

ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS A SOLUTION TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' SOCIAL AWARENESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract. Social awareness is a fundamental dimension of student character development at the elementary school level, encompassing empathy, concern, responsibility, and cooperative social interaction. This study analyzes the role of Islamic Religious Education as a solution for enhancing the social awareness of students at SDN 154 Aek Ngali. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, and data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings demonstrate that PAI is implemented contextually and practically, integrating social values into learning materials and methods. Forms of social awareness developed by students include empathy, mutual assistance, responsibility, cooperation, and discipline. Supporting factors include teacher role modeling, school support for religious habituation, and a conducive school environment, while inhibiting factors include limited learning time, differences in family backgrounds, and out-of-school environmental influences. Islamic Religious Education carries significant potential as a strategic solution for enhancing students' social awareness when implemented in an integrative, contextual, and sustained manner. This study is limited to a single public elementary school with a small number of informants, so its findings cannot be broadly generalized; future research is recommended to involve more schools with diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and to develop Islamic religious education learning models that systematically integrate social awareness indicators.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Social Awareness, Character Education, Elementary School, Habituation

Abstrak. Kesadaran sosial merupakan dimensi fundamental dalam perkembangan karakter peserta didik di tingkat sekolah dasar yang mencakup empati, kepedulian, tanggung jawab, dan interaksi sosial yang kooperatif. Penelitian ini menganalisis peran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) sebagai solusi dalam meningkatkan kesadaran sosial peserta didik di SDN 154 Aek Ngali. Pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif digunakan dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tiga tahapan, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan dan verifikasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran PAI dilaksanakan secara kontekstual dan praktis dengan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai sosial ke dalam materi dan metode pembelajaran. Bentuk kesadaran sosial yang berkembang meliputi empati, sikap tolong-menolong, tanggung jawab, kerja sama, dan kedisiplinan. Faktor pendukung meliputi keteladanan guru, dukungan sekolah terhadap pembiasaan religius, dan lingkungan sekolah yang kondusif, sementara faktor penghambat mencakup keterbatasan waktu, perbedaan latar belakang keluarga, dan pengaruh lingkungan luar sekolah. PAI memiliki potensi signifikan sebagai solusi strategis dalam meningkatkan kesadaran sosial peserta didik apabila diimplementasikan secara integratif, kontekstual, dan berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini terbatas pada satu sekolah dasar negeri dengan jumlah informan yang kecil sehingga temuannya tidak dapat digeneralisasikan secara luas; penelitian selanjutnya disarankan melibatkan lebih banyak sekolah dengan latar sosial ekonomi dan budaya yang beragam serta mengembangkan model pembelajaran PAI yang mengintegrasikan indikator kesadaran sosial secara sistematis.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam, Kesadaran Sosial, Pendidikan Karakter, Sekolah Dasar, Pembiasaan

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INTRODUCTION

Education fundamentally is not oriented only toward academic achievement but is also directed toward character formation and the development of students' social awareness as a foundation for social life (Suyadi, 2015). Social awareness encompasses the capacity of individuals to understand social conditions in their surroundings, demonstrate empathy, show concern, take responsibility, and establish harmonious cooperation with others. In the context of elementary education, the strengthening of social awareness is particularly important because this schooling phase constitutes a fundamental period in the formation of personality, attitudes, and basic values that will influence students' behavior at subsequent levels of education (Sulistyaningsih et al., 2024).

Social awareness is understood as the ability of individuals to understand and respond to social issues involving justice, empathy, and social responsibility toward the surrounding community (Harahap et al., 2025). However, realities in the field indicate that students' social awareness in elementary school environments still faces various challenges. Social phenomena such as low concern for fellow students, insufficient willingness to help one another, the emergence of individualistic behavior, and minimal sense of responsibility toward school cleanliness and order have become indicators of weakening social awareness among students. These conditions are inseparable from the influence of rapid social change, digital technology penetration affecting children's patterns of social interaction, and the tendency of learning to prioritize cognitive achievement over the strengthening of affective and social values (Sarkadi et al., 2022).

