

The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Fostering Student Independence among Elementary School Students at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency

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ABSTRACT : This thesis examines the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in fostering students' independence at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency. The study specifically addresses three main issues: (1) the role of IRE teachers in instilling students' independence, (2) the implementation of IRE learning methods directed toward developing independent attitudes and behaviors, and (3) the forms of independence demonstrated by students as a result of the IRE learning process. The purpose of this study is to describe the role of IRE teachers, explain the application of learning methods that promote independence, and identify the manifestations of students' independence in daily school life. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design and was conducted over a period of three months at SDN 158 Mundan. The primary data sources included the school principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and school operators, while secondary data were obtained from school documents, articles, journals, and other relevant sources. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a priority role in fostering students' independence through moral exemplification and the internalization of practical Islamic values in everyday life. Teachers do not merely deliver religious material, but also serve as role models in discipline, responsibility, honesty, and time management. Furthermore, the use of varied and applicative learning methods—such as lectures, discussions, worship practice demonstrations, simulations, and independent worship assignments—has proven effective in promoting students' independence. This independence is reflected in students' ability to perform worship independently, complete tasks without frequent reminders, manage time more effectively, and demonstrate social initiative, such as leading prayers, helping peers, and confidently making decisions related to religious activities.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education Teachers, Student Independence, Character Formation

INTRODUCTION

Elementary education serves as a fundamental foundation for shaping the character and personality of the younger generation through a systematic and continuous educational process. Teachers play a strategic role not only as instructors

but also as facilitators of moral and character development, as the effectiveness of character education is strongly influenced by the quality of teacher–student interactions. Lickona (2013) argues that character education should cultivate moral values through exemplary behavior and habituation. Within the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), teachers are expected not merely to transfer Islamic knowledge but also to internalize spiritual, ethical, and moral values that support the development of students' independence. Aji, Fitria, and Zulkifli (2025) reported that Islamic Religious Education teachers make a significant contribution to the development of students' religious character and independence through habituation and exemplary practices.

The rapid development of technology and the increasing flow of information have significantly influenced students' learning patterns, particularly at the elementary school level. Easy access to information and digital assistance can potentially encourage students to rely excessively on parents, teachers, or technological resources when completing learning tasks. Hidayat and Junaidi (2020) argue that excessive dependence on external assistance may hinder the development of learning independence when it is not accompanied by appropriate instructional strategies. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to design learning experiences that extend beyond mastery of subject matter and address students' affective and psychomotor development. Setyowati, Karomah, Hidayat, and Jannah (2025) found that the teacher's role as a facilitator and motivator significantly influences the development of students' learning independence in the digital era.

From an Islamic perspective, independence and individual responsibility are fundamental principles that should be cultivated from an early age. The Qur'an emphasizes personal responsibility in QS. Al-An'am 6:164, which states that each individual is responsible for his or her own actions and does not bear the burden of another person's wrongdoing. Ibn Kathir (2015) interprets this verse as emphasizing divine justice and individual accountability for one's deeds. This principle demonstrates that Islam encourages individuals to develop awareness of their choices and the consequences of their actions. Consequently, Islamic education, particularly through Islamic Religious Education, has an important role in internalizing the values of responsibility and independence so that they become integral components of students' personalities.

The principle of independence is also reflected in QS. An-Najm 53:39, which emphasizes that human beings attain what they strive for. Shihab (2017) explains that this verse conveys the values of effort, perseverance, and personal responsibility. In the educational context, these values can be translated into learning practices that provide students with opportunities to take initiative, make decisions, complete tasks,

and assume responsibility for their own learning processes. Sanjaya (2016) similarly argues that student-centered learning can foster independence, creativity, and responsibility. Accordingly, Islamic Religious Education can provide an important pedagogical context for integrating religious values with the development of students' independent learning behaviors.

