Transformation of Islamic Education: Fostering Exemplary Character through Integrated Curriculum in Islamic Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the development of an Islamic character-based curriculum in Al Qalam Kendari Integrated Islamic Elementary School as a solution to create a generation that has superior character and integrity. The purpose of this article is to identify effective strategies and methods in developing an Islamic character-based curriculum and to evaluate the results of implementing the curriculum. The research method used is a literature study and a case study involving interviews, observation and documentation at Al Qalam Kendari Integrated Islamic Elementary School which has implemented a character-based curriculum. The results of the study show that the development of an Islamic character-based curriculum at the school has succeeded in creating a learning environment that encourages students to internalize Islamic values and develop superior characters such as integrity, responsibility, cooperation and independence. Implementation of an Islamic character-based curriculum is an effective approach to achieving the goals of Islamic education with integrity and character.

Keywords: Character, Curriculum, Education, SDIT.

ABSTRAK: *Artikel ini membahas pengembangan kurikulum berbasis karakter Islami di Sekolah Dasar (SD) Islam Terpadu Al Qalam Kendari sebagai solusi untuk mewujudkan generasi yang memiliki karakter unggul dan berintegritas. Tujuan dari artikel ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi strategi dan metode efektif dalam pengembangan kurikulum berbasis karakter Islami serta mengevaluasi hasil implementasi kurikulum tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi literatur dan studi kasus dengan melibatkan wawancara, observasi dan*

dokumentasi disekolah tersebut yang telah menerapkan kurikulum berbasis karakter. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan kurikulum berbasis karakter Islami di sekolah tersebut telah berhasil menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendorong peserta didik untuk menginternalisasi nilai-nilai Islami dan mengembangkan karakter unggul seperti integritas, tanggung jawab, kerjasama, dan kemandirian. Implementasi kurikulum berbasis karakter Islami merupakan pendekatan yang efektif untuk mencapai tujuan pendidikan Islami yang berintegritas dan berkarakter.

Kata kunci*: Karakter, Kurikulum, Pendidikan, SDIT.*

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental cornerstone in shaping the character and quality of forthcoming generations, as highlighted (Manalu, et. al, 2022). The role of schools is pivotal in instilling strong Islamic values and fostering exemplary character in children, as emphasized by Pratama in 2019. To achieve these objectives, the development of an Islamic character-based curriculum in schools has emerged as a promising avenue. This research seeks to scrutinize effective strategies and methods employed in the creation of such a curriculum, aiming to assess the outcomes of its implementation.

In the contemporary era of globalization, the challenges associated with nurturing a generation that excels not only academically but also in character are growing increasingly intricate, as noted by Umayah and Riwanto (2020). Amidst the rapidly changing and diverse information landscape, the necessity for a robust foundation in character development becomes more pronounced, as articulated by Fatmawati in 2019. Recognizing the urgency of this need, the school acknowledges the significance of Islamic character as a sturdy basis for cultivating a well-rounded generation capable of making positive contributions to society.

Integrated Islamic schools represent institutions that strive to optimize the fusion of religious and general knowledge within their curriculum framework, as asserted (Sukhoiri, 2022). This integration can manifest explicitly in the learning process. Several integrated concepts characterize these schools: firstly, collaboration between educators and students' parents in the educational process; secondly, integration within the curriculum itself, amalgamating national, integrated Islamic, and institutional curricula; thirdly, harmonized collaboration among all stakeholders, as explored (Rojii et. Al, 2019).

Past studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impact of Islamic character-based curricula on shaping the character of children. Rahman & Wassalwa's research (2019), for instance, revealed that such curricula play a significant role in enhancing religiousness, ethics, and positive behavior among students. Similarly, Sinaga et al.'s study in 2022 suggested that an approach focused on character development in Islamic education can contribute to fostering independence, cooperation, and responsibility in children. While numerous studies have explored the influence of Islamic character-based curricula, this research stands out by uniquely analyzing the specific strategies and methods employed in developing character-based curricula within the schools under investigation.

This study aims to address a critical knowledge gap by comprehensively examining how the implementation of an Islamic character-based curriculum effectively encourages students to internalize Islamic values and cultivate outstanding character traits. The primary objective is to identify the most effective strategies and methods employed in the development of these curricula within the researched schools. Additionally, the study seeks to evaluate the outcomes of implementing the curriculum, focusing on how it creates a conducive learning environment that motivates students to internalize Islamic values, fostering traits such as integrity, responsibility, cooperation, and independence.

