values to shape students' morals at school. Second, they sought to describe the implementation of religious practices in the school environment to support character education. Finally, they sought to understand how PAI teaching and religious traditions collaborate to revitalize character education at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Efforts to Internalize the Values of Islamic Religious Education and Religious Culture in Shaping the Character of Students

In line with the research problem and objectives, the results and discussion focus on two main aspects. These three aspects include efforts to internalize the values of Islamic Religious Education and religious culture in shaping students' character, and the synergy between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and religious culture in revitalizing character education.

From an etymological perspective, the term "internalization" indicates a specific process. In Indonesian, the suffix "-isasi" denotes a process [2]. Chaplin, a leading figure in modern psychology, defines internalization as the process of internalizing or integrating attitudes, behavioral norms, opinions, and similar elements into an individual's personality [12]. Internalizing Islamic religious values is the process of instilling the essence of Islamic teachings into an individual so that their soul and behavior move and function in accordance with Islamic teachings [13]. This is done to teach ways to instill values or educational messages into a person's psyche.

Etymologically, the word "nilai" comes from the word "value." In line with Soemantri's statement, values are the essence that resides in the human conscience, serving as the foundation and ethical guideline for measuring the beauty, usefulness, and integrity of a person's personality, including their potential [14]. The internalization of values is instilled in students to shape a personality with noble morals. The role of Islamic Religious Education educators is crucial in implementing internalization efforts through communication, guidance, and role modeling. Particularly in the school environment and during the learning process, values can be internalized in various situations [14].

This study adopts Albert Bandura's theory of internalization of religious values within individuals. His theory explains that three main elements influence each other in value formation: the individual (person), the environment (environment), and behavior [15]. Findings from the field at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk are as follows:

##### 1. Person

An individual refers to someone who provides an example in instilling values. In a learning environment, this role can be played by teachers, peers, or other educational staff. In this context, teachers serve as role models for students in implementing the values they instill. This process can be implemented during classroom activities, where educators design

lessons that align with learning objectives and are reinforced by the teacher's behavior as a role model [16].

A teacher plays a crucial role and carries a significant responsibility in student learning activities at school. As stipulated in Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, a teacher is defined as an expert educator whose fundamental duties include teaching, leading, providing guidance, coaching, assessing, and conducting evaluations for students in early childhood education through formal education, elementary education, and secondary education [17].

Teachers play a key role in improving the quality of education. A teacher also serves as a role model for students, so a teacher is needed to achieve high-quality education [18]. In line with findings at MTs Nurul Islam, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers position themselves not as instructors, but as mentors and role models for students. Teachers consciously instill noble moral values, religious attitudes, responsibility, and good behavior through attitudes, habitual worship, and persuasive and educational communication. At MTs Nurul Islam, teachers accompany students every morning and participate in Koran recitation before lessons begin. These efforts aim to foster students' character.

According to Dony Kusuma, as quoted by Zubaedi, character education is a gradual process of developing individual abilities that form and instill values, resulting in individuals with complete character and the ability to internalize self-development [19]. Based on Muhaimin's view, the process of internalizing character education in students occurs through the following three main stages:

- a. Value Transformation: At this stage, educators convey only good and bad values to students. This process is generally carried out through verbal communication, for example, by stating that dishonesty is wrong behavior, among other examples.
- b. Value Transaction: This stage is the educational process in Which Values education is delivered through two-way communication or reciprocal interaction between educators and students. Educators not only provide information about good and bad values , but also actively provide examples and model their application. Furthermore, students are encouraged to respond to these values by accepting, internalizing, and practicing them in their daily lives.
- c. Transinternalization: This stage goes beyond simply transacting values. In this phase, the educator's delivery of values to students no longer focuses solely on physical aspects or appearance, but rather emphasizes the educator's inner attitude, personality, and integrity as a role model for students.

The internalization process occurs when an individual willingly accepts influence and voluntarily complies with it because it aligns with their personal beliefs and values [20]. Internalizing Islamic Religious Education Values in Building Student Character at MTs Nurul Islam. One of the Islamic Religious Education teachers stated:

"Students' character is formed in two ways: first, directly by linking the material to the Islamic legal basis/verbs and demonstrating this in learning activities. Second, indirectly by providing role models and creating an Islamic classroom atmosphere," said an Islamic Religious Education teacher at MTs Nurul Islam. According to Muhaimin, teachers at MTs

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Nurul Islam implement an internalization process from the stages of conveying, providing examples, and applying them in the school environment and in daily life.

