Islamic Religious Education as an Effort to Strengthen Religious Literacy among Adolescents

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Abstract: *This study aims to examine the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as an effort to strengthen religious literacy among adolescents in the contemporary era. Adolescents today face rapid globalization, digital transformation, and cultural shifts that influence their understanding and practice of religion. These conditions create both opportunities and challenges for PAI in nurturing balanced personal development that integrates knowledge, faith, and moral values. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, this research analyzed relevant studies published from 2018 to 2024 focusing on strategies, methods, and innovations in enhancing religious literacy among youth. The findings reveal that PAI contributes significantly to improving adolescents' cognitive understanding of religion while also fostering ethical awareness and spiritual resilience. Innovative strategies such as contextual learning, digital-based approaches, and value-oriented pedagogy were identified as effective in strengthening religious literacy. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on several factors, including teachers' digital competencies, institutional support, and active engagement of students in meaningful learning activities. The novelty of this study lies in highlighting the importance of integrating PAI with technological advancement and character-building approaches to ensure its relevance in the digital era. This research concludes that strengthening religious literacy through PAI must be carried out holistically by combining knowledge, practice, and values to prepare adolescents as morally responsible individuals capable of making positive contributions to society.*
Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Religious Literacy, Adolescents, Systematic Literature Review, Digital Era

INTRODUCTION

Religious literacy has become an essential aspect in guiding young people to navigate the complexities of modern life(Hannam et al., 2020). In the context of adolescence, this period is often marked by curiosity, exploration, and the need for identity formation, which makes it a crucial stage for religious education. Islamic Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' worldview by integrating spiritual values, ethical guidance, and knowledge about religious practices. With globalization and rapid technological development, adolescents are exposed to diverse ideologies and information, which may influence their perceptions of religion and morality(Fitryansyah, Muhammad Andryan, 2024). Therefore, strengthening religious literacy is not merely about teaching doctrinal knowledge but also about fostering the ability to understand,

interpret, and practice religious values in everyday life. Islamic education in schools thus becomes a vehicle to promote critical, contextual, and relevant engagement with religion. It not only prevents misunderstanding and misinterpretation but also nurtures a balanced identity among young Muslims(Iftikhar et al., 2025).

Islamic Education has traditionally functioned as a bridge between knowledge and practice, aiming to build students' character alongside intellectual competencies(Moslimany et al., 2024). In the modern era, religious literacy goes beyond the ability to read sacred texts; it includes the capacity to comprehend their meanings, relate them to contemporary challenges, and apply them in practical decision-making. For adolescents, whose identities are still in the process of development, this capacity is particularly vital. Schools serve as the primary setting where formal Islamic Education is delivered, combining cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects(Arlinda, 2024). Through the teaching of Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, and Islamic history, PAI creates a framework for students to critically engage with their faith while fostering tolerance and social responsibility. Such an approach not only strengthens personal piety but also promotes harmony in a pluralistic society. Religious literacy, therefore, becomes a foundation for young people to engage meaningfully with both their tradition and the wider global context.

The significance of Islamic Education in building religious literacy among adolescents cannot be overstated. Adolescence is often described as a transitional stage characterized by vulnerability to external influences such as peer pressure, media, and popular culture. In this context, PAI contributes to the internalization of values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and empathy, which are rooted in religious teachings. Moreover, religious literacy helps students to critically evaluate the information they encounter in social media and online platforms, preventing radical interpretations and misinformation. Islamic Education, when implemented effectively, also promotes a spirit of inquiry, encouraging students to ask meaningful questions about life, faith, and morality. This critical engagement prevents blind adherence while fostering genuine understanding and conviction. Thus, reinforcing religious literacy through PAI equips adolescents with both the spiritual strength and intellectual readiness to face contemporary challenges.

Despite the importance of religious literacy, many adolescents today experience a gap in understanding and practicing Islamic teachings. The rapid expansion of digital media exposes them to fragmented, shallow, and sometimes misleading interpretations of religion. Social media platforms, while offering access to religious knowledge, often lack the depth and authenticity provided by structured learning. Consequently, adolescents may develop a superficial understanding of their faith, leading to confusion or even apathy toward religious practice. Moreover, the influence of secularism and materialism has increasingly shaped youth culture, sometimes undermining the role of religion in everyday decision-making. Schools often struggle to balance academic demands with adequate emphasis on character and spiritual education. This condition poses a significant challenge for Islamic Education teachers, who must ensure that students not only acquire knowledge but also cultivate genuine faith and ethical values.