These general problems were also concretely identified at SDN 154 Aek Ngali. Preliminary observations conducted by the researcher revealed several indications of weak social awareness among students at this school: students tended to be indifferent when their classmates experienced difficulties in learning, were reluctant to share or lend learning equipment, frequently mocked or teased peers with different abilities or backgrounds, showed low responsibility for maintaining classroom and school cleanliness, and preferred working individually rather than cooperating in group assignments. Interviews with teachers further indicated that these behaviors were reinforced by students' increasing exposure to gadgets outside school hours and by the diversity of parenting patterns at home, which were not always aligned with the values taught at school. If left unaddressed, this condition risks hindering the development of students' social character at a formative stage of their growth. These problems make it necessary to seek a learning-based solution that is feasible within the existing school structure, and Islamic Religious Education, a subject explicitly mandated to instill moral and

social values represents the most strategic entry point. This is the practical rationale underlying the present study: to examine how Islamic Religious Education at SDN 154 Aek Ngali can serve as a solution for resolving the problem of students' low social awareness.

This situation demands a more comprehensive and holistic educational approach, one that not only orients itself toward knowledge transfer but also emphasizes the formation of positive social attitudes, values, and behaviors. Character education has become one of the important agendas in the national education system, and schools are expected to function as vehicles for forming students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and socially mature (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017). Social development research confirms that the quality of social-emotional learning in schools directly influences students' prosocial behavior and cooperative disposition in community life (Aliyah et al., 2024).

Islamic Religious Education not only functions as a means of strengthening faith and religious understanding but also as a medium for internalizing social values rooted in Islamic teachings. Values such as noble character (akhlak), brotherhood (ukhuwah), justice, tolerance, social concern, and social responsibility constitute integral elements of Islamic religious education learning materials and objectives (Muhaimin, 2014). When Islamic religious education is implemented contextually and practically, the social values taught are not merely understood conceptually but are internalized and practiced in students' social interactions (Desmita, 2014).

The internalization of national and religious values in the family and school context has been shown to be significantly influenced by the consistency between values taught at home and those reinforced through school programs, with family education playing a foundational role as a partner in the formation of students' character in elementary schools in the Mandailing Natal context (Nasution et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the relevance of an integrative approach between family education, school habituation, and religious value internalization as mutually reinforcing mechanisms for character formation, making the contextual implementation of Islamic education learning in schools particularly meaningful.

A review of existing studies indicates that research on Islamic Religious Education has been dominated by investigations focusing on cognitive religious aspects, improvement of learning outcomes, and general character formation (Harahap et al., 2025; Mufidah et al., 2024). Two previous studies are particularly relevant for comparison. First, Harahap et al., (2025) examined the role of Islamic Religious Education in enhancing students' social awareness at the secondary school level and found that PAI learning contributed positively to students' empathy and social responsibility; however, that study was conducted with

adolescent subjects whose basic character had largely been formed, and it did not trace how social values are habituated in everyday school practices. Second, Mufidah et al., (2024) investigated the instillation of students' social awareness through PAI learning and its implications for religious social behavior, but the analysis remained centered on the learning process within the classroom and gave limited attention to the supporting and inhibiting factors surrounding value internalization. Compared with these two studies, the present study offers novelty in three respects: (1) it focuses on the elementary school level, a formative period of character development that both previous studies did not address; (2) it is situated in a rural public elementary school, SDN 154 Aek Ngali, thereby providing empirical evidence from a context that has rarely been examined; and (3) it does not stop at describing the implementation of PAI, but also identifies the concrete forms of social awareness that develop in students and analyzes the supporting and inhibiting factors of the internalization process holistically, encompassing teachers, the school, families, and the out-of-school environment. Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) describe the implementation of Islamic religious education learning at SDN 154 Aek Ngali; (2) identify forms of students' social awareness developing through Islamic education learning; and (3) analyze the contributing and inhibiting factors in the development of students' social awareness through Islamic religious education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was used to describe directly and in depth how Islamic Religious Education learning is implemented to enhance students' social awareness in the natural setting of the school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Harahap et al., (2025); Mufidah et al., (2024) two previous studies are particularly relevant for comparison. First, Harahap et al., (2025) examined the role of Islamic Religious Education in enhancing students' social awareness at the secondary school level and found that PAI learning contributed positively to students' empathy and social responsibility; however, that study was conducted with adolescent subjects whose basic character had largely been formed, and it did not trace how social values are habituated in everyday school practices. Second, Mufidah et al., (2024) investigated the instillation of students' social awareness through PAI learning and its implications for religious social behavior, but the analysis remained centered on the learning process within the classroom and gave limited attention to the supporting and inhibiting factors surrounding value internalization. Compared with these two studies, the present study offers novelty in three respects: (1) it focuses on the elementary school level, a formative period of character

