

IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING IN IMPROVING STUDENT CHARACTER AT SDN CISALAK PASAR 3 DEPOK

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Abstrak

This study examines the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in improving student character at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok, a public elementary school with 367 students from heterogeneous socio-economic backgrounds. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal, two PAI teachers, homeroom teachers of grades IV–VI, and six students, complemented by passive-participation observation and documentation. The analysis employed the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation model, which covers six variables: policy standards and objectives, resources, characteristics of implementing agents, inter-organizational communication, disposition of implementers, and social, economic, and political conditions. The findings show that character-based PAI learning is guided by the Merdeka Curriculum and the Strengthening Character Education policy (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 20/2018), although specific written technical guidelines have not yet been formulated, so implementation remains bottom-up and driven by teachers' initiative. Facilities, funding, and digital infrastructure are considered adequate, and PAI teachers demonstrate strong competence, commitment, and exemplary conduct. Coordination among the principal, teachers, and parents runs fairly well, although it remains informal. Teachers' disposition toward character-based PAI learning is very positive, while the student composition, which is predominantly Muslim (94.8%) and drawn from families with stable economic conditions, further supports the internalization of religious values. This study recommends the development of written technical guidelines, structured teacher training, and standardized character assessment instruments to strengthen the consistency and sustainability of implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in building a civilized and dignified nation. In the context of Islamic education, education is understood not merely as a process of transferring knowledge, but as an effort to form a whole human being encompassing

intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions in an integrated manner. Quality education does not only produce academically intelligent learners, but also shapes individuals with firm values, character, and integrity as provisions for living in society.

In the context of Islamic education, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic role that is not limited to transferring religious knowledge cognitively, but also extends to shaping learners' character in a holistic and comprehensive way. Strong and noble character is the main foundation for realizing a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also faithful, pious, of noble morals, and possessed of good personality, as envisioned by the national education goals in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System.

The formation of student character has become an increasingly relevant and urgent issue in the current era of globalization, in which the influence of foreign cultures and information technology is so massive and difficult to contain in shaping the mindset, lifestyle, and behavior of the younger generation. Various negative phenomena such as juvenile delinquency, moral degradation, bullying, violence in the school environment, disrespectful behavior toward teachers and parents, and the misuse of social media show that character education needs serious attention and comprehensive handling from all parties, especially educational institutions as the front line in forming the nation's next generation.

Character education is essentially not only about teaching what is right and what is wrong, but more than that, it is about instilling habits (habituation) of doing good so that learners understand, feel, and are willing to do good continuously. Lickona (2013), one of the leading figures in character education, states that good character comprises three interrelated components, namely moral knowing (knowing the good), moral feeling (feeling the good), and moral action (doing the good). These three components must be developed synergistically in the learning process so that the character that is formed is authentic, deep, and sustainable, rather than merely temporary or coerced behavior.

In the context of formal education, PAI at the elementary school level holds a very important and strategic position. Elementary school age is the golden age for character formation in children, because during this phase the child's brain develops very rapidly and readily receives both positive and negative stimuli. Developmental psychologists such as Piaget and Vygotsky argue that the experiences and values a child receives at this age form a foundation of personality that tends to persist into adulthood. Therefore, the

implementation of PAI learning that is appropriate and effective, and that reaches students' affective and psychomotor domains, not only the cognitive, is crucial in shaping a generation of Islamic character.

SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok, as a public primary education institution located in an urban environment, bears a great responsibility to carry out PAI learning optimally and meaningfully. The school is located in a heterogeneous environment, with students of highly diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and levels of religiosity. Most students come from economically active families in which parents work full time, so the time available for religious education guidance at home is relatively limited. This condition places an ever greater responsibility on the school, especially PAI teachers, for the formation of students' Islamic character.

This heterogeneity requires the implementation of PAI to take a comprehensive, adaptive, and contextual approach so that religious values are truly internalized in students' daily lives, rather than being mere cognitive knowledge memorized for examinations. PAI teachers are required not only to master the subject matter, but also to have high pedagogical ability, sensitivity to students' socio-psychological conditions, and creativity in packaging learning so that it is engaging, relevant, and has a real impact on students' behavior in everyday life.

