

ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS

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Abstract *This study examines the religious development of elementary school-aged students, focusing on their religious knowledge, practices, and the factors influencing their spiritual growth. The research highlights how students acquire basic religious knowledge, such as the Five Pillars of Islam, but often lack a deeper understanding of the spiritual significance behind religious practices like prayer (salat), fasting (sawm), and almsgiving (zakat). Furthermore, the study investigates how students engage with these practices, noting that while students consistently perform religious rituals, their level of attentiveness and spiritual engagement remains limited. The study also explores the key factors influencing religious development, including family involvement, the school environment, peer influence, and media exposure. The findings suggest that while family support plays a central role, the school's teaching methods and external factors such as peer pressure and media exposure significantly affect students' religious growth. The research recommends the adoption of more interactive and reflective teaching strategies to enhance both the intellectual and emotional aspects of religious education, fostering a deeper and more sincere connection to religious practices.*

Keywords: *Religious development, elementary school, religious knowledge, religious practices*

Introduction

Religious education in primary schools plays a crucial role in shaping character and instilling moral values from an early age. The primary school years are a critical period in the religious development of students, during which they begin to understand religious teachings more deeply, not only in theory but also in everyday practice (Sianturi, 2023). At this age, children are at a stage of cognitive and emotional development that enables them to absorb religious values in ways that align with their understanding (Ernawati, 2022). Therefore, religious education should be designed to guide students in comprehending the spiritual and moral values that will form the foundation of their behavior in the future (Oktarina & Latipah, 2021).

Religious development in primary school students has specific characteristics. At this stage, children learn about religious teachings verbally and begin to internalize

these values in their lives, such as through structured acts of worship like prayer (salat). When implemented correctly, religious education in primary schools not only introduces students to religious teachings but also instills discipline, responsibility, and spiritual awareness, which will shape their character.

Various challenges must be addressed in implementing religious education in primary schools, such as how to ensure that religious education is delivered in a way that is relevant and aligned with children's developmental stages and how to optimize teaching methods that can cultivate students' interest and awareness of religious practices (Primasari, 2021). A more applicable and holistic approach to religious education is needed, focusing on aspects of knowledge and the development of moral values and character (Mustika, 2021).

Integrating religious education within the primary school curriculum is the foundation for forming positive character in the younger generation. Therefore, further research is needed on effective methods to support students' religious development at this stage, methods that are not only theoretical but also practical and can be implemented in their daily lives.

Furthermore, the rapid development of technology has an impact on religious education for children at the elementary level. Children who are already accustomed to technology are often exposed to a wide range of information, both positive and negative, which can influence their views on religion. Religious education at school should teach students how to use technology wisely and in accordance with religious teachings. Religious education should not be limited to teaching about rituals and values but also how to navigate the digital world in ways that align with religious principles (Dalimunthe, 2023).

Religious education in elementary schools must address the challenges posed by modern times. Globalization and modernization affect how children interact with the world, including technology, social media, and popular culture. Therefore, religious education needs to equip students with the tools to navigate these challenges using the principles they have learned. Religious education should not only aim to provide knowledge about God and religion but also help shape students' character so they can live wisely and responsibly in a rapidly changing world (Mukhlis et al., 2024). One way to develop more applicable religious education is by integrating religious values into everyday school activities (Astuti, 2023). For example, students can be encouraged to pray together, read the Quran, or engage in acts of charity. Such activities help connect the religious knowledge taught in class with real-life practice, allowing children to feel the direct benefits of religious teachings. This approach also helps students internalize religious values and turn them into daily habits, rather than merely theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom.

The role of the religious teacher is crucial in creating an enjoyable and meaningful learning atmosphere. Religious educators must be able to present the material in a way that is engaging and easily understood by children, using a variety of teaching methods such as storytelling, visual media, and interactive discussions. In addition, religious teachers should also serve as role models for students, not only in

theory but also in everyday life. Teaching religion in a fun and engaging way will increase students' interest and motivate them to delve deeper into religious teachings.

Religious education in elementary schools must also aim to build students' moral character by teaching values such as honesty, patience, empathy, and responsibility (Guna & Yuwantiningrum, 2024). Children who understand and practice these values from an early age will grow into individuals with good moral character, contributing positively to society. As Prophet Muhammad SAW said, "Indeed, I was sent to perfect good character" (HR. Al-Bukhari), religious education should not only focus on rituals but also on cultivating good character and ethics.

