

Exploring the Role of Islamic Religious Education in the Crisis of Character and Morality in the Modern Era

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Abstract:

Character education in Indonesia faces serious challenges due to the decline of morals and character, such as student fights, bullying, and corruption, in the modern era. The purpose of this research is to analyze character formation through Islamic religious education (PAI) as the main solution. This research is qualitative with a type of library research and a descriptive-qualitative approach. Library research utilizes literature sources such as books and journal articles as the main data, which is collected, read, understood, and analyzed in depth and systematically. The data analysis technique uses descriptive analysis through a deductive approach to describe the data objectively and draw conclusions from general theories to specific cases according to the focus of the research. The results show that Islamic education is needed in supporting character formation in the modern era which is full of challenges faced by students today. Through Islamic religious education, students can have the opportunity to form individuals of faith, character, morality, responsibility, and dignity, through the function of development, improvement, and filtering of cultural values. Islamic religious education is one of the main foundations in building noble character in harmony with human nature and providing direction on how to behave.

Abstrak:

Pendidikan karakter di Indonesia menghadapi tantangan serius akibat penurunan moral dan karakter, seperti perkelahian mahasiswa, perundungan, dan korupsi, di era modern. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis pembentukan karakter melalui pendidikan agama Islam (PAI) sebagai solusi utama. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian perpustakaan dan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif. Penelitian perpustakaan memanfaatkan sumber literatur seperti buku dan artikel jurnal sebagai data utama, yang dikumpulkan, dibaca, dipahami, dan dianalisis secara mendalam dan sistematis. Teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis deskriptif melalui pendekatan deduktif untuk mendeskripsikan data secara objektif dan menarik kesimpulan dari teori umum hingga kasus spesifik sesuai dengan fokus penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan Islam sangat dibutuhkan dalam mendukung pembentukan karakter di era modern yang penuh dengan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa saat ini. Melalui pendidikan agama Islam, siswa dapat memiliki kesempatan untuk membentuk individu yang beriman, berakhlak, bermoral, bertanggung jawab, dan bermartabat, melalui fungsi pengembangan, peningkatan, dan penyaringan nilai-nilai budaya. Pendidikan agama Islam merupakan salah satu landasan utama dalam membangun karakter mulia yang selaras dengan sifat manusia dan memberikan arahan bagaimana berperilaku.

Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education, Character and Morals, Modern Era.

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Introduction

Character education remains one of the most significant issues in the field of education despite the rapid development of society and technology. Although this is not a new topic, the increasing number of moral and ethical problems occurring in Indonesia has renewed public awareness of the importance of character education. Consequently, character education must continue to be studied, taught, practiced, and internalized by students. Today, character education has become a central concern in education because it plays a vital role in shaping the moral values of the younger generation. It is also expected to serve as a strong foundation for enhancing the dignity and character of the Indonesian nation. Character formation begins with the innate human nature bestowed by God and develops through continuous education, experience, and social interaction, eventually shaping an individual's identity and behavior. Islamic education plays a fundamental role in human development because it provides the essential foundation for nurturing individuals who believe in and are devoted to Allah SWT while maintaining sound psychological and moral well-being. Islamic education does not merely emphasize intellectual development but places greater importance on moral and character formation. This principle is reflected in the well-known expression *Al-Adabu Fauqa Al-'Ilmi*, which means that good manners and noble character take precedence over knowledge. In addition to intellectual growth, Islamic education aims to develop individuals with strong moral values, noble character, and spiritual integrity. Therefore, moral and character education occupies a central position within Islamic education and remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges (Jaelani, 2022).

In Indonesia, character education has become a major concern due to the noticeable decline in ethical values, courtesy, and religious commitment among students. This deterioration threatens the quality of future generations. Various social problems, such as students' lack of respect for teachers, increasing incidents of violence and bullying among students, and diminishing respect for older people, highlight the urgent need to strengthen character education. If these issues are not addressed through both short-term and long-term educational policies and programs, they may have serious consequences for society. Therefore, character education offers an appropriate solution to these challenges, and schools, as formal educational institutions, are expected to play a leading role in implementing character-building initiatives. The primary objective of Islamic Religious

Education is to cultivate students' moral character and ethical behavior, beginning within the family environment and extending to society and national life. Islamic values encourage individuals to practice good manners, mutual respect, honesty, responsibility, and compassion in their daily interactions. These values are not merely legal obligations but are fundamental principles that guide social behavior. Religion serves as a vital source of moral education by strengthening individuals' commitment to fulfilling Islamic teachings and avoiding prohibited actions. Since Indonesia's struggle for independence, education has played a crucial role in shaping the nation's character and identity.