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The research was conducted at SDN 154 Aek Ngali. The research subjects were determined using a purposive sampling technique, namely the deliberate selection of informants based on the criteria of being directly involved in, and having in-depth knowledge of, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning and students' social behavior at the school. Based on these criteria, nine informants were selected, consisting of one principal, two Islamic Religious Education teachers, and six upper-grade (IV–VI) students. Data were collected through three primary techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe Islamic religious education learning activities, student interaction patterns, and value internalization mechanisms occurring in the school's daily routines. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, Islamic religious education teachers, and students to obtain information about their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of Islamic religious education learning and its impacts on social awareness. Documentation was gathered from various sources, including lesson plans, school programs, and activity records, to strengthen data validity (Moleong, 2017).

Data analysis followed the interactive analysis model encompassing three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). In the data reduction stage, raw data were simplified and focused on information relevant to the research objectives. In the data display stage, reduced data were organized into narrative descriptions enabling pattern

analysis. In the conclusion drawing stage, findings were interpreted based on emerging patterns. Data trustworthiness was ensured through source and technique triangulation and member checking with informants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

RESULTS

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education

The findings reveal that PAI learning at SDN 154 Aek Ngali has been implemented in accordance with the applicable curriculum and designed not only to improve students' mastery of religious material but also to instill social values as part of character formation. The islamic religious education teacher consciously integrates materials related to character (akhlak), mutual assistance, honesty, social responsibility, and mutual respect into the learning process in a planned manner through the selection of materials, learning methods, and an emphasis on the practice of values in daily life (Khodijah et al., 2024). This integration reflects a contextual pedagogical orientation that connects religious content with students' lived social realities.

In the learning process, the islamic religious education teacher uses various participatory and contextual methods, including interactive lectures, simple discussions, the provision of concrete examples, and the habituation of positive behavior. The values are conveyed through examples close to students' daily experiences, such as respecting fellow students, helping friends who face difficulties in learning, sharing stationery, and maintaining the cleanliness and order of the school environment. Teacher role modeling and behavior that reflects Islamic moral values in daily interaction with students constitute the dominant method, as teacher exemplary behavior significantly influences students' social attitudes and prosocial orientations (Löper & Hellmich, 2024).

Islamic religious education learning at SDN 154 Aek Ngali is further supported by habituation activities carried out continuously, such as communal prayer, discipline, and cooperation in class activities. Research on the internalization of values in elementary schools in the Mandailing Natal context has confirmed that habituation, modeling, and communicative-religious approaches represent the most effective mechanisms in forming student character and serve as the initial foundation for value internalization (Nasution et al., 2025). The integration of Islamic values with school culture, teacher modeling, and family and community support therefore constitutes the primary key in optimizing the role of islamic religious education in character formation (Sarkadi et al., 2022).

Forms of Students' Social Awareness

Based on observation and interview results, various forms of social awareness were found to have developed in students as a result of Islamic religious education learning, reflected in changes in students' attitudes and behaviors in their daily interactions in the school environment. The first and most prominent form is the emergence of empathy toward fellow students, visible in students' ability to understand others' feelings and show concern when a friend experiences difficulty, whether in learning activities or in other social situations. Empathy constitutes a fundamental component in the development of prosocial behavior and social responsibility, and its cultivation through educational practices in schools has been demonstrated to produce lasting behavioral change (Evers et al., 2023).