Another pressing issue lies in the effectiveness of teaching methods used in Islamic Education. Traditional, teacher-centered approaches may no longer fully engage students who are accustomed to interactive and digital learning environments. Adolescents demand participatory and relevant forms of learning that connect religious concepts with real-life issues they face. Without innovation, Islamic Education risks becoming perceived as outdated and irrelevant, reducing students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Additionally, there is often limited collaboration between schools, families, and communities in reinforcing religious literacy, which weakens its impact. In some cases, the lack of contextualization leads to rigid interpretations that do not resonate with the dynamic realities of adolescence. These problems highlight the need for a renewed framework in teaching Islamic Education—one that integrates tradition with innovation while addressing the holistic needs of youth.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of religious literacy as a foundation for moral and character education among adolescents. Researchers note that strong religious literacy can help prevent moral decline, social deviance, and the spread of radical ideologies. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that students with higher levels of religious literacy demonstrate greater resilience, tolerance, and civic responsibility. Islamic Education, in this context, becomes not only a subject of study but also a transformative practice that nurtures ethical awareness and social harmony. Innovative teaching models such as project-based learning, contextual learning,

and the integration of digital media have been proposed to enhance students' engagement with religious content. These studies underline the need for Islamic Education that adapts to contemporary realities while remaining faithful to core values of Islam.

Other scholars highlight that religious literacy also involves interfaith understanding and the ability to appreciate diversity. For adolescents in multicultural societies, Islamic Education should not only reinforce personal faith but also cultivate openness and dialogue. Recent literature stresses the importance of integrating religious literacy with broader educational goals, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and emotional intelligence. This integration ensures that students are not isolated from global discourse but instead contribute positively while maintaining their religious identity. The literature therefore calls for teachers to serve as role models who embody religious values while facilitating critical discussions in classrooms. Such perspectives broaden the scope of PAI from mere doctrinal instruction to a comprehensive educational effort aimed at preparing responsible, ethical, and globally aware citizens.

Although existing research provides valuable insights into the role of Islamic Education in enhancing religious literacy, there remains a gap in understanding how this process specifically addresses the unique challenges of adolescence in the digital age. Many studies focus on general approaches to Islamic Education but overlook the contextual realities of students' daily interactions with media, peers, and global ideologies. There is limited research that maps out innovative strategies tailored to the needs of adolescents while simultaneously responding to the influence of social media and globalization. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on how Islamic Education can function as a dynamic tool for strengthening religious literacy, not only as a subject matter but also as a holistic practice embedded in students' lived experiences. By addressing this gap, the study aims to offer new perspectives on integrating traditional Islamic pedagogy with contemporary educational innovations.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of Islamic Education as an effort to strengthen religious literacy among adolescents. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how PAI can address challenges related to digital media, globalization, and identity formation in youth. It also aims to identify innovative teaching approaches that make religious learning more relevant, engaging, and transformative for students. Furthermore, the study intends to contribute to the

academic discourse by bridging the gap between theory and practice in the field of Islamic Education. By doing so, it aspires to provide practical recommendations for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers in designing effective models of religious literacy education. Ultimately, the research seeks to empower adolescents with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to embody noble character while actively participating in a pluralistic, digitalized world.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to explore the role of Islamic Education in strengthening religious literacy among adolescents(Arif, Muhamad; Abd Aziz, 2023). The SLR approach was chosen because it allows researchers to synthesize and critically evaluate existing studies in a structured and transparent way. This method ensures that the findings are based on reliable, peer-reviewed evidence rather than isolated perspectives.

The review process followed three main stages: planning, conducting, and reporting. In the planning stage, research questions were formulated to focus on how Islamic Education contributes to the development of religious literacy in adolescents, particularly in relation to the challenges of digitalization and globalization. The conducting stage involved identifying relevant literature published between 2018 and 2024, sourced from databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and DOAJ. Keywords used in the search included "Islamic Education," "religious literacy," "youth," and "character education." Studies that directly addressed Islamic Education at the adolescent level were prioritized, while articles unrelated to literacy or published outside the inclusion criteria were excluded.

