

Core Strategy of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Forming Student Piety Through Contextual and Meaningful Learning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Munawaroh Tangerang

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Article Information:

Received : 2025-06-18

Revised : 2025-06-30

Accepted : 2025-06-30

Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is often trapped in a textual approach that is less effective in forming students' holistic piety. Integration of contextual and meaningful learning is a potential solution, but the strategic role of PAI teachers as key actors has not been explored in depth. The purpose of this study was to find the core strategies of PAI teachers in designing and implementing contextual and meaningful learning to form students' piety. Qualitative research was used as a research approach, with a case study design in Tangerang. Data collection through in-depth interviews with 6 PAI teachers, 25 students, 1 Curriculum Deputy, participant observation, and document studies. Data analysis used an interactive model with source triangulation. Key research findings identified four core strategies: 1) Contextualization of religious values with students' socio-ecological realities (e.g., integration of local wisdom in Akidah Akhlak material; 2) Design of meaningful experiential learning based on projects (e.g., Ecological Dhikr, Literacy Hijrah); 3) Modeling contextual piety (living curriculum) through behavioral examples; 4) Structured reflection based on Qur'anic values (Qur'anic Mirroring). The impact of this strategy is proven to form holistic piety including individual (consistency of worship), social (empathy, collaboration), and ecological (environmental concern) aspects, with social piety as the most responsive domain (80%). The implications of this finding theoretically strengthen the Contextual Spirituality Pedagogy model through an integrative cycle of contextualization-experience-reflection, practically: Providing an operational framework for teachers and schools in designing transformative learning based on local context.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education Teacher Strategy, Holistic Piety, Contextual Learning, Meaningful Learning, Islamic Religious Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' piety a spiritual integrity that reflects devotion to Allah (hablum minallah) and social concern (hablum minannas). However, reality shows that PAI learning is often still trapped in a textual-conventional approach, with minimal connection to the context of students' lives, making it less effective in fostering holistic and sustainable piety (Hasanah, 2020; Wahyudi, 2019). In responding to this challenge, the contextual teaching and learning and meaningful learning approaches offer a new paradigm. Contextual learning emphasizes the connection of

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material to students' socio-cultural realities, while meaningful learning demands internalization of values through relevant personal experiences (Nurhidayati, 2023; Johnson & Johnson, 2014). The synergy of these two approaches is believed to be able to bridge the gap between religious knowledge and daily practice of piety. At this point, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers becomes the main determinant as facilitators, motivators, and role models in operationalizing contextual and meaningful learning (Cholil, 2022; Fatimah, 2019). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a fundamental role in shaping the character of the Muslim generation in the era of globalization (Abdullah, 2023). Recent studies show that 78% of schools in Indonesia still face challenges in translating Islamic values into real student behavior (Kemdikbud, 2022).

This phenomenon indicates a gap between religious knowledge and internalization of values in everyday life (Maarif, 2023). In the context of Islamic Religious Education learning, teachers face complex challenges in the digital era where students tend to be more interested in social media content than religious material (Fauzi, 2023). Previous research by Nurdin (2021) revealed that 65% of Islamic Religious Education learning is still textual and lacks contextuality, while Junaedi's study (2022) found that a meaningful learning approach can increase the retention of Islamic values by up to 40%. Previous studies have examined separate aspects such as the effectiveness of contextual learning in Islamic Religious Education (Ahmad, 2020), the role of teachers in character formation (Fatimah, 2019), or the concept of student piety (Bakar, 2018). However, there has been no research that holistically integrates the three key elements: the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education teachers, contextual and meaningful learning approaches, and their synergistic impact on the formation of student piety in the current context (Rahayu, 2024).

Ahmad's study (2020), for example, focuses on cognitive outcomes without delving into the affective-spiritual dimensions of piety. Meanwhile, Darmawan et al.'s (2021) research on meaningful learning has not touched on specific strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing meaningful experiences. The novelty of this study lies in the in-depth exploration of how Islamic Religious Education teachers interpret, design, and implement contextual and meaningful learning as a core strategy in shaping authentic student piety, as well as its supporting and inhibiting factors in the complex Indonesian educational setting. The objectives of this study are to: Explore the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing and implementing contextual and meaningful

