

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in the National Education System

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a key component of Indonesia's national education system, serving not only as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as an instrument for shaping students' character and moral values. This article aims to analyze the role of PAI in the national education system amidst the challenges of globalization, digitalization, and rapid social change. The research method employed is qualitative, utilizing a literature review approach (library research), by examining various recent scientific literature indexed in SINTA and other academic sources. The results of the study indicate that PAI continues to hold a strategic position in building national character, despite facing various challenges such as the dominance of cognitive approaches, low levels of technology integration, and issues of intolerance. Therefore, a reconstruction of the PAI paradigm is needed one that is more integrative, contextual, and adaptive to the times to ensure its continued relevance in national education.

Introduction

Indonesian national education is fundamentally aimed at developing students' potential so that they may become individuals who have faith in and are devoted to God Almighty, as stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a highly strategic role in shaping the spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of students. PAI functions not only as a subject but also as an instrument for shaping the character of the nation based on Islamic and national values.

However, the role of Islamic Education (PAI) in the national education system faces various complex challenges in the era of globalization and digitalization. One of the main challenges is a shift in the educational paradigm that increasingly emphasizes cognitive aspects and technical competencies, leading to a tendency to neglect affective and spiritual

aspects. This results in a weak internalization of religious values in students' daily lives (Ikhwan Ahmad et al, 2025).

In addition, advances in digital technology have also had a significant impact on learning patterns and access to information. On the one hand, technology offers great opportunities for the development of Islamic Education through digital media; on the other hand, it also creates opportunities for the spread of extremist ideologies and non-moderate religious interpretations. This situation calls for a transformation in the approach to Islamic Education so that it can better adapt to the changing times (Ahmad et al., 2025)

In a social context, the phenomena of intolerance and radicalism among students also serve as indicators that Islamic Education (PAI) has not yet fully succeeded in fostering a moderate character. This highlights a gap between the ideal goals of PAI and actual practices in the field. Therefore, efforts are needed to restructure the PAI curriculum and teaching methods to place greater emphasis on strengthening religious moderation and a critical religious mindset (Habibie et al., 2021).

The existence of Islamic Education (PAI) is also inextricably linked to the dynamics of national education policy. Through various regulations, the government continues to strive to strengthen the position of PAI within the education system; however, its implementation often faces various obstacles, such as limited teacher competence, a lack of innovation in teaching methods, and minimal integration with science and technology (Kementerian Agama, 2020).

Furthermore, from an academic perspective, Islamic Education must be able to transform from a mere transfer of knowledge into transformative education capable of fostering critical awareness among students. This is in line with the concept of contemporary Islamic education, which emphasizes the integration of religious and general knowledge, as well as the development of critical and reflective thinking skills (Yusuf, 2024).

In a global context, religious education also faces the challenges of secularization and pluralism, which call for a more inclusive and dialogical approach. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must be able to adapt to these realities without losing its Islamic identity.

Based on the above discussion, it is important to re-examine the role of PAI in national education, particularly in addressing contemporary challenges. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more relevant and effective educational policies and practices.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of a literature review. This approach was chosen because the study aims to analyze concepts, theories, and related research findings. The role of Islamic Religious Education in the national education system, based on relevant and up-to-date scholarly sources. The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from key books on Islamic education and qualitative research methods. Secondary data, on the other hand, comes from scientific journals, articles, and other important documents such as laws and regulations relevant to curriculum studies. (Sugiyono. (2019) / PDF, n.d.) Data was collected through various methods, such as reading and reviewing. Once collected, the data was analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods to identify correlations and problems, as well as ways to address them (Ali Geno Berutud kk, 2017).

Discussion/Results

1. The Strategic Role of Islamic Religious Education in the National Education System

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a highly strategic position within Indonesia's national education system. This is inextricably linked to the philosophical foundations of the Indonesian nation. The existence of PAI aligns with the core values of Pancasila, particularly the first principle, "Belief in One Supreme God," which establishes religion as the foundation of national and state life. From this perspective, PAI functions not only as a subject but also as a value system that must be internalized throughout the entire educational process.² Therefore, the existence of PAI cannot be separated from efforts to build national character (nation character building).