The second form is an increase in social concern manifested through mutual assistance behavior among students. Students have begun to habitually help friends who face difficulties in learning, share stationery, and cooperate in completing group assignments, indicating that the value of mutual assistance taught in PAI learning has begun to be internalized and practiced in daily school life. The capacity for empathy and prosocial motivation, when reinforced through consistent moral modeling and habituation, develops into stable behavioral dispositions in children (Peng et al., 2024). The third form is students' demonstrated attitudes of respecting differences in opinions, backgrounds, or academic abilities, with students cooperating, listening to others' opinions, and completing tasks collectively in group learning activities.

The fourth form is the increase in discipline and responsibility in executing tasks assigned by teachers, with students showing greater awareness to complete assignments on time, follow class rules, and take responsibility for their roles in group activities. Research in the Mandailing Natal context confirms that modeling and communicative-religious approaches employed by families and schools shape students' character as the initial foundation for the internalization of social values (Nasution et al., 2025). The development of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies in the Islamic paradigm, encompassing empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation, provides a culturally relevant framework for understanding how Islamic values of brotherhood and mutual respect translate into observable social behaviors in the classroom (Aliyah et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

Contributing and Inhibiting Factors

The research identifies several factors functioning as contributors and inhibitors in efforts to enhance students' social awareness through PAI learning. The primary contributing factor is the role of the PAI teacher who provides positive modeling in daily behavior. The teacher functions not only as a conveyor of learning materials but also as a role model who demonstrates attitudes of empathy, concern, discipline, and social responsibility in interaction with students. Teacher role model behavior has been confirmed as a significant prerequisite for the formation of students' prosocial attitudes, with students' perceptions of teachers' modeling directly predicting their prosocial orientation toward peers (Löper & Hellmich, 2024). The consistency between values taught in the classroom and values demonstrated by the teacher in daily interaction creates a coherent value ecosystem that accelerates internalization.

The second contributing factor is school support for religious habituation activities that reinforce the internalization of social values, such as communal prayer, disciplined behavior, and cooperative activities. A conducive school environment that is safe, orderly, and equipped with clear rules creates conditions supporting positive social interaction among students. The integration of character education into school culture has been shown to produce more effective character formation because students experience consistency between learning content and the school's daily social norms (Sarkadi et al., 2022). The role of social-emotional learning environments in schools in developing students' prosocial dispositions has been broadly confirmed in recent literature (Habyarimana et al., 2025).

Regarding inhibiting factors, the primary one is the limited time allocation for PAI learning, which forces the teacher to balance curriculum content delivery and value instillation, preventing the value internalization process from proceeding optimally and continuously. According to ecological development theory, students' social behavioral development is influenced by various environmental systems ranging from family to school to the broader community (Santrock, 2019). The second inhibiting factor is the diversity of students' family backgrounds in terms of parenting patterns, socioeconomic conditions, and living environments. Research in the Mandailing Natal context confirms that incorrect or negative parenting patterns, socioeconomic problems, and external environmental influences constitute the primary inhibiting factors in the internalization of values at the elementary school level (Nasution et al., 2025). The influence of the out-of-school environment, such as peer socialization and digital media use, also affects the formation of students' social attitudes (Slavin, 2018).

PAI as a Strategic Solution for Social Awareness Formation

The findings of this study affirm that Islamic religious education learning not only functions as a means of religious knowledge transfer but also as a strategic instrument for forming students' social character. According to value education theory, the internalization of moral and social values is effective when the learning process succeeds in connecting normative understanding with real social experience for students (Lickona, 2012; Samani & Hariyanto, 2017). Islamic teachings substantively contain a strong social dimension, where a person's religiosity is not only measured from ritual aspects but also from social behavior toward others, making Islamic religious education highly relevant in building students' social awareness at the elementary school level (Aliyah et al., 2024).