Initial observations at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok found a number of interesting yet complex phenomena related to the delivery of PAI and its impact on student character formation. On one hand, PAI teachers have actively and creatively implemented various innovative learning methods and approaches, such as role modeling, habituation of religious activities, lectures combined with interactive discussion, demonstrations of worship practices, and the use of technology-based learning media. On the other hand, there are still quite serious challenges in the form of students' lack of consistency in daily behavior that should reflect the Islamic values taught at school.

The first challenge is the gap between religious knowledge and religious practice. Many students are able to memorize PAI material well and obtain high scores on examinations, yet their daily behavior, such as honesty, discipline, courtesy, and concern for others, does not fully reflect the Islamic values they have learned. This indicates that PAI learning still touches the cognitive aspect more than the affective and psychomotor aspects.

The second challenge relates to external factors, namely the influence of the family

environment and peer associations that are not always in line with the values instilled at school. Students who are taught at school to be honest, respectful, and responsible, but who do not receive similar reinforcement at home or in their social circles, tend to experience value disorientation, which poses its own challenge for PAI teachers in designing learning whose impact is felt outside the classroom as well.

The third challenge is the limited time allocation for PAI in the primary education curriculum. With only two to three lesson hours available per week, PAI teachers must make the most of the time available not only to deliver religious knowledge, but also to instill character values that require repeated and consistent habituation, which demands creativity and innovation from teachers in designing learning strategies that are compact, meaningful, and oriented toward character formation.

Preliminary interviews with PAI teachers at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok revealed serious and sustained efforts to integrate character values into every PAI learning process. PAI teachers act not only as instructors who transfer knowledge, but also as educators, moral mentors, and role models for students, always trying to connect the subject matter with students' real-life contexts and to build positive emotional relationships so that the instilling of character values takes place naturally and sincerely.

The implementation of PAI learning in improving student character encompasses various interrelated and mutually supportive aspects, ranging from careful lesson planning oriented toward character formation, the selection of appropriate and varied methods, the use of relevant and contextual learning media, and the creation of a conducive, Islamic-nuanced learning environment, to a comprehensive evaluation system that measures not only cognitive aspects but also students' attitudes and behavior. In addition, close synergy and cooperation among PAI teachers, the principal, parents, and the entire school community are the main determinants of success in forming student character holistically and sustainably.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for a deeper and more systematic study of the extent to which the implementation of PAI learning is effective and has a real, measurable impact on student character formation at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok. Comprehensive, empirically based research is needed to objectively reveal the actual condition of PAI implementation at the school, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and find strategies and solutions that can increase the effectiveness of PAI learning in producing a generation of noble character.

To analyze these problems in a measurable and comprehensive manner, this study uses the policy implementation model developed by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), which comprises six main variables: (1) policy standards and objectives, (2) resources, (3) characteristics of implementing agents, (4) inter-organizational communication, (5) disposition of implementers, and (6) economic, social, and political conditions. This model was chosen because it is relevant and comprehensive in mapping the implementation process of an educational program holistically, from the planning aspect to the contextual factors that influence the success of implementation in the field. Based on the above background, research on the implementation of PAI learning in improving student character at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok is very important and urgent to conduct.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, combined with field observation and a review of relevant reference literature, to explore in depth the processes, meanings, and impacts of implementing PAI learning in improving student character at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok, along with its supporting and inhibiting factors. Creswell (2014) defines the qualitative approach as a research process based on a methodology that investigates a social phenomenon and human problem. According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena of what is experienced by research subjects, for example behavior, perceptions, motivation, and actions, holistically, by means of description in the form of words and language in a specific natural context.

In terms of type, this is descriptive research using the case study method. A case study is used to investigate a particular case in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundary between the phenomenon and its context cannot be clearly separated (Yin, 2014). The "case" in this study is the practice of implementing PAI learning in improving student character at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok.

The type of data used in this study is qualitative data, that is, non-numerical data that generally describes actual conditions in the environment under study, including the results of interviews, observations, documentation, and field notes related to problems that have occurred (Sugiyono, 2019). The characteristics of qualitative data in this study include: (1) descriptive, portraying the phenomenon of PAI implementation in detail and in context; (2) oriented toward meaning and process; (3) prioritizing depth of

information; and (4) obtained in naturalistic situations without manipulation of variables.