The importance of responsibility is further reinforced by the Prophetic tradition, particularly the well-known hadith, "Kullukum ra'in wa kullukum mas'ulun 'an ra'iyathi," which emphasizes that every individual is a responsible guardian and is accountable for those under his or her care. This principle highlights the importance of personal accountability and self-leadership. Al-Ghazali (2014) emphasizes that Islamic education aims to develop individuals who are capable of self-control and who demonstrate moral and spiritual responsibility. At the elementary school level, Islamic Religious Education teachers therefore have an important role in introducing students to the concept of self-leadership through daily routines, responsible decision-making, task completion, discipline, and moral habituation. Such practices can contribute to the gradual development of students' personal independence.

The importance of independence is also supported by Indonesia's national education policy. Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System establishes the development of students' potential to become individuals who are knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible citizens as one of the fundamental goals of national education. This legal framework indicates that independence is not merely an individual character trait but also an important educational outcome. Wati, Alkarimah, and Ulfah (2025) found that the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in value-based learning and exemplary practices contributes positively to the development of students' independent character. Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers perform a dual function: facilitating academic learning while simultaneously fostering students' moral and personal development.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the teacher's role in fostering student independence remains challenging in actual school settings. Preliminary observations at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, indicate that some students still demonstrate a high level of dependence on teachers and parents and show limited initiative in completing learning activities independently. These conditions suggest a discrepancy between the normative expectation of independence in Islamic and national educational frameworks and its practical implementation at the elementary school level. Mulyasa (2018) notes that learning practices that remain predominantly teacher-centered may limit opportunities for students to develop independence. However, existing studies have generally examined teacher roles and student independence in broader educational contexts, while limited attention has

been given to how Islamic Religious Education teachers specifically cultivate independence through everyday classroom practices in rural elementary school settings.

Therefore, a contextual investigation is needed to understand how Islamic Religious Education teachers foster student independence, what strategies they employ, what forms of independent behavior emerge among students, and what challenges they encounter in the process. This study focuses on SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering elementary students' independence within the specific social, cultural, and educational context of the school. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of character-oriented Islamic Religious Education, particularly in strengthening students' independence through habituation, exemplary behavior, guidance, motivation, and student-centered learning practices.

METHODS

Research Site and Research Design

This study was conducted at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school was purposively selected because it was considered relevant to the research focus, namely the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in fostering student independence. The site was selected based on its educational and social context, accessibility to relevant data, and the distinctive phenomenon under investigation. Nasution (2012) explains that a research setting in qualitative research constitutes a social situation involving actors, places, and activities that can be directly observed.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design because it sought to provide an in-depth and naturalistic description of the phenomenon rather than test hypotheses or statistically measure variables (Moleong, 2019; Sugiyono, 2022). The design enabled the researchers to examine how IRE teachers implement their roles and strategies in fostering student independence within the natural context of elementary school education.

Research Approach

A case study approach was employed to investigate the phenomenon in depth within its real-life context. A case study enables researchers to explore a contemporary phenomenon comprehensively while considering the contextual conditions in which the phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2018). This approach was appropriate because the study focused on a single social setting, SDN 158 Mundan, and sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of the practices, strategies,

interactions, and challenges associated with the role of IRE teachers in fostering student independence.

The case study approach also allowed the researchers to examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives and through multiple sources of evidence. As Creswell (2016) explains, case study research facilitates an in-depth exploration of processes, activities, and social interactions within a bounded system. Accordingly, this approach was considered appropriate for examining character education practices in a contextual and holistic manner.

Data Sources

The data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly from research participants through in-depth interviews with the principal, IRE teachers, classroom teachers, and educational staff at SDN 158 Mundan. The interviews focused on participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices concerning the implementation of IRE and the development of student independence.

Secondary data were obtained from relevant school documents, including school profiles, instructional plans and materials, records of religious activities, photographs of school activities, and other supporting documents. Relevant books and scholarly publications were also consulted to provide theoretical and conceptual support for interpreting the findings. Arikunto (2019) notes that qualitative research data may be obtained from both human sources, such as informants, and nonhuman sources, such as documents, provided that the information is relevant to the research focus and can be scientifically justified.

Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (human instrument) responsible for determining the research focus, selecting participants, collecting data, interpreting information, and drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2022). The researcher was directly involved in observing learning activities, conducting interviews, examining documents, and interpreting the meanings underlying participants' experiences and behaviors.

To support the researcher's role, several supplementary instruments were employed, including interview guides, observation guidelines, and documentation forms. These instruments were used to maintain consistency and focus during data collection while allowing sufficient flexibility to explore emerging issues in the field. Moleong (2019) emphasizes that qualitative research instruments are flexible and may develop in response to the dynamics of field data, enabling researchers to capture social meanings in greater depth and within their natural contexts.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and triangulation. Direct observation was conducted to examine IRE learning activities, teacher–student interactions, classroom practices, and observable indicators of student independence in the school environment. Particular attention was given to students’ initiative, responsibility, discipline, ability to complete tasks independently, and willingness to make decisions without excessive assistance.

In-depth interviews were conducted with selected informants to obtain detailed information regarding the role of IRE teachers, strategies for fostering independence, students’ responses, and challenges encountered during the implementation of character-building activities. Interviews were conducted flexibly to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

Documentation was used to complement and corroborate observational and interview data. The documents included school records, instructional materials, religious activity records, photographs, and other relevant administrative or learning documents.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, including the principal, IRE teachers, classroom teachers, and educational staff. Technique triangulation involved comparing findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. This procedure was intended to identify consistencies and discrepancies across data sources and strengthen the credibility of the interpretations (Denzin, as cited in Moleong, 2019).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analysis consisted of four interconnected processes: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

First, data collection was conducted continuously throughout the observation, interview, and documentation processes. Second, data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, organizing, and focusing the collected information according to the research objectives. The researchers identified data related to the roles of IRE teachers, strategies for fostering independence, forms of student independence, supporting factors, and challenges encountered in the process.

Third, the condensed data were displayed in the form of organized narrative descriptions and thematic categories to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and emerging themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified by comparing emerging interpretations with the available evidence. The

verification process was conducted throughout the research process to ensure that the conclusions were grounded in the collected data rather than based on assumptions.

The interactive nature of this analytical process enabled the researchers to move systematically between data collection, condensation, display, and interpretation. This approach was considered appropriate for capturing the complexity of the role of IRE teachers in fostering student independence within the specific educational and social context of SDN 158 Mundan (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Moleong, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

A. The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Fostering Student Independence

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, play a strategic role in fostering student independence. Their role extends beyond delivering religious knowledge and includes character development through role modeling, habituation, and guidance in students' daily behaviors. IRE teachers are viewed as moral figures who serve as references for students in developing appropriate attitudes, performing religious practices, and making independent decisions.

Based on interviews with the principal, IRE teacher, and classroom teachers, the primary focus of the IRE teacher is to develop students' character and moral conduct from an early age. Values such as responsibility, honesty, discipline, and respect for others are consistently cultivated through classroom instruction and religious activities at school. The IRE teacher does not focus solely on students' cognitive understanding of religious concepts but also encourages them to apply these values in their everyday lives.

Student independence is fostered through habituation in independent religious practices, time management, and task completion without excessive dependence on teachers or parents. The IRE teacher guides students to perform prayers on time, read the Qur'an regularly, and take responsibility for their schoolwork and religious obligations. Observational findings indicate that students have begun to demonstrate greater awareness in performing religious practices and completing their tasks independently.

The instructional methods used by the IRE teacher are varied and practical, including discussion, question-and-answer sessions, direct practice, self-reflection, and independent religious assignments. Students are also actively involved in religious

activities, such as leading prayers and assisting with religious programs at school. This approach provides students with opportunities to take responsibility and develop self-confidence.