Education is not only a process of transferring knowledge but also an effort to develop students' character. Western educational figures such as Klipatrick, Lickona, Brooks, and Goble reaffirm the classical view expressed by Socrates and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), that the formation of morals, ethics, and character is the primary goal of education. This view was also reinforced by Martin Luther King, who stated that the true goal of education is the combination of intelligence and character. However, according to analysis, Thomas Lickona, the development of positivism, which rejects moral truth, value relativism, personalism, pluralism, and the process of secularization of society, has led to the increasing marginalization of moral and character education, particularly in developed, secular countries, as moral teaching is often seen as synonymous with religious education [21].

Character education has become an integral part of the educational process, particularly in Islamic schools (madrasahs). Through educational interactions grounded in Islamic values, educators instill noble morals, religious attitudes, responsibility, and commendable behavior, helping students grow and develop holistically, both physically and spiritually. Character education is not only concerned with distinguishing between right and wrong, but also with instilling positive habits that serve as guidelines for action, fostering a high level of understanding and awareness in students, and fostering an attitude of caring and commitment [22].

Efforts to internalize the values of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and religious culture in shaping students' character at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk are implemented through an educational process that is oriented not only toward mastery of the material but also toward personality development and Students' morals. Interviews with the principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers indicate that the internalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk is achieved through their integration into classroom learning. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers not only provide cognitive teaching materials but also instill moral and ethical values contained in each material. In accordance with what was said by Mr. Hartomo, the principal, who said, "The integration of religious values into subjects is not a foreign thing in today's learning, considering the implementation of the independent curriculum in the Pancasila student profile, for example, being faithful, pious, and having noble character." Emphasizing that almost all of these practices are part of the same practice." This approach is said to be effective because each Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subject at MTs Nurul Islam is not a stand-alone subject, making it easier for students to remember and understand, as it is often integrated into the lessons.

In addition to the cognitive aspect, the internalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values also touches the affective domain (moral feelings). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers strive to build students' moral awareness and sensitivity through exemplary behavior, advice, and persuasive approaches. Teachers' role models are an effective medium for fostering respect, empathy, and responsibility in students. This aligns with Lickona's statement that emphasizing [21].

## 2. Environment

The environment is an educational setting that serves as a learning space for students to understand knowledge and transform it into behavioral experiences. To optimize the role of the educational environment, it should be designed to support students' learning processes effectively. An environment that aligns with educational goals will strengthen and sustain the ongoing process of internalizing values [16]. Bandura proposed that an individual's environment influences their behavior, and that an individual's behavior, in turn, influences their environment. In other words, there is a dynamic reciprocal relationship between behavior and the environment, with both continuously influencing each other in an ongoing cycle [23].

Efforts to internalize Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk are also realized through the habituation of religious behavior as a means of practicing these values (moral action). This habituation includes:

### a. Congregational Prayer

Islamic Religious Education plays a significant role in internalizing these values across all areas of learning, including through school traditions and teachers' behavioral examples [24]. The religious studies teacher usually leads congregational prayer, but when the teacher is unable to attend, another teacher usually substitutes. There are two groups for congregational prayer: male students attend the mosque near the school, while female students attend the prayer with the female teacher in the school prayer room. It is hoped that this practice will be implemented at home and in the community.

The activity most emphasized by the school is congregational prayer. This emphasis can be explained through the perspective of the behaviorist theory. Before discussing the application of behaviorism further, it is necessary first to understand the basic concepts of the theory. In an educational context, behaviorism can be understood simply as the view that all human behavior is a response to repeated stimuli, which then form habits [25].

### b. Quran Recitation

Students gather in the schoolyard every morning before classes start for a morning assembly. This is a positive activity and is carried out daily. A student representative from one of the classes leads the communal recitation. Each day, a rotating group will lead the recitation. The selection of the tadarus activity is not based on the assumption that other activities are less important or do not support moral development. Rather, the selection is primarily based on the Quran's position as a guide for Muslims in all aspects of life, both in the afterlife and in worldly affairs. The Quran aims to produce individuals with noble morals, pure feelings, and commendable behavior. The presence of the Quran conveys the concept of a perfect and comprehensive moral methodology that encompasses all aspects of human life and existence [26].

### c. Cultivating noble morals

Abuddin Nata views the development of noble morals as a process of deeply instilling noble moral values within students. This internalization process leads to these values being firmly embedded in students' cognitive structures, thereby influencing their

thinking, speaking, and behavior. This influence encompasses students' relationship with God, interactions with other humans at various social levels, their functions and roles, and their relationship with the natural environment [27].