In conclusion, this research is poised to offer valuable insights into the efficacy of developing Islamic character-based curricula within Islamic elementary school environments. By delving into the specifics of the strategies and methods employed, the study aims to bridge existing knowledge gaps and contribute new perspectives to the understanding of Islamic character education. Furthermore, the research is expected to provide valuable guidance for educators and policymakers in their efforts to cultivate a generation characterized by excellence and integrity in their character development. This holistic approach to character education is crucial in shaping well-rounded individuals who not only excel academically but also contribute positively to their communities and society at large.
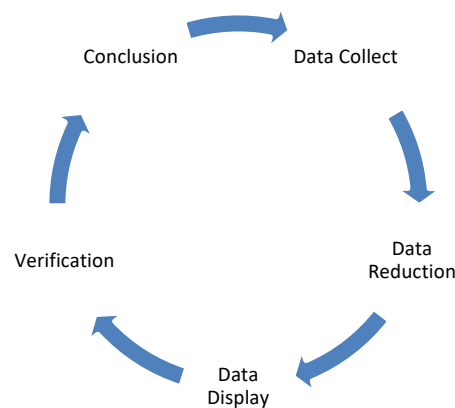
METHODS

This research adopts a case study approach to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the development of an Islamic character-based curriculum at Al Qalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School (SDIT) in Kendari. The utilization of a case study allows for an in-depth exploration of the curriculum's context, processes, and outcomes, facilitating a nuanced understanding of its implementation (Raharjo, 2017). To establish a robust theoretical foundation, the initial phase involves gathering secondary data from scholarly literature pertaining to the development of Islamic character-based curricula and their effectiveness in shaping children's characters (Ulfah, 2022).

The subsequent stage of the research entails on-site investigations at the school. This includes interviews with teachers and staff, direct observation of the character-based curriculum in action, and documentation of relevant supporting materials. Key informants for this study encompass the School Principal, Administrative Staff, teachers, parents, and students. The collected data will undergo qualitative analysis to discern effective strategies and methods employed in the development of the character-based curriculum.

The data analysis in this research follows an interactive approach, encompassing three interrelated activities: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, as illustrated in Figure 1. This methodological framework ensures a systematic and thorough exploration of the collected information, facilitating the identification of successful strategies and methods. Through this meticulous process, the study aims to offer valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of Islamic character-based curriculum development at Al Qalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School. The combination of theoretical insights from existing literature and empirical findings from on-site research is expected to

contribute significantly to the understanding of effective practices in character education within Islamic educational settings.

Figure 1 Interactive Analysis Model Diagram (Social Research Methodology by Usman, 2017)

Furthermore, the implementation outcomes of this curriculum will be evaluated with a focus on the character development of the students.

RESULTS

The successful implementation of an Islamic character-based curriculum at Al Qalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Kendari has effectively fostered a conducive learning environment for the internalization of Islamic values and the development of exemplary character in students. This study highlights various strategies and methods that prove effective in shaping an Islamic character-based curriculum. The essential foundation lies in adopting a holistic approach to seamlessly integrate Islamic values throughout the entire curriculum. Employing active and creative teaching methods, such as discussions centered on Islamic values, simulations, and collaborative projects, facilitates students in grasping and applying character concepts in their day-to-day lives. This resonates with the school's vision of establishing a nationally acclaimed Islamic institution dedicated to nurturing intelligent, skilled, and morally upright generations.

SDIT Al Qalam Kendari's full-day school program, operational from Monday to Friday, aims to instill outstanding character values. In its true essence, the full-day school concept is characterized by extended learning hours compared to conventional schools, fostering more intensive interaction between students and their educators (Hawi, 2015). As per the insights gathered from an interview with the school principal, the face-to-face learning approach at the school primarily focuses on guidance and habituation. Shared lunch activities are also strategically utilized for cultivating and habituating Islamic etiquette. Opting for full-day school helps parents proactively prevent and counteract potential engagement of their children in negative activities (Wicaksono, 2018). The school's religious activities commence with congregational Dhuha prayer, followed by memorization and ITQ (Iqra, Tahfiz, Qur'an), and culminate with congregational Zuhr and Asr prayers.

The successful implementation of the Islamic character-based curriculum at the school has effectively promoted the internalization of Islamic values among students, as highlighted by Bahri (2015). Building upon the research conducted by Erwanto in 2019, it is evident that the JSIT curriculum application plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character by infusing Islamic values across various subjects. Through diverse activities, including lectures, religious studies, and group discussions, students gain a profound understanding of Islamic ethics and morals, actively incorporating these principles into their daily lives (Haron, et.all 2020).

This curriculum has proven to be highly effective in fostering outstanding character traits among students. Observable enhancements in aspects such as integrity, responsibility, cooperation, and independence demonstrate the positive impact. Students exhibit a heightened awareness of the significance of aligning their behavior with Islamic teachings and take the initiative to serve as exemplary role models for their peers.

The school's learning environment plays a pivotal role in character development. The active involvement of teachers, positive interactions among students, and an approach rooted in Islamic values within the school's regulations collectively create a supportive atmosphere for character growth. Research findings underscore that the strategies and methods employed in curriculum development successfully establish a learning environment that motivates students to internalize Islamic values and cultivate exceptional character traits. This offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of Islamic education that transcends mere academic focus, prioritizing the development of robust and principled character traits.