The IRE teacher's role modeling is an important factor in developing student independence. The teacher demonstrates consistency in discipline, honesty, and religious practice, providing students with concrete examples to emulate. This role modeling appears to influence changes in students' behavior, particularly in terms of discipline, responsibility, and compliance with school rules.

Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges in fostering student independence, including limited instructional time, students' continuing dependence on their parents, and insufficient support from the family environment. In addition, limited initiative and discipline among some students constitute obstacles to the development of independent character. These challenges require teacher creativity and sustained collaboration among the school, parents, and the broader community.

Overall, the findings indicate that IRE teachers at SDN 158 Mundan play an important role in fostering student independence through religious instruction, religious habituation, role modeling, and active learning practices. These roles contribute to the development of students' independent character in both school and social settings.

Table 1. The Role of IRE Teachers in Fostering Student Independence

No.	Informant	Interview Findings
1	Principal	The IRE teacher serves as a moral and character educator by cultivating discipline, responsibility, and religious values as foundations for student independence.
2	IRE Teacher	Student independence is fostered through independent religious practices, time management, and religious assignments that encourage students to work without depending on others.
3	Grade Classroom Teacher	1 The IRE teacher establishes the foundation of students' moral character through role modeling and habituation of honesty and responsibility.
4	Grade Classroom Teacher	2 The IRE teacher emphasizes the direct practice of religious values, including caring for others, responsibility, and independence in religious activities and schoolwork.
5	Grade Classroom Teacher	3 Student independence is developed through time management, independent religious practices, and gradually reducing students' dependence on teachers.
6	Grade	4 The IRE teacher's role modeling of discipline and compliance

	Classroom Teacher		with school rules encourages students to become independent in simple daily activities.
7	Grade 5 Classroom Teacher		The IRE teacher provides concrete examples through daily behavior, which influences students' independence and sense of responsibility.
8	Grade 6 Classroom Teacher		Practical instructional methods and the assignment of responsibilities in religious activities help improve students' independence and self-confidence.

B. The Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Teaching Methods in Fostering Student Independence

The findings indicate that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teaching methods at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, is deliberately directed toward fostering student independence. The IRE teacher does not rely solely on teacher-centered instruction but also emphasizes active student participation as a means of developing independent attitudes. Teaching methods are considered important instruments for cultivating responsibility, discipline, and students' ability to manage their learning activities independently.

Based on interviews with the principal, the IRE teacher, and classroom teachers, the instructional methods employed are varied and contextual. The IRE teacher combines lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, demonstrations, religious practice, simulations, and role-playing. Lectures are used to provide students with a basic understanding of religious teachings, whereas discussions and question-and-answer activities are used to encourage students to think critically and express their opinions independently.

Practice-based learning is one of the main strategies used to foster student independence. Through religious practices such as congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, and leading prayers, students are trained to take responsibility for their religious obligations without relying entirely on the teacher. Observations indicate that students have gradually become accustomed to performing religious activities and completing religious assignments independently while demonstrating improved discipline.

In addition, simulation and role-playing activities are used to help students internalize Islamic values in social situations. Students are involved in various roles that reflect real-life situations, such as leading prayers, cooperating with peers, and making decisions based on religious values. This approach provides meaningful learning experiences and encourages students to become more confident and independent in their actions.

The IRE teacher also adapts instructional methods to students' individual characteristics. More active students are encouraged to participate through discussions and question-and-answer activities, whereas quieter students are given self-reflection and independent religious assignments. For students who respond well to visual and kinesthetic learning experiences, the teacher uses demonstrations and hands-on activities. This adaptation is intended to enable students to develop according to their potential and learning needs.

However, the study identified several challenges in implementing instructional methods to foster student independence, including differences in students' characteristics, limited instructional time, and the tendency of some students to remain dependent on teachers and parents. These conditions require teachers to be creative in selecting appropriate instructional methods and require continuous support from both the school and family environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that varied, practical, and student-centered Islamic Religious Education teaching methods play an important role in developing student independence at SDN 158 Mundan. Through discussions, independent religious practices, simulations, and instructional adaptations based on students' characteristics, IRE teachers encourage students to become more responsible, disciplined, and independent in their school and social lives.