In the reporting stage, data from the selected studies were analyzed thematically, focusing on key aspects such as pedagogical approaches, challenges faced by teachers, and the impact of Islamic Education on adolescent religious identity. This process ensured that the review provided both a broad overview and in-depth insights into the role of Islamic Education(Sulaeman, 2025). The SLR method is suitable for this research because it highlights the breadth of existing evidence while identifying research gaps and opportunities for further investigation. By using this method, the study not only summarizes the state of knowledge but also offers practical recommendations for enhancing religious literacy through Islamic Education in adolescent contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. **The Role of Islamic Education in Strengthening Religious Literacy**

Islamic Education plays a pivotal role in enhancing the religious literacy of adolescents by providing a structured framework for understanding faith(Sulaeman, 2025). Unlike informal sources such as social media, formal education ensures that knowledge is authentic and systematically delivered. This helps students not only memorize religious texts but also comprehend their meaning in context. Adolescents are trained to connect religious teachings with real-life situations, which strengthens both intellectual and moral development. By doing so, Islamic Education becomes a foundation for resilience against moral decline and external influences. Teachers serve as role models who embody religious values in daily interactions with students. Such consistent exposure helps adolescents gradually internalize religious literacy as part of their identity.

Religious literacy within Islamic Education is not limited to doctrinal knowledge but also involves developing the ability to analyze and critically reflect on religious messages(Sulaeman, 2025). Adolescents are encouraged to engage in discussions that connect Qur'anic teachings with current social and cultural issues. This approach nurtures a sense of relevance and prevents students from perceiving religion as detached from reality. It also fosters critical thinking, which is crucial in evaluating the vast information circulating in digital spaces. The school setting becomes an arena where students can clarify their doubts, debate respectfully, and form balanced religious perspectives. Through guided learning, students are less likely to adopt extreme or radical interpretations. Ultimately, Islamic Education provides a safe and constructive platform for fostering literacy that is both spiritual and intellectual.

Another important aspect of strengthening religious literacy is the integration of Islamic values into everyday school activities. Daily practices such as communal prayers, Qur'an recitation, and religious ceremonies are more than rituals; they serve as reinforcement of classroom teachings. Adolescents are more likely to embrace values when they are consistently practiced in their environment. This aligns with the principle that literacy is not only about knowledge acquisition but also about habitual engagement. Schools that emphasize integration

between learning and practice create a holistic learning environment. Over time, students develop an identity that harmonizes intellectual understanding with religious commitment. Such practices illustrate that Islamic Education is not limited to textbooks but extends into life habits.

The effectiveness of Islamic Education in strengthening religious literacy also depends on the teacher's ability to adapt methods to adolescent needs. Traditional lecture-based methods are often insufficient to engage students who demand interaction and digital involvement. Teachers who employ project-based learning, case studies, and digital platforms can significantly enhance students' engagement with religious content. This method not only makes learning enjoyable but also encourages students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. Adolescents are more likely to embrace religious values when they see them as applicable to real-life challenges. Thus, Islamic Education that combines pedagogy, digital tools, and life skills has greater potential to strengthen literacy among youth. The dynamic role of the teacher is therefore crucial to maintaining relevance in a changing society.

In summary, Islamic Education has a fundamental role in shaping religious literacy among adolescents. It goes beyond teaching rituals and doctrines to fostering critical, reflective, and applicable understanding of religion. Through role modeling, integrated practices, and innovative pedagogy, adolescents can develop a comprehensive literacy that blends spiritual commitment with intellectual maturity. The school context thus becomes a central space for cultivating future generations who are resilient, morally grounded, and socially responsible. This role highlights the strategic importance of Islamic Education in addressing the complex realities faced by today's youth.

2. Challenges in Strengthening Religious Literacy

Despite its importance, strengthening religious literacy through Islamic Education faces significant challenges in today's context. One of the main issues is the overwhelming influence of digital media on adolescents. Students are increasingly exposed to fragmented religious information online, which often lacks authenticity and depth. Social media influencers sometimes present simplified or even misleading interpretations of Islam. Without adequate guidance, adolescents may adopt shallow or distorted religious perspectives. This undermines

the structured and holistic efforts of Islamic Education in schools. The challenge lies in bridging the gap between formal learning and digital exposure. Teachers must address this reality to prevent confusion and misinterpretation among students.