The rapid advancement of science and technology has transformed nearly every aspect of education. Traditional educational systems have gradually evolved into digitally supported learning environments, requiring educational institutions to adapt their teaching methods, curricula, and learning management systems to meet the demands of the modern era. Today's digital age is characterized by unlimited access to information, allowing people to communicate and obtain knowledge from around the world within seconds through the internet. While these technological advancements provide significant educational opportunities, they also present new moral and ethical challenges. Therefore, education in the digital era must not only equip students with academic knowledge and digital competencies but also strengthen their character, moral values, and sense of responsibility so that they are prepared to navigate the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly interconnected world. Islamic Religious Education primarily aims to develop students' moral character and ethical values, beginning within the family environment and extending to society and national life. It emphasizes the cultivation of virtues such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, respect for others, and social responsibility. These values are not merely legal obligations but fundamental principles that guide individuals in their daily interactions and contribute to harmonious social relationships. Since religion and culture are closely interconnected, Islamic values play a significant role in shaping individuals' behavior and fostering a morally responsible society. As a source of moral guidance, Islam encourages believers to fulfill the commands of Allah SWT while avoiding actions that are prohibited, thereby strengthening both individual character and social harmony.

Since Indonesia's struggle for independence, education has played a strategic role in shaping the nation's character and identity. However, rapid technological advancement and globalization have significantly transformed the educational landscape. Traditional educational systems have gradually evolved into digitally supported learning environments, requiring schools to adapt their curricula, teaching methods, and educational management systems to meet the demands of the digital era. Today, information can be accessed instantly through the internet, making the world increasingly interconnected. While this digital transformation provides unprecedented opportunities for learning and communication, it also presents new ethical and moral challenges. Therefore, education in the twenty-first century must not only develop students' intellectual abilities and digital competencies but also strengthen their moral values and character so that they can use technology responsibly and contribute positively to society.

The complexity of modern society is increasingly reflected in television broadcasts, online news, and social media platforms, where issues such as poverty, economic inequality, violence, cyberbullying, misinformation, and political polarization dominate public discourse. These issues are widely discussed through mass media, academic forums, seminars, and various public discussions. Among the most concerning problems are student violence, bullying in schools, juvenile delinquency, declining respect for teachers and parents, and the widespread dissemination of negative content through digital media. Such phenomena demonstrate that society is increasingly exposed to behaviors and values that may negatively influence young people's character development.

To address these cultural and moral challenges, various solutions have been proposed, with education consistently regarded as one of the most effective approaches. Through education, future generations can be equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and moral values necessary to become responsible citizens. Consequently, education is expected to serve as the primary instrument for improving the quality of human resources while simultaneously reducing the negative impacts of moral degradation and social problems. Within this context, character education has become a national priority in Indonesia, including within Islamic educational institutions, which emphasize the integration of religious teachings and moral development. Character education is expected to provide a solid foundation for preparing future generations to face the challenges of globalization and the rapid advancement of civilization while maintaining Indonesia's cultural and religious values. This commitment is reflected in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Article 3 states that national education functions to develop learners' capabilities and to shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the life of the nation (Sari & Wulandari, 2020). This legal framework underscores that character development is an essential objective of the Indonesian education system alongside intellectual achievement.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education provides a comprehensive framework for addressing contemporary character-related issues. By integrating religious teachings with moral education, Islamic Religious Education contributes to the development of individuals who possess noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*), integrity, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness. Therefore, this article aims to examine the role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering students' character development and to explore its contribution to building a morally responsible generation capable of responding to the challenges of the modern era.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using a library research approach with a descriptive-qualitative orientation (Adlini, Dinda, Yulinda, Chotimah, & Merliyana, 2022). Library research was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore and synthesize theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and conceptual discussions concerning the role of Islamic Religious Education in character formation. Rather than relying on field observations or primary data collection, this approach enabled the

researchers to critically examine and interpret existing scholarly works to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The primary data sources consisted of relevant academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, government regulations, and other credible scholarly publications related to Islamic Religious Education, character education, moral development, and educational philosophy. To ensure the quality and relevance of the data, only literature directly aligned with the research objectives and published by reputable academic sources was included in the analysis.