Table 2. Implementation of IRE Teaching Methods in Fostering Student Independence

No.	Informant	Interview Findings
1	Principal	IRE teaching is directed toward character development and student independence through active learning and religious practices.
2	IRE Teacher	The teacher uses lectures, discussions, religious practices, simulations, and independent assignments to develop students' responsibility and discipline.
3	Grade Classroom Teacher	2 Practical activities and religious habituation help students complete tasks without depending excessively on teachers.
4	Grade Classroom Teacher	3 Discussions and question-and-answer activities encourage students to think and act more independently.
5	Grade Classroom Teacher	4 Demonstrations and hands-on activities increase students' confidence in performing religious practices independently.
6	Grade Classroom	5 Simulations and role-playing help students make decisions based on religious values.

	Teacher	
7	Grade Classroom Teacher	6 Adapting instructional methods to students' characteristics contributes to the development of independence and learning responsibility.
8	IRE Teacher	Student development is evaluated through behavioral observation, independent assignments, and feedback to monitor the development of student independence.

C. Forms of Student Independence Developed through Islamic Religious Education

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, contributes to the development of various forms of student independence. The independence developed is not limited to religious practices but also includes time management, responsibility for assignments, decision-making, and behavioral changes in everyday life. IRE serves as an important means of cultivating discipline, responsibility, and personal awareness among students.

Based on interviews with the IRE teacher, principal, and classroom teachers, the most visible form of student independence is the ability to perform religious practices independently. Students have gradually become accustomed to performing prayers on time, reading the Qur'an, and fulfilling religious obligations without having to be continuously reminded by teachers or parents. This indicates the development of students' internal awareness of their religious obligations as part of their personal responsibility.

In addition to religious practices, student independence is also reflected in their ability to manage time and complete assignments. Students have begun to manage their time between learning, religious activities, and other activities. They demonstrate improved discipline in completing religious and school assignments without relying excessively on others. IRE learning that emphasizes discipline and responsibility contributes to the development of these positive habits.

Student independence is also reflected in their willingness to make decisions related to religious activities. Students have begun to take initiative in leading prayers, determining appropriate times for religious practices, and applying religious values in their daily lives. This active participation indicates that students not only understand religious teachings cognitively but are also increasingly able to apply them consciously and independently.

In terms of responsibility, students demonstrate greater awareness of both individual and social obligations. They are more disciplined in completing religious tasks, taking responsibility for religious activities, and showing concern for their peers and surrounding environment. These behaviors reflect the internalization of Islamic

values such as amanah (trustworthiness), responsibility, and social concern cultivated through IRE.

Changes in students' everyday behavior are also important indicators of the development of independence. Students demonstrate more independent, disciplined, and responsible behaviors both at school and at home. Rather than relying entirely on teachers' directions, they have begun to take initiative in managing their personal and social activities in accordance with religious values.

Feedback provided by teachers plays an important role in strengthening student independence. The IRE teacher and classroom teachers consistently recognize students' progress and provide constructive encouragement to improve their responsibility and initiative. Such feedback helps increase students' motivation, self-confidence, and awareness in developing independent behaviors.

Overall, the findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education at SDN 158 Mundan is associated with the development of various forms of student independence. These forms include independent religious practices, time management, decision-making, task responsibility, and behavioral changes in everyday life. The Islamic values conveyed through IRE learning have become an important foundation for developing students who are independent, disciplined, and responsible.

Table 3. Forms of Student Independence Developed through IRE

No.	Informant	Interview Findings
1	IRE Teacher	Students are able to perform religious practices independently, manage their time, and complete religious assignments without excessive dependence on others.
2	Principal	Student independence is reflected in discipline, responsibility, and the ability to manage learning and religious activities.
3	Grade Classroom Teacher	1 Students have begun to manage their learning and religious activities independently, although they still require limited guidance.
4	Grade Classroom Teacher	2 Students demonstrate independence in performing religious practices, completing assignments, and managing their daily schedules.
5	Grade Classroom Teacher	3 Students demonstrate increased responsibility and independence in completing religious and school assignments.
6	Grade Classroom Teacher	4 Students demonstrate greater initiative in religious and social activities, such as leading prayers and helping their peers.