According to Lofland as cited in Moleong (2017), the main sources in qualitative research are words and actions, while documents serve only as supplements. For analytical purposes, this study uses primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the principal of SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok, two PAI teachers who teach in the lower and upper grades, the homeroom teachers of grades IV, V, and VI, and six students (two students from each of grades IV, V, and VI), as well as through observation of the implementation of PAI learning. Secondary data include Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Education regulations related to PAI learning, the school's internal academic documents, the PAI syllabus and lesson plans (RPP), and the school profile and other relevant documents related to character education.

Three data collection techniques were used in this study. First, semi-structured interviews conducted in depth (in-depth interviews) with the informants to obtain information directly from the source. Second, observation was carried out with passive participation, in which the researcher was only present at the location without taking part in the activities; the objects of observation were grouped into three elements, namely place (classrooms, the school prayer room, and the school environment), actors (PAI teachers, the principal, and students), and activities (the PAI learning process, religious habituation activities, and students' everyday social interactions). Third, documentation was used as a complement to the observation and interviews, covering the school profile, vision and mission, teacher and staff data, student data, facilities and infrastructure, character education work programs, the PAI syllabus and lesson plans, religious activity reports, school rules, habituation activity archives, and curriculum documents that integrate character values.

This study is qualitative research with a case study design, so the term "variable" is understood as a research focus or construct that is operationalized into dimensions and indicators. There are two main constructs, namely the implementation of PAI learning as the main variable, and student character as the outcome variable, because student character is viewed as a result of the PAI learning implementation process at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok.

Data analysis was carried out based on the interactive model of analysis developed

by Miles and Huberman (1992), covering the stages of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. At the data collection stage, the researcher recorded the interview results, prepared verbatim transcripts, made field notes, and collected the school's official documents related to PAI learning and character education. Data reduction means summarizing, selecting the main points, focusing on important matters, and looking for themes and patterns. Data display was done primarily through narrative text, while conclusion drawing/verification was carried out repeatedly, with initial conclusions being tentative until supported by strong and consistent evidence from subsequent data collection stages.

This research was conducted at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok, located in Cimanggis District, Depok City, West Java, from February to July 2026, covering the submission of the title, preparation of the proposal, obtaining the research permit, the proposal seminar, data collection through classroom observation and document collection, interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, data processing and analysis, up to the writing of the thesis.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The following research results and discussion present the findings obtained from the field regarding the implementation of PAI learning in improving student character at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok, organized according to the six variables of the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation model, followed by a cross-variable discussion of their implications for the process of character formation and students' moral-spiritual quality.

1. Data Description

a. School Profile and General Overview of Respondents

SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok (NPSN 20254245) is a public elementary school under the Depok City Education Office that has been established since 1976. In the 2025/2026 academic year, the school has 367 learners (187 male and 180 female) spread across 12 study groups at six grade levels. Most of the learners, 348 people or 94.8 percent, are Muslim, while 19 learners (5.2 percent) are Christian, and 97.0 percent of learners are within the ideal elementary school age range of 6–12 years. The school is supported by 18 teaching and administrative staff, four of whom are civil servants (PNS), seven government employees with work agreements (PPPK), and seven honorary staff, led by the principal, Yadi Yusriadi, M.Pd. Facilities relevant to the implementation of PAI include

eight classrooms, one prayer room (mushola) used for congregational prayers and Qur'an recitation (tadarus), one library, one computer laboratory, and audio-visual learning media, funded through School Operational Assistance (BOS), the Regional Budget (APBD), and voluntary contributions from students' parents. The school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum at all grade levels and integrates Islamic values into daily, weekly, monthly, and annual religious activities as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Character-Building Religious Activities at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok

No.	Activity Category	Program	Frequency
1	Daily	Praying before and after lessons; reciting short surahs; greeting and shaking hands with teachers; Qur'an recitation (tadarus) and memorization	Every school day
2	Weekly	Congregational Dhuha and Zuhr prayers at the mushola; halaqah on Islamic values every Friday morning	Weekly
3	Monthly	Commemoration of major Islamic holidays (Prophet's Birthday, Isra Mi'raj); religious talks and value-sharing sessions	Monthly
4	Annual	Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha celebrations; Ramadan intensive Islamic boarding program (pesantren kilat); collection and distribution of zakat fitrah; infaq and alms	Annual

As shown in Table 1, character education at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok is integrated into a layered cycle of religious activities, from daily and weekly to monthly and annual. This layered habituation model reflects the school's effort to go beyond classroom learning toward continuous and repeated practice, as required in the process of character formation (Lickona, 2013).