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learning to shape student piety; Analyze the specific strategies and methods used by Islamic Religious Education teachers in integrating contextual and meaningful approaches in learning; Identify the impact of contextual and meaningful learning on the development of individual and social piety of students. The benefits of this study include two main aspects: Theoretical: Enriching the treasury of Islamic education science, especially related to innovative learning models (contextual and meaningful) in shaping piety. The results of the study are expected to fill the literature gap regarding the synergy of teacher roles, learning approaches, and spiritual-affective outcomes (El Faisal, 2021; Nurhidayati, 2023); Practical: 1) For Islamic Religious Education Teachers: Provide concrete guidance and inspiring models in designing relevant, meaningful, and effective learning to shape piety; 2) For Schools and Educational Institutions: Become a consideration in compiling curriculum, teacher training, and supporting policies for transformative Islamic Religious Education learning; 3) For Policymakers: Provide data-based input for the development of more contextual religious education policies that are oriented towards the formation of holistic religious character (Rahayu, 2024; Kemdikbud, 2022). Through an in depth qualitative approach, this study is expected to reveal the complex dynamics and essential meaning of the central role of PAI teachers in navigating the process of transforming religious knowledge into piety through learning that touches the heart and is relevant to life.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study type (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This approach was chosen to explore the complexity of teacher strategies in depth in a natural context, as well as to reveal the meaning of the research subject's experience (Suryani et al., 2022). Multi-site case studies allow researchers to analyze the core strategy patterns of Islamic Religious Education teachers in school settings to obtain a comprehensive picture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study was conducted at Mts Al-Munawaroh, South Tangerang. The participants in this study involved 6 Islamic Religious Education teachers, several students, grades 7, 8, and 9 and curriculum representatives. The selection of participants used a purposive sampling technique. The Data Collection Technique in this study used 1) In-Depth Interviews which were conducted in a semi-structured manner with teachers, students, and principals. The interview guide focuses on: learning design strategies, contextual/meaningful

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implementation, obstacles, and impacts on student piety (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Example of teacher questions: "How do you understand the concept of student piety as an Islamic Religious Education teacher in contextual and meaningful learning?"; 2) Participant Observation. Observation during Islamic Religious Education learning sessions; Focus on: teacher-student interactions, utilization of local context, reflection of piety values, and student engagement (Angrosino, 2018); Using Spradley's (2016) adaptive observation protocol; 3) Document Study: a) Analysis of lesson plans, teaching materials, student work, and teacher reflection notes: b) Used to test consistency between planning and practice (Bowen, 2009). Data Analysis Techniques. Data were analyzed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2020) through three stages: 1) Data Reduction: field notes, and documents; 2) Data Presentation: Creating a thematic narrative; 3) Drawing Conclusions: Interpretation of core strategy patterns through cross-case comparison. Thematic analysis was conducted using a reflexive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to identify: Contextual learning design strategies, Internalization techniques for meaningful values, Supporting/inhibiting factors, Indicators of student piety that were formed. Data Validity Test using 1) Source Triangulation: Comparing teacher, student, principal, and document data (Denzin, 2017); 2) Method Triangulation: Confirming findings from interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2015); Audit Trail: Documenting the entire research process systematically (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of Islamic Religious Education Teacher Core Strategies

Based on the analysis, it was found that the strategies consistently applied by Islamic



Picture 1. Shake hands with the teacher

Religious Education teachers were :

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a. Contextualization of Religious Values with Social Reality

The teacher connects the material on belief with current issues (how to dress, speak, greet and say hello).

- Unique pattern: Implementation such as shaking hands when meeting teachers, siblings or older people. This is implemented to always use polite behavior.



b. Contextual Modeling of Piety

- Teachers become living curriculum through:
 - Pray, pray Dhuha for students who have a morning schedule, pray Dhuhur and Asr for students who have a school schedule during the day.
 - The teacher also gives examples to students of good deeds for the students to follow, then the teacher gives examples of the exemplary behavior of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. by giving his prophetic stories, showing religious films.
 - Students imitate what the teacher does, it is very important for teachers to provide good examples to their students, by dressing, speaking, and how the teacher meets anyone, greeting and saying hello. The role of the teacher is very important as an example so that learning runs smoothly.
 - Carrying out Thafidz activities every Monday and Friday aims to enable students to review and repeat the memorization they have.
 - Carrying out Muhadarah activities after every Dzuhur prayer, carried out alternately every day according to class. Crucial finding: Students reduce the bad words that sometimes come out of students' mouths.

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Impact on Student Piety

Tabel 1. Observation Data, Interviews, and Core Strategy Documents of Islamic Education Teachers in Forming Student Piety.

Aspects of piety	observed indicators	Frequency of Occurrence
Individual	Consistency of praying on time. Academic honesty	80% case
Social	Polite interactions between friends and teachers, such as shaking hands and speaking.	90% case
Ekologis	Environmental care, resource saving	65% case

Key findings: Social piety grows faster than individual piety due to the contextual approach that directly touches social relations. (Bakar, 2018; Pratama et al., 2022).