7	Grade Classroom Teacher	5	Student independence is reflected in time management, learning discipline, and completion of religious assignments.
8	Grade Classroom Teacher	6	Students demonstrate independence in decision-making and responsibility for religious activities.

DISCUSSION

In the context of elementary education, student independence should not be understood merely as the ability to perform activities without assistance from others. Rather, it represents a developmental competency that encompasses self-awareness, self-control, perseverance, and the ability to make responsible decisions. At the elementary school level, independence develops through consistent daily practices, such as managing time, following rules, completing tasks without excessive dependence on others, and demonstrating honesty and initiative (Hidayat & Asyafah, 2019; Lickona, 2013). In this regard, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupies a strategic position because it not only transmits normative religious knowledge but also develops moral and spiritual habits that guide students' behavior in everyday life (Muhaimin, 2017).

From a regulatory perspective, efforts to strengthen student independence are consistent with Indonesia's national education policies. Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021 on National Education Standards, as amended by Government Regulation No. 4 of 2022, emphasizes that education should produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also possess well-rounded character and competencies. This direction is further reinforced by Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 10 of 2025 on Graduate Competency Standards and Regulation No. 12 of 2025 on Content Standards, which position character development and habituation as integral components of educational planning and learning implementation (Kemdikbudristek, 2021; Kemdikdasmen, 2025). Therefore, student independence constitutes an important mandate of the education system that should be developed through planned and continuous learning processes.

Within the conceptual framework of character education, independence can be understood as a form of self-regulation involving self-awareness, responsibility for the learning process and its outcomes, and the ability to monitor and regulate one's own behavior (Zimmerman, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). Independence does not mean that students are expected to learn entirely on their own without guidance. Instead, students are gradually trained to manage themselves consciously and responsibly. This perspective is particularly relevant to Islamic Religious Education at

the elementary school level because practices such as worship, discipline, trustworthiness, and honesty represent concrete and continuous forms of self-regulation training (Suyadi, 2018).

From an Islamic perspective, independence is closely associated with personal responsibility and *ikhtiar* (individual effort). The Qur'an emphasizes that every individual is responsible for his or her own actions and that changes in one's circumstances require changes within oneself (Qur'an 6:164; Qur'an 13:11). Within this framework, independence does not imply social isolation; rather, it represents a form of responsibility entrusted to individuals as moral agents (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Islamic Religious Education therefore serves as a means of internalizing values through which independence is developed through spiritual awareness and personal responsibility, rather than merely through external control or punishment (Nata, 2016).

The findings from SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, indicate that the role of the Islamic Religious Education teacher is particularly evident in three major areas: moral-spiritual modeling, the use of varied instructional methods, and the habituation of religious values in students' daily lives. The PAI teacher does not merely deliver instructional content but also serves as a role model in discipline, honesty, and religious practice. This modeling is consistent with the Islamic educational concept of *uswah hasanah*, in which values are more effectively internalized through concrete examples than through verbal instruction alone (Muhaimin, 2017; Tafsir, 2014).

Regarding instructional strategies, the PAI teacher combines various methods, including lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, demonstrations, role-playing, and habituation activities. Lectures provide students with a conceptual framework of religious values, while discussions and question-and-answer activities encourage reflection and reasoning. Demonstrations and role-playing transform abstract values into concrete learning experiences, while habituation reinforces these experiences into consistent patterns of behavior. This strategy is consistent with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes learning through observation and imitation, as well as character education approaches that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Bandura, 1986; Lickona, 2013).