Legally, the existence of PAI is enshrined in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that education aims to develop students' potential so that they may become individuals who have faith in and are devoted to God Almighty. (*UU No. 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*, n.d.)

From a theoretical perspective, Islamic Education (PAI) serves not only as a vehicle for transmitting religious values but also as a means of social transformation. In other words, PAI has a responsibility to shape individuals who are not only pious in not only personally, but also socially aware and able to contribute to community life (Abdullah M.A, 2017).

However, in practice, this strategic position has not yet been fully realized. Numerous studies indicate that Islamic Education (PAI) is still often treated as a complementary subject rather than a core curriculum component that significantly influences students' character development. This is due to several factors, including the lack of integration between PAI and other subjects, as well as limited innovation in teaching methods. One example of this is evident in the continued prevalence of moral degradation, such as low social ethics, rising intolerance, and deviant behavior among students (Afdal dkk, 2019).

Critically, this situation highlights a gap between normative ideals and empirical reality. In this context, a new approach is needed that can integrate Islamic Education with all

aspects of education, so that Islamic values are not only taught theoretically but also internalized throughout the entire learning process.

Critically, the role of Islamic Education (PAI) in the national education system is determined not only by its presence in the curriculum but also by the quality of its implementation. In this regard, there is an urgent need to reconstruct the PAI paradigm to make it more relevant to the needs of the times. PAI must be able to transform from a dogmatic approach to a dialogical and critical one. Critically, the role of Islamic Education (PAI) in the national education system is determined not only by its presence in the curriculum but also by the quality of its implementation. In this regard, there is an urgent need to reconstruct the PAI paradigm to make it more relevant to the needs of the times. PAI must be able to transform from a dogmatic approach to a dialogical and critical one.

Thus, it can be concluded that the strategic position of Islamic Education (PAI) within the national education system is very strong from a normative and philosophical standpoint, but still requires strengthening in terms of implementation. To that end, synergy is needed between government policy, curriculum development, and the enhancement of teacher competencies so that PAI can function optimally as an instrument for shaping the nation's character.

2. Challenges to the Existence of Islamic Education in the Era of Globalization and Digitalization

The era of globalization and digitalization has brought about major changes in the world of education, including the role of Islamic Education. One of the main challenges is the flood of unfiltered information, which allows students to access a wide range of religious content without adequate guidance (Putri Hanifa Naufa, 2025).

This phenomenon is reinforced by research findings showing that digital media often serves as a vehicle for spreading extremist ideologies and religious radicalism. In this context, students who lack adequate digital literacy skills are at risk of being exposed to narrow and exclusive interpretations of religion (Kementerian Agama, 2019).

In addition, globalization has also brought with it secular values that tend to separate religion from public life. This poses a challenge for Islamic Education (PAI) to remain relevant in shaping students' religious identity amid the tide of modernization (Abdullah M.A, 2017).

Critically, this challenge demonstrates that Islamic Education must shift from a normative-doctrinal approach to a critical-contextual one. It is not enough for Islamic Education to simply teach “what is right”; it must also be able to explain “why something is considered right” in the context of modern life. Here are some examples from everyday life:

a. Disinformation and Religious Scholarly Authority

The phenomenon of “instant clerics” on social media is a concrete example of this challenge. Much religious content goes viral despite lacking a solid scholarly foundation; in fact, it often tends to be provocative and simplistic. This has the potential to foster a superficial understanding of religion among students (Fitriah et al., 2025).

Case Study:

Several studies show that students trust religious content on social media more than their teachers in the classroom, as they find it more engaging and easier to understand (Rukli dkk, 2025).

b. Digital Radicalism and Extremism

Digitalization has also created opportunities for the spread of radical ideologies via the internet. Extremist groups often use digital media to spread propaganda targeting young people. ((PDF) *Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community*, n.d.)