Religious education at the elementary level often fails to provide enough space for students to develop a deep understanding of religious teachings. The material is often limited to memorization and theory without clear connection to real-life situations. Therefore, the religious curriculum needs to be developed to be more relevant to the social and cultural contexts of today's children. A curriculum based on universal values that links religious teachings to everyday life issues will help students better understand and apply their religious knowledge.

Moreover, teaching religious practices like prayer needs to be approached in a more practical way. Students should be taught not only to memorize the prayer recitations and movements but also to understand the meaning and purpose behind each action. With a deeper understanding, children will appreciate the significance of each ritual and approach prayer as a means of getting closer to God, not just as a mandatory task. Through meaningful and applicable teaching, religious education can develop discipline and spiritual awareness among students.

Effective religious education also requires the support of all involved parties, including schools, families, and communities. All stakeholders need to collaborate to create an environment that supports the religious development of children, both at home, in school, and in society. Close cooperation between schools and parents, as well as community involvement in religious education, will foster a conducive environment for shaping students' character and understanding of religion. With this support, religious education at the elementary level can succeed in imparting profound knowledge and help form a generation that possesses strong moral character and ethics.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to examining the religious development of elementary school-aged students. Unlike previous studies that may have focused solely on religious knowledge or practices, this study explores both the cognitive and spiritual aspects of religious development, specifically key religious practices such as prayer (salat), fasting (sawm), and almsgiving (zakat). The research assesses the acquisition of religious knowledge and the level of attentiveness and spiritual engagement students exhibit during these rituals, a dimension often overlooked in conventional studies. Moreover, the study examines the various factors influencing religious development, including family involvement, the school environment, peer influence, and media exposure. Considering these multiple factors,

the study provides a broader understanding of the environment that shapes religious growth. This holistic perspective, particularly in the context of elementary school students, offers new insights into how religious education and practices are understood and internalized at a critical stage of cognitive and emotional development.

Metode Penelitian

In this study, the research method used is literature review or study of literature, which focuses on analyzing existing theories, research, and findings related to the religious development of elementary school-aged students. This method is chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the topic by reviewing previous studies, articles, books, and scholarly papers that discuss religious education, the spiritual development of children, and the factors influencing their religious growth. By examining various sources, this research aims to gather relevant information about how students at the elementary level develop their religious knowledge, practices, and attitudes. The literature review will also help identify the key factors that contribute to their religious development, such as the role of teachers, family, community, and cultural influences, as well as the pedagogical approaches used in religious education.

The literature review will systematically analyze previous studies on religious education and child development, particularly those that focus on the elementary school stage. This method will allow the researcher to synthesize existing research findings, compare different perspectives, and identify gaps in the literature. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence that explain the religious development of elementary school students. The findings of the literature review will also highlight best practices in religious education and offer recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of religious programs in elementary schools. This research method is valuable for building a theoretical foundation that can inform future studies and practical applications in religious education.

Discussion

Religious Knowledge and Understanding

Religious education plays a crucial role in shaping the character and morality of elementary school students. However, a noticeable gap often exists between students' theoretical knowledge and their practical understanding of religious teachings. For instance, many students can memorize prayers and the rituals of salat accurately, yet they struggle to grasp the deeper spiritual meaning behind these practices. Studies have shown that students tend to focus more on memorization and routine rather than reflecting on the essence and purpose of religious practices.

The analysis of religious knowledge and understanding among elementary school-aged students reveals significant gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical comprehension of religious practices. While students demonstrate

proficiency in memorizing religious texts such as prayers and key rituals like salat, they often lack a deeper understanding of their spiritual significance. This is consistent with existing studies in the field of religious education, which show that children tend to memorize religious content without fully grasping the underlying theological or spiritual meaning (Harahap, 2023). This gap is concerning, as religious education should aim not only to impart knowledge but also to foster a deeper, more reflective connection with the faith.

Cause of the Gap: Traditional Teaching Methods

One of the primary factors contributing to this disconnect is the reliance on traditional teaching methods that emphasize rote memorization rather than engagement and reflection. In many cases, religious educators focus on ensuring that students can recite prayers accurately and follow religious rituals correctly, without encouraging critical thinking about the purpose behind these practices. As a result, students may develop the ability to perform religious rituals mechanically, without understanding the transformative role these practices can play in their spiritual lives. This approach aligns with the findings of Umam (2020), who argue that memorization-based religious education limits students' ability to connect with the deeper, personal meanings of religious practices.