Contextual Islamic religious education learning accompanied by teacher modeling has been proven to be an important factor in the process of social value internalization. Students tend to imitate behavior they observe from figures considered to have authority and emotional proximity, such as teachers (Bandura, 1977). The quality of the teacher-student relationship, characterized by closeness and the teacher's role model behavior, constitutes a prerequisite for the development of students' prosocial orientations in the classroom (Löper & Hellmich, 2024). The findings of this study are consistent with and enrich previous research that affirms the positive contribution of religious learning to the formation of students' social attitudes (Hilmi et al., 2024; Mufidah et al., 2024).

This study provides an additional contribution by demonstrating that the role of Islamic religious education in enhancing social awareness can be concretely observed in the context of public elementary schools, particularly through students' daily behaviors in the school environment. This aligns with the contextual learning approach that emphasizes the importance of connection between learning materials and students' life realities (Johnson, 2014). These inhibiting factors result in varying levels of social value internalization among students, indicating that enhancing students' social awareness cannot solely rely on classroom Islamic religious education learning but requires sustained cooperation among teachers, school, family, and the community environment (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017; Santrock, 2019).

The findings of this study carry several implications. Theoretically, this study strengthens the body of literature on character education by demonstrating that Islamic Religious Education functions not merely as a vehicle for transmitting religious knowledge but as an effective medium for the internalization of social values at the elementary school level, thereby extending the applicability of value education theory and social learning theory to the context of religious instruction in rural public schools. Practically, the findings imply that Islamic

Religious Education teachers need to deliberately design learning that integrates social awareness indicators into lesson objectives, methods, and assessment, rather than treating social values as incidental outcomes. For school principals, the findings imply the importance of institutionalizing religious habituation programs and creating a school culture that consistently reinforces the values taught in the classroom. For policymakers, the results suggest the need to review the time allocation for Islamic Religious Education and to develop programs that strengthen the partnership among schools, families, and communities, given that the inhibiting factors identified in this study largely originate outside the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education plays a significant role in enhancing the social awareness of students at SDN 154 Aek Ngali. Islamic religious education implementation is directed not only toward cognitive mastery of religious material but also toward the instillation and internalization of social values such as empathy, concern, responsibility, cooperation, and discipline. Contextual learning, accompanied by teacher modeling and sustained habituation, has been proven capable of encouraging students to practice these values in their daily lives in the school environment, with forms of social awareness developing in students including increased mutual assistance attitudes, respect for differences, and responsibility in executing tasks. The effectiveness of social awareness enhancement through Islamic religious education learning is supported by teacher role modeling and school policy that sustains religious habituation, and is inhibited by limited learning time, differences in students' family backgrounds, and the influence of the out-of-school environment. These inhibiting factors confirm that enhancing students' social awareness cannot rely solely on classroom learning but requires synergy among school, family, and the community environment. Overall, this study affirms that Islamic Religious Education can function as a strategic solution for enhancing students' social awareness in elementary schools when implemented in an integrative, contextual, and sustained manner.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at only one public elementary school with a limited number of informants, so the findings are context-bound and cannot be generalized to schools with different characteristics. Second, the qualitative descriptive design employed describes the role of Islamic Religious Education in enhancing social awareness but does not measure the magnitude of its effect quantitatively. Third, observation of students' social behavior was confined to the school environment within a limited research period, so changes in students'

behavior in family and community settings, as well as the long-term sustainability of the values internalized, could not be fully captured. These limitations open opportunities for follow-up studies as outlined in the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research is recommended to explore the role of Islamic religious education in enhancing social awareness across various school types and regions in Indonesia, including schools with different socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, in order to broaden the theoretical and practical generalizability of these findings. The development of Islamic religious education learning models that systematically integrate social awareness indicators into lesson planning, assessment, and school culture is also recommended as a practical step toward institutionalizing the social dimension of Islamic religious education in elementary schooling.

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