Case Study:

Religious content that labels other groups as infidels, rejects diversity, or justifies violence is still easy to find on various digital platforms (Hermansyah Yus dkk, 2024).

c. Secularization and the Spiritual Crisis

Globalization has also brought about a trend toward secularization, which tends to separate religion from public life. In the context of education, this is evident in the tendency of students to prioritize material and pragmatic aspects over spiritual values (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Case Study:

Many students view Islamic Education as a subject that is irrelevant to their future career needs.

d. The Dominance of the Cognitive Approach

Islamic Education is still dominated by a cognitive approach that emphasizes memorization of material, such as verses and hadiths, without being accompanied by the internalization of values (Abdullah, M.A).

Case Study:

Students are able to answer religious exam questions well, but do not demonstrate religious behavior in their daily lives.

e. The Competency Gap Among Islamic Education Teachers in Digitalization

Tidak semua guru PAI memiliki kemampuan yang memadai dalam utilizing digital technology. This has made PAI instruction less appealing to the digital generation. If analyzed in depth, the challenges facing PAI in the era of globalization and digitalization are not merely technical but also paradigmatic. The main problem lies in the education system's unpreparedness to respond to the changing times. PAI still tends to remain within an old paradigm that is normative and textual, while the reality of students' lives has changed significantly. Therefore, a paradigm shift in PAI is needed toward an approach that is contextual, critical, integrative, and digitally adaptive.

3. Issues in Islamic Education: Between the Cognitive and Affective Domains

One of the main problems in Islamic Education is the dominance of cognitive aspects over affective and psychomotor aspects. Islamic Education often focuses on memorization material, such as verses from the Quran and hadiths, without a deep understanding of them or their application in daily life (Muflihin Ahmad,2020).

As a result, a "split personality" phenomenon has emerged, in which students possess a solid understanding of religion, yet this is not reflected in their behavior. This indicates that the primary goal of Islamic Education as a means of character building has not yet been fully achieved.

From a modern educational perspective, effective learning must encompass three main domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Therefore, Islamic Education (PAI)

needs to develop more holistic learning approaches, such as experiential learning and project-based learning, which enable students to internalize religious values through direct experience.

Critically, this transformation requires a paradigm shift from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning, in which students become active participants in the learning process.

4. Integrating Religious Moderation into Islamic Education

Religious moderation is a critical issue in the context of national education, particularly in addressing the phenomena of intolerance and radicalism. Religious Education plays a strategic role in instilling values of moderation, such as tolerance, justice, and balance. (Kementerian Agama, 2019)

The concept of religious moderation is not only about tolerance toward differences, but also encompasses the ability to understand religious teachings comprehensively and contextually. In this regard, Islamic Education must be able to teach Islam as a religion that is a mercy to all creation.

However, the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic Education still faces various challenges, such as teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of moderation and the limited availability of relevant teaching materials. (Putri, 2025)

Critically, the integration of religious moderation into Islamic Education cannot be done in a piecemeal manner, but must be an integral part of the curriculum and the learning process. This requires policy support as well as teacher capacity building.

5. Curriculum Transformation and Teaching Methods in Islamic Education

The Islamic Education curriculum needs to be restructured to make it more relevant to the needs of the times. One approach that can be used is the integration of knowledge, which combines religious studies with science and technology. (*Transformasi Peran Guru Dalam Implementasi Dan Evaluasi Kurikulum PAI / Sulawesi Tenggara Educational Journal*, n.d.)

This approach is consistent with the contemporary Islamic educational paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of integrating revelation and reason. As a result, students not only understand religious teachings in a normative sense but are also able to apply them in the context of modern life.

In addition, teaching methods for Islamic Education should be developed by leveraging digital technologies, such as e-learning, multimedia, and online learning platforms. This not only enhances the effectiveness of learning but also makes Islamic Education more engaging for the digital generation.(As-Shidqi et al., 2025)

Critically, this transformation requires infrastructure readiness as well as improved teacher competence in the field of technology.