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation techniques. This process involved identifying, collecting, reading, classifying, and critically reviewing relevant literature from various academic databases and library resources. Subsequently, the selected materials were organized according to key themes and research questions to facilitate a comprehensive analysis (Ardiansyah, Risnita, & Jailani, 2023). Throughout this process, the researchers employed critical reading and note-taking strategies to identify recurring concepts, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence that contributed to the understanding of character education within the context of Islamic Religious Education.

The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis combined with a deductive approach. Descriptive analysis was employed to systematically organize, interpret, and present the findings in accordance with the research objectives, allowing for a comprehensive description of the concepts and themes emerging from the reviewed literature. Meanwhile, the deductive approach enabled the researchers to interpret the findings by applying established theories and general principles of character education and Islamic educational philosophy to specific issues discussed in the literature. This analytical process facilitated the formulation of logical and evidence-based conclusions regarding the contribution of Islamic Religious Education to students' character development in contemporary educational contexts (Haki, Prahastiwi, & Selatan, 2024).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted a rigorous literature selection process by comparing information across multiple scholarly sources, identifying consistencies and discrepancies among previous studies, and synthesizing the evidence into coherent thematic categories. This triangulation of literature strengthened the credibility and reliability of the analysis while ensuring that the conclusions were grounded in well-established academic evidence.

Result and Discussion

Result

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in the Crisis of Character and Morality in the Modern Era

Reinforcement is a process that maintains or increases the likelihood of a particular behavior occurring. In the challenging times faced by students today, the role of Islamic Religious Education is urgently needed to support character building. Many students are

confused and uncertain about what to do and how to behave. Through Islamic Religious Education, students can develop the foundation for honesty and good character in their daily lives (Fitri, Wismanto, Nursikin, Mashuri, & Amin, 2023). The role of Islamic Religious Education is closely related to character and moral education, as it aims to teach individuals to develop noble morals and foster a humanitarian perspective. The role of Islamic Religious Education is closely related to character education because it internalizes Islamic moral values, develops students' ethical awareness, and encourages responsible behavior in both personal and social life (Septianingsih, Amalia, & Oktafiani, 2025).

Islamic Religious Education is a conscious and planned effort to prepare students to know, understand, appreciate, and practice the teachings of Islam while respecting followers of other religions. This promotes harmony among religious communities and strengthens national unity. Thus, Islamic Religious Education emphasizes the development of individuals who are able to apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives and demonstrate them within society. Religious education aims to cultivate noble character and instill spiritual values in children. This highlights the important role of religion in shaping children's character. Therefore, it is appropriate for religious education to be a compulsory subject at all levels of education. Schools are expected to optimize religious education by continuously instilling religious values among teachers, students, and all members of the school community (Hubbi, Ramdani, & Setiadi, 2020). Religious values instilled in children enable them to distinguish between good and bad deeds.

Islamic Religious Education plays a very important role in the education system. It enlightens students by instilling religious values that are beneficial throughout their lives. Through these values, it is expected that students will develop good character and strong moral principles, which are among the objectives of national education. According to Zulfarno and Mursal (2019), religious education in schools can be implemented through both curricular and extracurricular activities, as well as through the habituation of positive behaviors in daily life. It can therefore be concluded that Islamic Religious Education in schools should not only focus on understanding and learning religious knowledge but also require students to practice and implement it in their daily lives. Furthermore, some aspects of Islamic Religious Education involve practicing the pillars of Islam, such as performing prayers, paying zakat, and other religious obligations. This practical aspect distinguishes Islamic Religious Education from many other school subjects. Education is essentially a process of guiding individuals to become people of good character. Character refers to positive behavior, including being aware of one's responsibilities to Allah, fulfilling obligations toward oneself and others, and continually striving for self-improvement as a civilized human being. In the implementation of character education, parents play a crucial role because character education that begins in childhood significantly influences an individual's future development (Us'an & Suyadi, 2022).