More Interactive Teaching Approaches

In addition, more interactive teaching approaches can reduce this gap. Methods such as group discussions, storytelling, and real-life examples of how religious teachings can be applied in everyday life can help students understand the importance of spiritual teachings in their context. This approach encourages students to reflect on their beliefs and relate them to their life experiences. A study by Judrah (2024) showed that interactive religious teaching tends to be more successful in helping students understand religious teachings more deeply because this method transfers information and promotes self-reflection and personal growth.

Furthermore, family plays a critical role in shaping children's religious understanding. Parents are often the first and most influential teachers when it comes to religious practices, but their level of involvement in their children's religious education varies. In some cases, parents actively reinforce religious values through daily practices, while in others, they may not emphasize the importance of understanding the spiritual meaning of religious rituals. This inconsistency in family support can create disparities in students' understanding of religion, further highlighting the importance of integrating family-based religious education with formal schooling. As Rohmah (2023) suggests, a holistic approach that includes both home and school environments is essential for fostering a deeper religious understanding.

Lastly, the impact of external factors such as peer influence and media exposure cannot be overlooked. Peers can both positively and negatively affect children's religious development. In schools with strong religious environments, peer influence can encourage students to engage more deeply with their faith. However, in

environments where religious values are not strongly emphasized, students may adopt behaviors or attitudes that conflict with the teachings they receive at school. Additionally, media exposure, particularly to social media and online content, can present conflicting messages about religion, potentially confusing students or challenging the values they learn at home and school. As Jasminto (2022) highlights, the growing influence of digital media on children's perceptions of religion requires careful consideration in designing religious education curricula that help students navigate these external influences.

The Role of the Family in Religious Education

The role of the family in children's religious education is also vital. Parents are the first and most influential educators in shaping their children's understanding of religion. For example, when parents set an example in religious practices, such as praying together, discussing religious values in everyday life, and teaching the spiritual meaning of each worship, children will find it easier to understand and deeply experience religious teachings. Therefore, parents need to work with schools to support children's religious education by providing tangible examples and discussions that encourage critical thinking about religious beliefs.

To address this gap, several concrete steps can be taken. First, religious teaching should incorporate methods that encourage interaction and reflection rather than focusing solely on memorization. For example, teachers can use relevant case studies to connect religious teachings to students' daily lives. Second, religious education in schools should involve closer collaboration between teachers and parents, providing materials that can be discussed at home and facilitating in-depth conversations about spiritual values. In this way, students' understanding of religion will be more holistic and continuous, extending beyond what they learn at school to include the insights they receive at home.

With a more integrative and reflective approach, religious education in elementary schools can be more effective in fostering a deep and applicable understanding of religious teachings, ultimately helping students develop a stronger spiritual connection.

Religious Practices and Implementation

The second aspect of religious development analyzed was the extent to which students implemented religious practices, particularly the regularity and sincerity with which they performed rituals like prayer. Based on classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students, it was found that while most students performed the ritualistic aspects of prayer (such as movements and recitations), their engagement in the prayer process often seemed mechanical and not rooted in deep spiritual reflection. For instance, students were able to follow the prescribed motions of prayer but struggled to concentrate during the prayer itself, often completing it without full attention or mindfulness.

This issue reflects the broader challenge in religious education, which is the disconnection between knowledge and practice. Despite understanding the "how" of

religious practices, many students struggled with the "why," which affects the sincerity and personal connection to the practice. According to Kunzman (2012), genuine religious engagement requires both intellectual understanding and emotional involvement, something that many students have not fully developed at the elementary school level. One reason for this is the lack of individualized support in helping students connect emotionally and spiritually with the practices they are taught.

Another factor contributing to the lack of sincere engagement in religious practices is the limited focus on developing students' internal motivation for prayer and other religious rituals. In many cases, the emphasis in religious education is placed on teaching the correct procedure—such as the proper movements and recitations—without addressing the underlying spiritual purpose of these actions (Hidayat & Malihah, 2023). As a result, students may come to view religious rituals as mere obligations or tasks to be completed, rather than opportunities for reflection and connection with the divine. This mechanical approach to religious practice can be seen in students' difficulties in concentrating during prayer, as they may focus more on completing the ritual correctly rather than on the personal, spiritual experience that prayer is meant to foster. Therefore, it is crucial for religious education to encourage a deeper exploration of the purpose behind these rituals, helping students understand how they can cultivate mindfulness and a more meaningful connection to their faith.