6. The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Strengthening the Presence of Islamic Education.

Religious education teachers play a very important role in determining success learning. Teachers do not merely serve as conveyors of material, but also as role models for students.(*Peran Guru Dalam Penguatan Eksistensi PAI - Yahoo Hasil Pencarian*, n.d.)

From a critical perspective, Islamic Education teachers must be able to serve as agents of change who not only teach religious values but also foster a critical and moderate mindset among students.(*(PDF) Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community*, n.d.)

However, in practice, many teachers have yet to fully develop innovative and context-based teaching methods. This highlights the need to enhance teachers' competencies, particularly in the areas of pedagogy and digital literacy.(Juliani et al., 2025)

For example, many teachers still rely on conventional lecture-based methods without the support of interactive learning tools. Yet today's students are more accustomed to visual and digital learning. This creates a disconnect between students' learning styles and the methods used by teachers.

To address this issue, Islamic Education teachers need to develop digital literacy skills, including the ability to use technology, evaluate information, and create innovative learning content. In this way, teachers can leverage technology as a tool to improve the quality of Islamic Education instruction (Nafisah Durrotun dkk, 2024).

In addition to digital competencies, Islamic Education teachers must also possess strong pedagogical competencies, particularly in designing character-building lessons. Teaching Islamic Education is not merely about conveying content; it must also shape students' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, teachers It is necessary to use a method diverse

learning methods, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and experiential learning (Nafisah Durrotun dkk, 2024).

In this context, Islamic Education teachers also serve as facilitators of dialogic learning. Teachers must be able to create an open classroom environment where students can discuss, ask questions, and express their opinions critically (Basyori Sansan Ihsan,, 2023).

Religious education teachers also play a role in fostering a religious culture within the school environment. A religious culture is shaped not only through classroom instruction but also through daily school activities, such as religious events, social interactions, and school policies. In this regard, religious education teachers can serve as catalysts in creating an environment conducive to the internalization of religious values (Nafisah Durrotun et al, 2024).

From a critical perspective, the role of Islamic Education teachers in strengthening the presence of Islamic Education cannot be separated from the context of the education system as a whole. Teachers cannot perform optimally without adequate policy support, curriculum, and facilities. Therefore, synergy is needed between the government, educational institutions, and the community to support the role of Islamic Education teachers.

Furthermore, Islamic Education teachers must also be able to adapt to shifts in educational paradigms that call for a more holistic and integrative approach. Teachers are not only expected to master the subject matter, but also to understand students' needs and evolving social dynamics (Nafisah Durrotun dkk, 2024).

In this context, Islamic Education teachers must be able to develop reflective competencies, namely the ability to critically evaluate teaching practices and continuously making improvements. This is important to ensure that Islamic Education remains relevant to the needs of the times.

In addition, collaboration among teachers is also a key factor in improving the quality of Islamic Education instruction. Islamic Education teachers can work together with teachers of other subjects to integrate religious values into various areas of study. This approach can help students understand that religious values are not separate from everyday life.

Overall, the role of PAI teachers in strengthening the presence of PAI is highly complex and multidimensional. Teachers serve not only as conveyors of content but also as role

models, facilitators, and agents of change. Therefore, improving the quality of PAI teachers must be a priority in efforts to strengthen religious education in Indonesia. It can thus be concluded that the presence of PAI in the national education system is highly dependent on the quality and professionalism of teachers. Competent, innovative PAI teachers with high integrity will be able to make PAI an effective instrument in shaping the character of the nation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the role of Islamic Education in the national education system remains highly relevant, yet it faces a range of complex challenges. Specifically, there are three key issues that require attention: The gap between theory and practice, where religious values have not yet been fully internalized in students' lives. 1. A lack of innovation in teaching, which makes PAI less appealing to the digital generation. 2. Global ideological challenges, such as radicalism and secularism. PAI remains normatively important, but in practice it is not yet effective because it remains predominantly cognitive and lacks adaptability to the digital age. The main challenge lies not in the existence of PAI, but in its learning paradigms and methods. Therefore, a more critical, integrative, and contextual reconstruction of PAI is needed so that it can truly shape students' character.

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