The respondents in this study included the principal, two PAI teachers (lower and upper grades), three homeroom teachers (grades IV, V, and VI), and six students. All respondents had experience relevant to their respective roles, thereby providing the researcher with data on policy formulation, day-to-day implementation, and the real experience of character-based PAI learning.

2. Findings Based on the Van Meter and Van Horn Implementation Variables

a. Policy Standards and Objectives

The results show that SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok has made PAI learning one of the main instruments in forming student character, guided by the Merdeka Curriculum and the Strengthening Character Education (PPK) program regulated in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 20 of 2018, which requires every education unit to integrate character values into every basic competency taught, while the technical details

are left to each education unit. As a result, there are no specific written technical guidelines at the school level, and there has been no structured dissemination of the objectives of character-based PAI learning to all stakeholders; implementation remains bottom-up, driven by the teachers' own pedagogical initiative and their awareness of the urgency of forming noble morals in this modern era.

The principal explained that although the school does not yet have specific, written technical guidelines, PAI teachers are encouraged to implement character-oriented learning wisely and consistently, so that students not only master the cognitive aspects of religion but are also able to internalize noble moral values in their daily lives, with planning and innovation that remain bottom-up, emerging from the teachers' creativity and sensitivity to students' needs. The implementation of character-based PAI learning at this school is currently at the development stage, meaning that the program is already running routinely, but the strengthening of the evaluation system and the standardization of character indicators are still being refined. From the PAI teachers' perspective, the objectives of character-based learning are more pragmatic and contextual, namely to form consistent worship habits, foster honesty and trustworthiness, increase social concern, and build self-discipline that arises from awareness of religious values, not merely external pressure, in line with the national education goal of developing students' potential holistically in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

b. Resources

Resources, including funding, time, facilities and infrastructure, and human resource capability, are considered fairly adequate. Facilities and infrastructure supporting PAI learning include the prayer room, prayer equipment, Qur'ans, religious books, and audio-visual-based learning media. In terms of funding, learning and character-strengthening activities are supported by School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds, the Depok City APBD, and parental participation, which enable the school to hold activities such as the commemoration of major Islamic holidays, the Ramadan intensive Islamic boarding program, and religious extracurricular activities.

PAI teachers at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok have relevant educational backgrounds and a high commitment to student character formation; however, most have not received specific training on character-based learning strategies and still rely on the lecture method, although it is beginning to be combined with role modeling and habituation.

Most of their abilities derive from personal experience and knowledge sharing among fellow teachers, indicating individual initiative to adapt that has not yet been fully facilitated institutionally through structured training programs.

c. Characteristics of Implementing Agents

PAI teachers, as the main implementing agents together with the principal and the entire school community, demonstrate high commitment, professional attitude, adequate pedagogical competence, trustworthiness, and full responsibility in educating student character. The teachers regard teaching as part of worship and da'wah to Allah SWT, so their intrinsic motivation in carrying out the task of student character formation is very strong. One PAI teacher explained that she always links PAI material to character formation in every lesson, because this approach has proven effective and relevant to the needs of today's students, since good PAI learning must touch the heart, not merely fill the mind. This orientation reflects the teacher's role not merely as a subject instructor, but as an educator, spiritual mentor, and moral role model for students.

d. Inter-Organizational Communication and Implementing Activities

Coordination among PAI teachers, the principal, homeroom teachers, and parents is conducted through direct meetings as well as digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, which serve as a venue for teachers to share experiences, discuss innovations, and solve problems in character-based PAI learning. Although it runs fairly well, this communication remains informal and lacks a specific, structured coordination system, an aspect identified as needing to be strengthened to ensure consistent implementation across all classes and grade levels.

e. Disposition of Implementers

The disposition, or attitude, of PAI teachers toward character-based learning is very positive and proactive. Teachers understand the urgency of PAI in shaping the character of Generation Z students who were born and raised in the digital era, so they consistently seek learning methods and approaches that are relevant, contextual, and engaging for students without departing from Islamic values, reflecting a high level of motivation and commitment that goes beyond merely delivering material.