Praying before and after lessons, as well as cultivating polite behavior, are consistently practiced in madrasah life. This practice is a form of cultivating noble morals at MTs Nurul Islam, in accordance with the reason conveyed by the Islamic Religion Teacher, "habituation in school is not only in the classroom, but throughout the school environment. Among them is the 4S culture (Smile, Greet, Say Hello, Be Polite), and then there is a culture of helping others."

### 3. Behavior

Behavior is the result of an internalization process, in which the term encompasses both an individual's actions and perspectives. These actions and perspectives are shaped by the learning process and the habits developed in the learning environment [16]. In this context, through positive habits, parents and educators naturally hope that these habits will be consistently applied in students' lives, both at school and outside. MTs Nurul Islam Musuk instills religious values reflected in students' habits and behavior, which can be observed at home.

#### 3.2. The Form of Synergy between Islamic Religious Education Learning and Religious Culture in Efforts to Revitalize Character Education

Religious culture represents a living environment that thrives and is strongly influenced by Islamic values. Religious culture in educational institutions strives to actualize religious teachings into institutional customs and norms adhered to by the school community. Religion, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is incorporated into educational traditions, encouraging the practice of religious teachings by all members of the institution throughout their time within the educational environment [28].

Creating a religious atmosphere in educational institutions is currently considered crucial, particularly in shaping students with good character, noble morals, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility. Establishing a strong religious culture in schools not only deepens students' spirituality but also creates a conducive, peaceful environment grounded in mutual respect [29].

Based on observations, the first form of synergy is seen in the alignment of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning materials with the madrasah's religious culture programs and activities. The moral values taught in PAI learning, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness, are directly put into practice through religious worship and behavior within the school environment. This demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning does not stop at the cognitive level but is strengthened through students' direct experiences within the madrasah's religious culture.

The second form of synergy is evident in the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as liaisons between the pedagogical and cultural domains. Islamic Religious Education teachers not only deliver subject matter but also actively participate in the planning, implementation, and supervision of religious and cultural activities. In terms of

supervision, Islamic Religious Education teachers at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk use a daily activity book (monitoring book) to record students' religious activities, such as attendance at congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, and other Yaumiyah worship. The use of this activity book embodies the control function in character education management. Theoretically, this aligns with Muhaimin's opinion regarding the Power Strategy, which aims to discipline students before these values are truly internalized [30]. Islamic Religious Education teachers act as role models and facilitators, validating students' character development through these records. With this activity book, supervision is no longer abstract but measurable. This synergy reinforces the values taught in the classroom through consistent teacher role models and supports a continuous monitoring system, effectively revitalizing character education.

The third form of synergy is seen in the integration of religious habits and the learning process. Religious cultural activities such as communal prayer, Quranic recitation, and congregational prayer are not treated as additional activities but as part of the madrasah's educational ecosystem. Through this integration, students experience a continuous, repeated process of internalizing values, thereby deepening their character. This synergy aligns with Thomas Lickona's view, which emphasizes that effective character education must simultaneously encompass moral knowledge, value appreciation, and concrete action [21].

Furthermore, the synergy between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and religious culture is also evident in the persuasive and humanistic character development pattern. The values taught in PAI are reinforced through a habituation and role-model approach rather than through coercion, as evidenced by observations during religious activities before the start of learning. This approach creates an educational environment that encourages students to internalize religious values consciously. Thus, the revitalization of character education is not only structural, but also cultural and personal.

Overall, based on observations and interviews, the synergy between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction and religious culture at MTs Nurul Islam Musuk plays a crucial role in revitalizing character education. This synergy enables the values of Islamic Religious Education to be enshrined in madrasah culture, so that character education becomes not merely a curricular discourse but also embodied in students' behavior and habits. These findings indicate that the revitalization of character education will be more effective if implemented through the integration of formal learning with a school culture grounded in religious values.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research confirms that renovating character education in madrasas requires strong collaboration between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching and the school's religious culture. Character education will be more successful if Islamic values are not only taught intellectually but also internalized through teacher role models, religious practices, and a consistent educational environment.

Implicitly, this research provides a conceptual contribution to the development of character education grounded in Islamic values and offers practical implications for madrasah management in aligning PAI learning with the religious culture of the entire

educational system. However, this study has limitations: it was conducted in a single location and used a qualitative approach, so the results cannot be generalized. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more educational institutions and to apply various methodological approaches to enrich studies on strengthening character education. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for educational institutions and the community in developing a generation with religious character, good morals, and social responsibility.

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