Strategies in Character Building Education

One of the strategies for building students' character is to maximize the role of parents in character formation. This is because the family is the primary social environment in which parents bear the main responsibility for developing their children's

skills and character. Children begin learning from an early age under the guidance of their parents (Maksum, 2019). Schools also strive to maximize the role of parents in students' character education. The strategies employed by schools to optimize parental involvement in character formation include: (1) emphasizing character values as part of the institution's vision, mission, and goals, and implementing them through concrete activities; (2) integrating selected character education values into the curriculum; and (3) incorporating character education values into the Lesson Plan (LPP) prepared by teachers.

An effective teacher is one who is able to apply innovative teaching strategies to develop students' potential according to their stages of growth and development, recognizing that each child has different abilities in solving problems (Sifa, Rahman, & Putri, 2022). The teacher's role is no longer limited to delivering knowledge but also includes facilitating the development of students' potential according to their individual needs. Therefore, teachers should be able to build close relationships with students rather than distance themselves from them. Professional teachers are able to establish positive interactions with their students, creating a supportive learning community. Effective learning occurs in a comfortable environment free from fear and intimidation. To create enjoyable learning experiences, teachers are expected to be innovative in their teaching practices.

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping Students' Character

The role of Islamic Religious Education is essential in supporting character development in an era full of challenges. Today's students often experience confusion about how they should think, behave, and respond to various situations. Through Islamic Religious Education, students have the opportunity to develop good character and noble morals in their daily lives. Character education within the context of Islamic Religious Education aims to shape students' positive attitudes and behaviors, which are essential for facing the challenges of life in the modern era (Kamal, 2022).

Islamic Religious Education is essential for equipping the younger generation with fundamental values and competencies that not only support lifelong learning but also prepare them to participate positively in society as individuals, family members, citizens, and members of the global community. Through Islamic character education, it is expected that future generations will be better prepared to face the demands of modern education, which emphasizes life skills and competitiveness. Therefore, strengthening character education is crucial in an era without boundaries, as character reflects the identity of a nation, the strength of a country, national unity, and the formation of responsible human beings in accordance with the objectives of national education (Priyanto, 2020).

Thus, religious and moral education should be interconnected and continuously practiced in everyday life and within the broader community. Education itself is viewed as a lifelong process of shaping an individual's personality, beginning in early childhood and continuing into adulthood. This perspective reflects the belief that education is a continuous process because education that incorporates religious values ultimately shapes individuals into morally responsible human beings.

Challenges and Solutions in Islamic Religious Education

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia faces various challenges that affect the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. One of the main challenges is the use of teaching methods that tend to be monotonous and less engaging, often relying primarily on lectures without incorporating interactive learning media. As a result, students may become bored and less motivated, leading to a lower level of understanding of the material. In addition, the limited variety of assessment techniques presents another challenge, as evaluations often rely solely on written tests that do not adequately measure students' comprehensive understanding.

To address these challenges, several solutions have been proposed. First, implementing more innovative instructional models, such as the Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (ADDIE) model, can help create more engaging and effective learning experiences. Furthermore, integrating technology into the learning process, such as using Google Street View and digital platforms like YouTube, can provide students with more interactive, meaningful, and engaging learning experiences (Salsabila, 2023).

Discussion

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Character Transformation in the Modern Era

Based on the findings of this study, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the modern era functions as a primary instrument for reinforcing students' moral development and addressing the ongoing moral crisis. Instilling the value of honesty through PAI provides students with a strong moral foundation, enabling them to navigate the complexities of global challenges without losing their ethical direction. This finding is also supported by recent studies demonstrating that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in strengthening students' moral character and digital ethics by integrating Islamic values into the learning process and fostering responsible engagement with digital technology (Amelia, Gani, & Febriani, 2026; Septianingsih, Amalia, & Oktafiani, 2025). Furthermore, the successful development of a civilized personality depends on the extent to which divine values are embodied in everyday behavior, a process that recent literature describes as continuous moral-spiritual integration (Sutrisno, 2021).