f. Social-Economic-Political Environment

Social, economic, and political environmental conditions generally support implementation. Most students come from middle-to-upper-income families who care deeply about their children's religious and moral education, so students can focus more

on internalizing character values without being burdened by economic problems. The predominantly Muslim composition of the student body (94.8 percent) further strengthens the foundation for intensive PAI-based character-building programs. Nevertheless, the influence of digital media and the social environment outside school remains a contextual challenge that requires continuous attention from both teachers and parents.

Cross-Variable Discussion

Cross-variable analysis using the Van Meter and Van Horn framework shows that the implementation of PAI-based character education at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok has in general run fairly well, as evidenced by the integration of character values in the learning process, the habituation of religious activities, and the role modeling shown by the teachers (Zubaedi, 2012; Mulyasa, 2018). The most crucial gap lies in the absence of standardized written technical guidelines and structured teacher training, which causes variation among teachers in designing character-oriented learning explicitly: some teachers have developed mature and explicit strategies, while others still tend to be limited to conventional delivery of material.

This finding is in line with the view of Miles and Huberman (1994) that policies implemented without adequate training and institutional support tend to be implemented inconsistently in the field. This finding also reinforces Lickona's (2013) argument that character formation requires synergistic development of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which in the context of SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok is most strongly supported through habituation and role modeling, not merely through cognitive learning. Overall, the implementation of PAI learning at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok illustrates that the success of character education policy at the school level depends not only on the clarity of formal regulations, but also on the alertness, commitment, and disposition of the implementing teachers, supported by a social, economic, and communication environment conducive to the continued internalization of values.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion using the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation framework, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the implementation of PAI learning in improving student character at SDN Cisalak Pasar 3 Depok.

First, in terms of policy standards and objectives, implementation is guided by the Merdeka Curriculum and the Strengthening Character Education program in accordance with Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 20 of 2018, which aims to equip students with religious knowledge while fostering character values such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, social concern, and tolerance, although specific written technical guidelines have not yet been formulated at the school level.

Second, resources are fairly adequate. School funding comes from various channels (BOS, APBD, and voluntary contributions), and facilities and infrastructure have moved toward digitalization, including projectors, laptops, a digital library, and interactive whiteboards that support character-based PAI learning.

Third, the implementing agents, namely the PAI teachers, demonstrate strong quality and are the key factor in success. They show high commitment, a professional attitude, adequate pedagogical competence, trustworthiness, and full responsibility, regarding teaching as a form of worship and da'wah that fosters strong intrinsic motivation.

Fourth, inter-organizational communication runs fairly well, although it remains informal and lacks a specific coordination system. Communication among PAI teachers, the principal, and related parties is conducted through meetings and digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, which serve as a venue for sharing experiences and resolving implementation challenges.

Fifth, the disposition of PAI teachers is very positive and proactive. Teachers understand the urgency of character-based PAI learning for the generation of students growing up in the digital era and consistently pursue learning approaches that are relevant, contextual, and engaging without compromising Islamic values.

Sixth, social, economic, and political conditions generally support implementation. Most students come from middle-to-upper-income backgrounds with high parental concern for religious and moral education, so the internalization of character values can proceed with greater focus, while the predominantly Muslim composition of the student body (94.8 percent) provides a strong foundation for PAI-based character-building programs.

Overall, the implementation of PAI learning in improving student character at SDN Cislak Pasar 3 Depok has run fairly well, marked by the integration of character values in the learning process, the habituation of religious activities, and the role modeling

shown by teachers. However, the absence of written technical guidelines, limited structured teacher training, and a coordination system that remains informal continue to be the main challenges. It is recommended that the principal develop written technical guidelines and standardized character assessment instruments; that PAI teachers continue to develop character-based pedagogical strategies and digital literacy; that parents actively reinforce character values at home; and that the Depok City Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs issue more specific technical standard operating procedures accompanied by comprehensive and sustainable teacher training programs. Future researchers are advised to broaden the scope of research through a comparative approach across several elementary schools in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of character-based PAI implementation in diverse school contexts.

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