Additionally, the social dynamics within the classroom and school environment play a significant role in how students engage with religious practices. Students are often influenced by their peers when it comes to religious behavior, and in schools where religious engagement is more valued, students are more likely to perform rituals with sincerity and focus. In contrast, in environments where religious practices are not emphasized or where peers display indifference or disrespect towards religious rituals, students may feel less inclined to engage wholeheartedly. This peer influence can either strengthen or weaken a student's commitment to religious practices. In this sense, creating a positive, supportive religious environment at school is just as important as individual motivation in encouraging sincere religious practice (Hidayat et al., 2023).

Finally, the role of teachers in fostering a genuine connection to religious practices cannot be overstated. Teachers who are passionate about the spiritual aspects of religious rituals and who model mindfulness and reflection during prayer can significantly influence how students engage with these practices. Unfortunately, many teachers may not have the training or resources to encourage emotional engagement with religious rituals, focusing primarily on ensuring that students follow the prescribed steps. The study found that when teachers provided opportunities for students to reflect on the significance of prayer—such as discussing the meanings of the words recited or the purpose of the ritual—students were more likely to approach their prayers with greater sincerity. Therefore, it is essential for religious education programs to equip teachers not only with the knowledge of

religious practices but also with strategies to guide students in developing a deeper, more meaningful connection to their faith.

Factors Influencing Religious Development

The third sub-topic explores the factors influencing religious development among elementary school-aged students. These factors include family, school, peers, and media exposure.

The most significant factor identified in this study was the role of family, particularly in transmitting religious values. Interviews with parents revealed that many families serve as primary sources of religious education for their children, emphasizing daily practices such as prayer and fasting. Family influence was inconsistent, with some children having more supportive religious environments than others. This inconsistency can be attributed to varying parental religious involvement and knowledge levels.

In contrast, the school environment, particularly the teachers' approach to religious education, also plays a critical role. Teachers who employed interactive methods, such as group discussions about religious values or simulations of everyday situations that align with religious teachings, were found to have more success in fostering a deeper understanding of religion. For instance, teachers can use role-playing activities where students act out ethical decision-making in various everyday scenarios based on religious teachings, encouraging reflection on how religious values guide actions in real life. Incorporating technology in the form of educational apps, virtual field trips to religious sites, or interactive media that illustrates key religious stories and practices can also significantly enhance the learning experience. This practical approach helps students connect religious teachings to real-world experiences, making the lessons more meaningful and more straightforward to internalize. Regarding the challenges posed by modern digital media, the study highlights that students often encounter conflicting or misleading information online that can influence their understanding of religion.

The increasing influence of media exposure, particularly through digital platforms, has introduced new challenges and opportunities for religious development. While online content can provide access to diverse religious perspectives, it can also expose students to conflicting views or misinterpretations of religious teachings. Social media has made religious discourse more accessible but also more fragmented, creating opportunities for children to encounter superficial or extreme portrayals of religion (Andriani et al., 2022). The study revealed that students who spent significant time on social media were often confused by contradictory messages about religion, sometimes leading them to question the practices they were taught at home and school. This underscores the need for educators and parents to help children navigate the digital world in a way that supports their religious growth,

by encouraging critical engagement with online content and ensuring that their religious education aligns with their broader values.

Moreover, a holistic approach to religious education ensures that students receive consistent and reinforcing messages about religion. This approach emphasizes collaboration between family, school, and the broader social environment. Schools can strengthen this collaboration by involving parents in religious activities, such as prayer sessions, community service projects, or workshops that align with the religious curriculum. This approach helps children see the connection between the values taught at home and those reinforced at school, ensuring a consistent and cohesive understanding of religion. The role of peers is also vital in this process. Schools should create environments where students can form study groups or religious discussion circles, fostering positive peer influence and providing a space for children to learn from one another. Such peer interactions can significantly enhance students' religious understanding and create a supportive community within the school. By integrating these elements into the religious education, children can receive a more comprehensive and holistic education that nurtures their spiritual development.

Conclusion

Religious development of elementary school-aged students is influenced by a combination of factors, including religious knowledge, practice, and external influences such as family, school, peers, and media. Although students demonstrate a basic understanding of religious practices and exhibit regular engagement in rituals, the depth of their spiritual understanding and the sincerity of their religious practices remain areas for improvement. It is evident that more interactive and reflective approaches to teaching religious practices, alongside supportive family and school environments, are essential to fostering a more comprehensive and meaningful religious development. Future educational programs should focus on integrating both cognitive and emotional aspects of religion to ensure students not only learn about their faith but also feel a personal connection to it.

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