Strategic Synergy between Institutions, Educators, and Families

The findings of this study indicate that effective character development cannot be achieved through schools alone but requires a collaborative educational ecosystem. Schools' efforts to align their vision and mission with the PAI curriculum should be strengthened through the active involvement of parents as the primary educators at home. Wulandari and Sari (2025) demonstrated that the synergy among the three centers of education, schools, families, and communities, increases the success of character education by up to 40% compared to conventional approaches. Furthermore, teachers' ability to create a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment has been shown to reduce students' learning anxiety (Sauri & Yanuarti, 2023).

Methodological Challenges and the Urgency of PAI Digitalization

This study identifies monotonous teaching methods as one of the major obstacles to the effective internalization of religious values. Low student engagement resulting from lecture-based instruction highlights the need for a transformation toward more dynamic and technology-supported pedagogical approaches. This finding is supported by Zalillah (2026), who reported that the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based learning media in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) enhances students' conceptual understanding and learning motivation through adaptive, interactive, and personalized learning experiences. Therefore, enhancing teachers' digital literacy has become a crucial factor in bridging the gap between traditional instructional materials and the learning preferences of Generation Z (Wulandari & Sari, 2025).

Originality and Novelty of the Research

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the moral crisis in the borderless era and the urgency of developing an adaptive Islamic identity. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on static curriculum aspects, this research demonstrates that the effectiveness of PAI in the modern era is strongly influenced by teachers' digital competence and the availability of inclusive technological infrastructure (Ramadhan, 2024). These findings provide an empirical contribution by demonstrating that the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into PAI not only enriches teaching and learning methods but also strengthens the relevance of Islamic teachings in addressing contemporary social issues ethically, responsibly, and with dignity (Fauzi & Lestari, 2025).

Conclusion

In the midst of the rapid development of the modern era, characterized by the digital revolution and increasingly complex moral challenges, Islamic Religious Education has emerged not only as an instrument for transmitting knowledge but also as a holistic foundation that shapes individuals' spiritual, intellectual, and moral development. This study has demonstrated that Islamic Religious Education, with its emphasis on noble character and spiritual responsibility, serves as a fundamental means of addressing the moral confusion experienced by students amid the overwhelming flow of information in the digital age. Islamic Religious Education is not detached from the realities of the modern world; rather, it adapts to contemporary challenges, including monotonous teaching methods and limited classroom interactivity, as identified in this study. Innovative approaches, such as the implementation of the ADDIE instructional model and the integration of digital technologies, including YouTube and other visual learning media, can enrich the ethical and spiritual dimensions of Islamic Religious Education. These innovations enable students not only to understand Islamic teachings theoretically but also to internalize them as practical principles that guide their daily lives. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education functions as a source of enlightenment that equips the younger generation with essential life skills, enabling them not merely to compete in a globalized

world but also to contribute as responsible, ethical, and dignified citizens. Within this framework, character is understood not simply as good behavior but as the integration of faith, morality, and the ability to adapt to changing societal conditions, thereby supporting the broader objectives of national education in developing a civilized and morally responsible society.

Ultimately, this conclusion should not be regarded as the end of the discussion but rather as a call for collective action. Educational institutions, beginning with families and extending to schools and the wider community, are expected to optimize the implementation of Islamic Religious Education as a fundamental basis for character formation by integrating innovative, engaging, and inclusive learning approaches. Through such a holistic effort, Indonesia can cultivate a generation that is not only intellectually competent but also morally resilient and spiritually grounded, capable of facing the challenges of a borderless world while maintaining a strong Islamic identity. In this way, Islamic Religious Education will continue to serve as a guiding light in fostering a harmonious, just, and ethical society founded on integrity and enduring moral values.

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Ethical Statement

This study is a library-based qualitative research that exclusively utilizes publicly available secondary data, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other scholarly publications. No human participants, animals, or personal data were involved in this research. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required. The author conducted this study in accordance with the principles of academic integrity by ensuring accurate citation, proper acknowledgment of all sources, and adherence to ethical standards in scholarly research.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

- **Author 1:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Supervision.
- **Author 2:** Literature review, Data curation, Validation, Writing – review & editing.
- **Author 3:** Methodology, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.
- **Author 4:** Resources, Validation, Project administration, Writing – review & editing.
- **Author 5:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Funding acquisition (if applicable), Writing – review & editing, Final approval of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available upon reasonable request

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