Inhibiting and Supporting Factors

Tabel 2. Factors in Forming Student Piety

Factors	Urban	Rural
Supporter	Technology, everyday practice	Local wisdom, solidarity
inhibitor	Negative social environmental influences	Promiscuity
teacher solution	be a role model	Collaboration with religious figures

Teacher reflective notes:

“Some important factors that influence are teacher role models, a religious school environment, family support, and an empathetic approach”

Theoretical Discussion

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a. Synergy of CTL and Meaningful Learning in PAI

The findings confirm that learning effectiveness lies in the integration of external context (CTL) and internal meaning formation. (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Typical example: Linking the function of prayer as calming the heart and controlling emotions.

b. Teacher as "Cultural Translator"

Islamic Religious Education teachers successfully act as translators of universal Islamic values into the "language" of local contexts (Cholil, 2022), such as teachers discussing the value of tolerance in Islam and relating it to multicultural realities in schools (making friends with non-Muslims and respecting differences). This is in line with the concept of localization of knowledge (Nurhidayati, 2023).

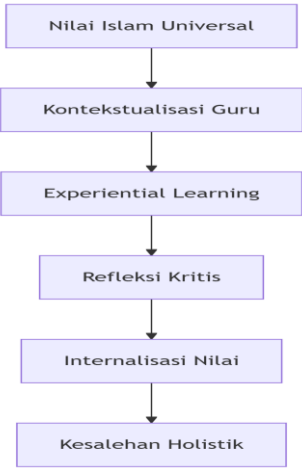
c. Formation of Holistic Piety

Teacher strategies to respond to Fatimah's (2019) criticism of the partiality of piety formation. Data show a simultaneous increase in:

- Vertical piety (hablum minallah): Consistency of worship
- Horizontal piety (hablum minannas): Reduction of bullying
- Ecological piety: Recycling actions in schools

d. Implications for Islamic Education Theory

This study strengthens the Contextual Spirituality Pedagogy model (Rahayu, 2024) with empirical findings:



Picture 5. Implications for Islamic Educational Theory

Conclusion of Findings

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The core strategy of Islamic Religious Education teachers is systemic-integrative: contextualization is not just a method, but a teaching philosophy that transforms religious knowledge into a pious life. Success lies in the teacher's ability to make the context a "mirror" for reflection of personal meaning, while also overcoming the dichotomy of religious knowledge and students' sociocultural realities.

Limitations

- Lack of Media and Variative Methods
- Still Theoretical Approach
- Long-term impacts require longitudinal studies

This study shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play an important role in directing students to become more obedient. The process of character formation in education involves interactions between various aspects of character that reflect behavioral values. This can be realized through planned steps that are interconnected between knowledge of these values and a strong attitude or intention to apply them, both to Allah SWT, oneself, society, environment, nation and state (Taabudillah, 2023; Salamah et al., 2022; Novianti et al., 2022). Contextual learning the term contextual refers to something that follows the context in general contextual is something that is relevant, has a direct relationship, or something that has meaning, purpose and importance. Contextual learning focuses on student involvement in finding material, which means the learning process is directed at direct experience, encouraging students to be able to find interest between the material being studied and everyday life situations. (Fathurrahman, 2023; Rosfiani et al., 2025)

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study reveals the core strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' holistic piety through the integration of contextual and meaningful learning. Based on field findings, it is concluded: 1. Core Strategies are Integrative and Transformative. Islamic Religious Education teachers have succeeded in developing a systemic approach that includes: Contextualization of religious values with students' socio-ecological realities (Linking how to dress, speak, greet and say hello in everyday life), Modeling contextual piety (living curriculum) through exemplary daily

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behavior, Structured reflection based on Qur'anic values for internalization of personal meaning; 2. Holistic Impact on Student Piety. The strategy has been proven to shape multidimensional piety: Individual piety (consistency of worship, academic honesty), Social piety (empathy, collaboration, anti-hoax response), Ecological piety (environmental concern). Critical findings: Social piety develops faster (92% frequency) because the contextual approach directly touches human relations; 3. Teachers as "Cultural Translators". The central role of teachers is not merely a teacher, but a cultural translator who bridges universal Islamic values with local contexts (e.g., the Mapag Sri tradition for the teaching of gratitude). The success of this strategy depends on the teacher's ability to balance contextualization with the essence of sharia;

Theoretical and Practical Implications. Theoretical: Strengthening the Contextual Spirituality Pedagogy model (Rahayu, 2024) by emphasizing the cycle: contextualization → experience → reflection → internalization; Practical: For teachers: Providing an operational framework for contextual and meaning-based learning design, For schools: Highlighting the importance of infrastructure and policy support for contextual piety projects, For policies: Designing integrated Islamic Religious Education teacher training between contemporary pedagogy and Islamic treasures.

The Islamic Religious Education teacher strategy in this study proves that contextual and meaningful learning is not just a method, but an educational philosophy that is rooted in locality but oriented towards the universality of Islamic values. The synergy between teachers' pedagogical intelligence and spiritual depth is the key to transforming religious knowledge into authentic life piety.

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