The forms of independence observed in this study include discipline in performing religious practices, the ability to manage study time, willingness to make simple decisions, responsibility for completing assignments, honesty, and initiative in school activities. At the elementary school level, these indicators represent essential dimensions of independence because they reflect students' self-control and moral awareness (Hidayat & Asyafah, 2019). From the perspective of Islamic Religious

Education, time discipline can be understood as a form of trustworthiness, honesty as a foundation of integrity, and responsibility as a consequence of faith (Nata, 2016).

Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges in fostering student independence, including limited instructional time, differences in students' characteristics, and inconsistent support from families. These challenges indicate that the development of independence is influenced by the broader educational ecology, including the family environment and school culture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In this context, strengthening a safe and supportive school culture, as emphasized in Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 6 of 2026, is an important prerequisite for enabling students to experiment, act honestly, and demonstrate initiative without fear.

Based on the findings and discussion, the main contribution of this study lies in connecting concrete Islamic Religious Education practices with the concept of independence as self-regulation while aligning these practices with the direction of national education policy. The findings demonstrate that habituation and teacher modeling in Islamic Religious Education are not merely religious activities but also pedagogical mechanisms that can foster student independence at the elementary school level. Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education should extend beyond strengthening religious content to include pedagogical strategies that intentionally promote self-regulation, responsibility, and students' moral awareness.

CONCLUSION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SDN 158 Mundan, Masalle District, Enrekang Regency, plays a significant role in fostering student independence. This independence is reflected in students' increasing discipline in performing religious practices, responsibility for completing school assignments, and ability to manage their time more independently. These findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education functions not only as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as an important medium for character development and strengthening students' self-regulation from an early age.

The role of the Islamic Religious Education teacher is a key factor in this process. The teacher does not merely function as an instructor but also serves as a moral role model who instills discipline, honesty, responsibility, and respect for time. The internalization of Islamic values is facilitated through the habituation of positive attitudes and behaviors in students' daily lives, including politeness, social concern, tolerance, and independence in performing religious practices and completing school

assignments. This approach enables students to understand, internalize, and apply religious values more effectively in their everyday lives.

In terms of instructional strategies, Islamic Religious Education teachers employ varied and practical methods, including lectures to establish conceptual understanding, discussions and question-and-answer activities to develop independent and reflective thinking, as well as demonstrations, religious practice, simulations or role-playing, and independent religious assignments. These methods are considered effective because they encourage active student participation, strengthen students' sense of responsibility, and gradually reduce their dependence on teachers in the learning process and religious practices.

The forms of student independence observed as outcomes of Islamic Religious Education include the ability to perform religious practices independently, complete assignments with minimal supervision, demonstrate improved discipline and time management, and display social initiative, such as leading prayers, helping peers, and making decisions during religious activities. Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges, including limited instructional time, differences in students' characteristics, and inconsistent family support, all of which affect the optimization of student independence development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, Islamic Religious Education should be positioned more strategically as an important driver of student independence through consistent habituation of religious practices, time discipline, and personal responsibility across all grade levels. Consistency in school programs and institutional culture is expected to strengthen the internalization of independence values among students.

Islamic Religious Education teachers are encouraged to maintain and further develop varied, interactive, and practice-oriented instructional methods, including discussions, demonstrations, role-playing, and the assignment of active roles to students in religious activities. Such approaches provide students with greater opportunities to practice responsibility, make decisions, and develop confidence rather than relying primarily on teacher-centered lectures.

Schools should also strengthen systems for assessing student independence through behavioral observation and independent assignments, accompanied by continuous feedback. Simple but structured non-cognitive assessment can assist teachers in monitoring students' development of independence more comprehensively and identifying areas that require further support.

In addition, challenges related to limited instructional time and inconsistent family support should be addressed by strengthening collaboration between schools and parents. Cooperation is necessary to ensure that independence-building practices

developed at school can be reinforced in the home environment. Differentiated instructional approaches based on students' individual characteristics should also be implemented so that every student has equitable opportunities to develop into an independent, responsible, and confident individual.

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