Another challenge relates to the changing social environment and peer influence among adolescents. Many students are drawn to popular culture, entertainment, and secular lifestyles that may conflict with religious values. Peer pressure often discourages the practice of religious teachings in daily life. For example, students may feel reluctant to perform prayers or wear religious attire due to fear of being judged by peers. This creates an internal conflict between their faith and their social acceptance. Such tension highlights the difficulty of translating religious literacy into consistent practice. Islamic Education must therefore address the psychological and social dimensions of adolescent life, not just the cognitive aspects.

Institutional limitations also present barriers to effective religious literacy (Moslimany et al., 2024). Many schools lack adequate facilities, digital infrastructure, and training for teachers to integrate innovative methods. Teachers may be willing to adapt but face constraints in terms of resources and support(Ngoasong, 2022). This problem is particularly evident in rural schools where access to educational technology is limited. Consequently, students may not benefit from interactive and engaging approaches to Islamic Education. Without sufficient institutional support, efforts to strengthen literacy risk becoming stagnant and less relevant to adolescent needs. Addressing these systemic issues requires collaboration between schools, policymakers, and communities.

Family involvement is another critical challenge in reinforcing religious literacy. While schools play a central role, parents are often less engaged in supporting their children's religious development. Adolescents may receive mixed messages when school teachings are not reinforced at home(Yeager et al., 2018). In some cases, parents prioritize academic success over character and spiritual development. This weakens the overall impact of Islamic Education because literacy must be reinforced consistently across different environments. Teachers often struggle to build partnerships with families to ensure coherence in values. Strengthening communication and collaboration between home and school is therefore essential.

Lastly, globalization and secular ideologies pose a broader challenge for religious literacy. Adolescents are increasingly exposed to global narratives that may undermine the role of religion in shaping identity and values. Concepts of relativism, materialism, and individualism often dominate media and social discourse. These influences can lead adolescents to question or distance themselves from religious traditions. Islamic Education must therefore find ways to present religion as relevant, dynamic, and compatible with modern life. Without such contextualization, religious literacy risks being perceived as outdated or irrelevant. This makes the task of teachers more complex but also more urgent in guiding adolescents toward balanced and holistic literacy.

3. Opportunities for Strengthening Religious Literacy

While challenges exist, the era of digital transformation also presents unique opportunities for strengthening religious literacy. Technology provides platforms that can be harnessed to make Islamic Education more engaging and interactive. Digital applications, online Qur'an learning, and multimedia resources can bring religious content closer to adolescents(Sanusi, 2024). When used effectively, these tools can turn the digital environment into a space for positive religious engagement. This approach aligns with the way adolescents naturally interact with technology in their daily lives. Teachers who embrace digital innovation can reach students more effectively and create meaningful learning experiences. Thus, technology should be seen as a partner rather than a threat in fostering literacy.

Another opportunity lies in the increasing emphasis on character education within national and global educational policies. Religious literacy is naturally aligned with the goals of character formation, making Islamic Education a key contributor to holistic education(Rukmana, 2024). Schools can position PAI as not only a subject but also a driver of broader values-based education initiatives. This allows Islamic Education to gain more recognition and support within the educational system. Adolescents benefit from this integration because it creates coherence between religious values and civic responsibilities. The synergy between religious literacy and character education offers a strategic pathway to strengthen students' moral and intellectual development.

Collaboration between schools, families, and communities also provides opportunities for reinforcing literacy. When all stakeholders actively contribute, adolescents receive consistent reinforcement of religious values. Community programs such as youth religious activities, social service, and religious competitions complement school teachings. These collaborative efforts ensure that literacy is practiced beyond the classroom. They also provide adolescents with role models outside the school environment, strengthening their sense of belonging and identity. Such multi-level collaboration maximizes the impact of Islamic Education on students' lives. It turns literacy into a lived experience rather than a theoretical concept.

