



THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SHAPING STUDENTS' SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS CHARACTER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT STIT AL-KHAIRIYAH CILEGON

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students' social-religious character in higher education. Using a qualitative approach grounded in an interpretive paradigm, the research was conducted at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving lecturers and students engaged in IRE learning. The findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education is implemented through contextual and value-oriented learning processes that integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Lecturers play a crucial role as facilitators and role models, while students actively participate in reflective and interactive learning activities. The internalization of Islamic values contributes to the development of students' social-religious character, including empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and respect for others. In addition, students demonstrate improved emotional regulation and positive social interaction, although continuous guidance is still required to ensure consistency. This study highlights that Islamic Religious Education serves as a strategic component in higher education for character formation through meaningful and contextual learning. The findings suggest the importance of strengthening student-centered and value-based learning approaches to enhance sustainable social-religious character development.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, social-religious character, qualitative research, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in higher education plays a strategic role in shaping students' social-religious character, particularly in responding to contemporary moral and social challenges. In the context of Islamic higher education, IRE is not merely oriented toward cognitive mastery but also emphasizes the internalization of ethical and spiritual values reflected in students' social behavior. Previous studies indicate that Islamic Religious Education significantly contributes to the development of students' moral values, including honesty, responsibility, and empathy (Arabiyah, Pesisir, and Sumatera 2025).

At STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon, IRE is positioned as a core component of the curriculum designed to foster both intellectual and social-religious competencies. However, several challenges remain in optimizing its role in character formation. Research suggests that the implementation of Islamic education in higher education requires a more holistic and integrative approach, particularly in addressing students' motivation and contextual learning needs (Asril, Rahman, and Falihin 2024).



One of the primary issues lies in the pedagogical approach employed by lecturers. Although student-centered learning is increasingly emphasized, instructional practices in IRE frequently remain dominated by conventional lecture-based methods. This condition limits students' active participation and reduces opportunities for meaningful value internalization. Effective Islamic education requires interactive, reflective, and experiential learning processes that engage students in critical thinking and social interaction (Taja et al. 2021). From a theoretical perspective, Islamic Religious Education aims to develop individuals who not only understand religious teachings but also demonstrate them in their daily lives. The integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains is therefore essential. Studies show that Islamic education serves as a medium for strengthening religious identity, social responsibility, and tolerance, which are crucial components of social-religious character (Hajaroh et al. 2025).

Furthermore, the formation of social-religious character cannot rely solely on classroom instruction. It requires a comprehensive process involving habituation, role modeling, and a supportive academic environment. Qualitative studies demonstrate that the role of educators as facilitators, role models, and mentors significantly influences students' moral and social development (Handayani, Q, and Wijaya 2024). In addition, institutional culture and religious activities within the campus environment play a vital role in reinforcing the internalization of Islamic values (Firman 2024). In the contemporary era, Islamic Religious Education is also expected to respond to global challenges, including moral crises and the impact of digital transformation. Research shows that IRE remains relevant as a means of guiding students toward ethical awareness and responsible social behavior in modern society (Septianingsih et al. 2024). Moreover, qualitative studies in higher education contexts reveal that Islamic education contributes to the development of students' character by integrating spiritual values with real-life experiences and social engagement (Fajri, Of, and Students 2025). Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' social-religious character through a qualitative approach. Specifically, it seeks to understand how learning processes, lecturer roles, and student experiences contribute to the internalization of Islamic values within the academic environment of STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon.

Although previous studies have highlighted the role of Islamic Religious Education in character formation, most of them focus on general moral development or are conducted in primary and secondary education contexts. Limited studies specifically examine how Islamic Religious Education contributes to the development of students' social-religious character within higher education settings, particularly through qualitative exploration of learning processes, lecturer roles, and student experiences. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by investigating the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' social-religious character at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon using an in-depth qualitative approach. This research offers novelty by integrating value-based Islamic education with the framework of social and emotional development in a higher education context, providing a more contextual and holistic understanding of character formation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in an interpretive paradigm to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping students'



social-religious character. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for understanding social phenomena in depth, including participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions within their natural settings (John W. Creswell 2018). The research was conducted at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon, an Islamic higher education institution where Islamic Religious Education constitutes a central component of the curriculum. The research setting includes three interconnected elements: place, actors, and activities. The place refers to the institutional environment; the actors include lecturers and students involved in IRE learning; and the activities encompass teaching-learning processes, religious practices, and social interactions that reflect the internalization of Islamic values. Data sources in this study are divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from participants through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of learning activities. These participants consist of IRE lecturers and students who are actively engaged in the learning process. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents, including curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, and relevant academic records (Creswell 2013). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research focus. This approach enables researchers to obtain rich and meaningful data that support in-depth understanding of social phenomena (Etikan 2016). Data collection techniques include: (1) in-depth interviews to explore participants' perspectives and lived experiences; (2) observation to examine actual practices in teaching and learning processes; and (3) documentation to support and validate findings. To ensure the credibility of the data, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing information obtained from multiple sources and methods. Data analysis follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, (Matthew B. Miles 1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process is conducted iteratively to identify patterns, themes, and meanings related to the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' social-religious character. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employs validation strategies including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as emphasized in qualitative research traditions..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Learning

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon has been systematically designed and oriented toward strengthening Islamic values while shaping students' social-religious character. Classroom observations reveal that IRE learning does not merely emphasize cognitive aspects but also integrates moral values such as cooperation, responsibility, and self-control through interactive learning approaches, including discussions, reflective dialogue, and contextual learning. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to students' character development and moral behavior (Saraya, Mardhatillah, and Fitriani 2023). Interviews with lecturers indicate that IRE materials are adapted to students' developmental characteristics at the higher education level. Lecturers emphasize role modeling, habituation, and reinforcement of values such as empathy, honesty, and emotional regulation. Students also perceive IRE not only as theoretical knowledge but as practical guidance for behavior in academic and social



contexts. This aligns with research stating that value-based Islamic education supports the internalization of religious teachings in everyday life (Setyaningrum and Nida 2025).