The curriculum adopted by the researched school aligns with the JSIT Curriculum, officially sanctioned during the 2006 JSIT National Conference. This curriculum is distinguished by its incorporation of approaches and content grounded in the philosophical principles, vision, and objectives of Islamic education (Khodijah, 2017). Following the National Conference, a curriculum was crafted for each SDIT, including Al Qalam Kendari, centered around the attainment of ten specific character traits, outlined as follows:

1. Unwavering Faith (Salimul Aqidah): Embracing a belief in Allah as the creator, owner, sustainer, and ruler of the universe, while steadfastly avoiding thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors associated with innovation (bid'ah), superstitions, and polytheism (syirik).
2. Righteous Worship (Shahihul Ibadah): Cultivating a habitual and enthusiastic practice of various forms of worship, including prayer, fasting, Quranic recitation, remembrance, and supplication, in accordance with the guidance of the Quran and Sunnah.
3. Matured Personality (Matinul Khuluq): Demonstrating courteous, orderly, and disciplined behavior, showcasing empathy towards others and the environment, and exhibiting patience, perseverance, and courage in navigating daily life challenges.
4. Independence (Qadirun alal Kasbi): Fostering self-reliance in meeting life's needs, equipped with ample knowledge and skills to independently fulfill those needs.

5. Intelligent and Knowledgeable (Mutsaqqaful Fikri): Possessing critical, logical, systematic, and creative thinking skills, resulting in comprehensive knowledge mastery and adept problem-solving capabilities.
6. Healthy and Strong (Qawiyyul Jismi): Maintaining a robust physical and mental state, coupled with strong stamina, resilience, and self-defense skills to safeguard against external threats.
7. Diligent and Disciplined (Mujahidun Linafsihi): Exemplifying high motivation and sincerity in self-improvement, contributing positively to the community through a strong work ethic and disciplined conduct.
8. Orderly and Precise (Munazhzhomun Fi Syu'unihi): Exhibiting organizational skills in all tasks, duties, and responsibilities, embracing calculated risk-taking while maintaining precision and attentiveness.
9. Efficient (Harisun 'ala waqtihi): Effectively utilizing time and engaging in productive work, skillfully organizing activities based on priority.
10. Beneficial (Nafi'un Lighoirihi): Displaying concern for others and possessing the sensitivity and skills to extend assistance to those in need.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of the JSIT curriculum at the studied school reflects a holistic approach to Islamic education, aiming to instill not only academic knowledge but also essential character traits rooted in Islamic principles. This integration of character development within the curriculum is in line with the broader educational philosophy that emphasizes the cultivation of moral and ethical values alongside cognitive skills (Lind, 2023).

Various studies have explored the correlation between Islamic character education and positive outcomes in students. Bahri's research in 2015, for instance, emphasized the importance of character education in reinforcing Islamic values among students. The study found that a curriculum infused with Islamic character elements significantly contributed to the internalization of Islamic values in students, fostering a deeper understanding of ethical and moral principles (Small& Lew, 2021).

Furthermore, Erwanto's study in 2019 demonstrated the efficacy of the JSIT curriculum in shaping students' character through the incorporation of Islamic values across different subjects. The research highlighted the positive impact of activities such as lectures, religious studies, and group discussions in enabling students to apply Islamic ethics in their daily lives (Huda, et.all, 2020).

The ten character traits outlined in the curriculum align with the broader discussion on character education. Researchers such as Pradana, et.all (2020) and Zulela, et.all (2022) argue that character education is essential for the holistic development of students, contributing to their social, emotional, and ethical well-being. The emphasis on traits like integrity, responsibility, cooperation, and independence in the JSIT curriculum resonates with the overarching goals of character education as highlighted in these theoretical perspectives.

In summary, the implementation of the JSIT curriculum at Al Qalam Kendari incorporates theoretical foundations and aligns with relevant research on character education. The curriculum's emphasis on specific character traits is supported by studies showcasing the positive impact of character education in reinforcing Islamic values and fostering holistic development among students.

This approach not only aligns with educational philosophies emphasizing character development but also contributes to the broader discourse on effective character education in Islamic schools.

CONCLUSIONS

This study sheds light on the effectiveness of implementing an Islamic character-based curriculum at Al Qalam Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Kendari. The research findings demonstrate that the strategies and methodologies employed in curriculum development successfully foster an educational environment that motivates students to internalize Islamic values and nurture exemplary character traits. These outcomes hold significant implications for educators and policymakers, providing valuable guidance in the pursuit of Islamic education that transcends mere academic focus, emphasizing the cultivation of robust and integral character attributes. As such, the research results have the potential to positively contribute to the advancement of Islamic character education across various Islamic elementary schools.

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