The global discourse on interfaith dialogue and multiculturalism also creates opportunities for Islamic Education(Smith & Rena, 2016). By framing religious literacy as a tool for understanding diversity, PAI can promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Adolescents equipped with strong religious literacy are better prepared to engage respectfully with people of other faiths. This prepares them not only for local but also for global citizenship. Islamic Education can therefore play a proactive role in building bridges between communities. Such positioning enhances the relevance of religious literacy in a pluralistic world. It also shows that Islamic values are compatible with global values of peace, justice, and cooperation.

Finally, the increasing professionalization of teachers provides opportunities for more effective Islamic Education. Training programs, workshops, and continuous professional development equip teachers with new skills and methods. Teachers who are digitally literate and pedagogically innovative can deliver more impactful lessons. Professional development also helps teachers address the psychological and social needs of adolescents. This enhances the role of teachers as both educators and mentors in guiding students. By strengthening teacher capacity, schools can maximize the potential of Islamic Education in fostering religious literacy. Such investment ensures that adolescents are guided by competent and inspiring figures.

4. **Strategic Approaches to Enhance Religious Literacy**

To address challenges and maximize opportunities, strategic approaches must be adopted in Islamic Education(Sain, 2024). One key strategy is curriculum innovation that integrates

religious literacy with critical thinking and digital skills. Lessons should not only teach religious knowledge but also train students to analyze, question, and apply teachings in contemporary contexts. This makes literacy more relevant and engaging for adolescents. The integration of project-based learning and problem-solving approaches encourages active participation. Students become co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Such an approach transforms Islamic Education into a dynamic and meaningful process.

Another strategy is the adoption of digital platforms as complementary tools for classroom learning. Teachers can use interactive applications, e-learning modules, and social media to extend literacy beyond school hours. For example, digital storytelling and virtual discussions can help students explore religious concepts in creative ways. These methods resonate with adolescents' learning styles, which are often visual and interactive. By integrating technology, Islamic Education can bridge the gap between traditional teaching and digital realities. This strategy also ensures that religious literacy is not confined to the classroom but becomes part of students' digital engagement(Sain, 2024).

Strengthening partnerships with families is also essential for enhancing literacy. Schools should actively involve parents in supporting students' religious development(Jacob, 2025). Programs such as parent workshops, family-based religious assignments, and joint community activities can reinforce school teachings. Adolescents benefit greatly when they receive consistent messages from both school and home. Such collaboration ensures that literacy is nurtured in multiple environments. Teachers should therefore build open communication channels with parents to align educational goals. This creates a holistic ecosystem for reinforcing religious literacy.

Developing teachers' professional capacity is another strategic priority. Teachers must be equipped with both pedagogical innovation and emotional intelligence to guide adolescents effectively. Professional development programs should emphasize not only teaching methods but also mentorship skills. Teachers who are empathetic, approachable, and reflective become role models for students. This enhances their ability to address the diverse needs of adolescents. By investing in teacher development, schools can ensure that Islamic Education remains

impactful and relevant. Strong teacher capacity is therefore central to any strategy aimed at strengthening religious literacy.

Lastly, creating a school culture that embodies religious values is a powerful strategy for reinforcing literacy. When values are integrated into every aspect of school life, students are immersed in a consistent environment of practice and reinforcement. This includes daily routines, interpersonal interactions, and institutional traditions. Such a culture helps adolescents internalize religious literacy naturally through lived experience. Schools that embody this holistic approach create a strong foundation for character and identity formation. This strategy ensures that literacy is not an isolated academic goal but a way of life for students.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in strengthening religious literacy among adolescents, especially in facing the complex challenges of globalization, digital culture, and moral decline. The findings demonstrate that PAI not only provides cognitive understanding of religious teachings but also fosters critical, ethical, and spiritual awareness that supports balanced personal development. Through systematic literature review, it was found that various innovative methods, such as contextual learning, digital-based media, and character-oriented pedagogy, have been effectively applied to improve students' religious literacy. However, the novelty of this research lies in emphasizing that the effectiveness of PAI depends largely on the integration of digital competence, teacher professionalism, and active engagement of adolescents in meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, strengthening religious literacy through PAI must be designed holistically, combining knowledge, practice, and values, so that adolescents can grow into morally responsible individuals with strong religious insight and readiness to contribute positively to society.

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