The analysis of learning documents including syllabi and lesson plans demonstrates consistency between instructional planning and implementation. Learning objectives integrate spiritual and social competencies, while instructional strategies promote interaction and reflection. These findings confirm that Islamic Religious Education contributes to the development of students' social awareness and moral responsibility in a structured and contextual manner.

From a theoretical perspective, Islamic Religious Education is a holistic process integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. It aims to develop students' understanding and practice of Islamic teachings in both personal and social life. Previous research confirms that Islamic education is effective in fostering character development when it emphasizes value internalization and behavioral transformation (Imam Tabroni 2021). Recent empirical studies also indicate that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to students' character formation, social attitudes, and emotional balance. Interactive and reflective learning approaches have been shown to enhance empathy, responsibility, and cooperation among students (Mursyidah 2025). Furthermore, Islamic education remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary challenges by strengthening moral and ethical values in the digital era (Salisah, Darmiyanti, and Arifudin 2024).

From a policy perspective, Islamic Religious Education is supported within the national education framework as a key component in developing students who are faithful, ethical, and socially responsible. Therefore, its implementation in higher education institutions plays a strategic role in shaping students' character holistically. The findings of this study confirm that Islamic Religious Education at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon functions not only as knowledge transmission but also as a medium for value internalization. This supports the theory of character education, which highlights the importance of role modeling, habituation, and moral reflection in shaping behavior (Idris 2023). Furthermore, the integration of moral values into interactive learning demonstrates that IRE contributes to strengthening students' affective and social competencies. Studies show that value-based education positively influences students' emotional and social development, particularly when learning is contextual and reflective (Setyaningrum and Nida 2025).

The contextual approach used in IRE learning enables students to relate religious teachings to real-life situations. This supports the argument that effective character education depends on the relevance of learning experiences and the consistency of educators in modeling ethical behavior (Bier and Ph 2005). Islamic Religious Education is therefore highly relevant in developing students' social-religious character, as it emphasizes not only religious knowledge but also the internalization of values such as empathy, responsibility, and social awareness. Through reflective learning processes, students are encouraged to apply Islamic values in their daily lives. The findings also indicate that direct interaction in classroom learning plays a crucial role in shaping students' affective and behavioral dimensions. This reinforces the importance of experiential learning in Islamic education. The alignment between instructional planning and implementation further strengthens the effectiveness of IRE. This finding supports previous research indicating that character education is more effective when systematically integrated into the curriculum and consistently applied.



Students' Social-Religious Character Development

The findings indicate that students' social-religious character develops gradually and is reflected in their daily academic and social behavior. Students demonstrate the ability to interact positively with peers and lecturers, collaborate in group activities, and respect others' perspectives. However, in certain situations, students still require guidance in managing conflicts and differences of opinion. Lecturers observe that students' emotional awareness is improving, particularly in recognizing and regulating emotions. Islamic Religious Education plays a key role in fostering empathy, patience, and social responsibility among students. This finding is consistent with the concept that emotional and social intelligence are essential components of character development (Eshghi, Arofzad, and Hosaini 2013). Students also express awareness of the importance of respectful behavior, cooperation, and accountability, although consistent implementation remains a challenge. This indicates that character development requires continuous reinforcement through structured learning and supportive environments.

Documentation analysis shows that institutions systematically monitor students' character development through academic evaluations and behavioral assessments. These records indicate improvements in cooperation, social awareness, and emotional maturity over time. Overall, the findings suggest that students' social-religious character at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon has developed positively, although ongoing support and reinforcement remain necessary. From a theoretical perspective, social intelligence refers to the ability to understand social situations, interact effectively, and build meaningful relationships (Albrecht and Morris 2006). In higher education, this competence is essential for fostering ethical behavior, collaboration, and social responsibility.

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education is not solely determined by curriculum design but also by the interactional dynamics between lecturers and students. The success of value internalization depends on the consistency of role modeling, the relevance of learning materials to students' real-life experiences, and the creation of a supportive academic environment. This suggests that Islamic Religious Education should not be positioned merely as a theoretical subject but as a transformative learning process that actively shapes students' social behavior and emotional maturity. Compared to previous studies, this research emphasizes the contextual and experiential dimensions of learning as key factors in developing sustainable social-religious character in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a significant role in shaping students' social-religious character at STIT Al-Khairiyah Cilegon. The implementation of IRE is carried out through contextual and value-oriented learning processes that emphasize not only cognitive understanding but also the internalization of moral and social values. Through interactive learning, role modeling, and habituation, students develop positive social behaviors such as cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and respect for others. Furthermore, the findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education contributes substantially to students' ability to regulate emotions and engage in constructive social interactions. Although students demonstrate positive character development, continuous guidance is still needed to ensure consistency in applying these



values in real-life situations. This study highlights that Islamic Religious Education serves as a strategic component in higher education for integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions in character formation. Therefore, it is recommended that higher education institutions strengthen contextual and student-centered learning approaches in Islamic Religious Education to enhance students' social-religious character. Future research is suggested to involve broader institutional contexts and explore more effective learning models through mixed-method approaches..

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