

Integration of Science and Parental Involvement in Islamic School Curriculum: A Review on Al-Azhar Islamic School Indonesia

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Abstract: This article examines the integration of science and parental involvement within the Islamic school curriculum, with a particular focus on the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (Ind: Pendidikan Agama Islam [PAI]) at Al-Azhar Islamic School Solo Baru. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study of Al-Azhar Islamic School Solo Baru. Data collection methods include interviews with religious education teachers, direct observations by the researcher, and documentation. After validating the data, an interactive analysis approach is used. The findings reveal that Al-Azhar Islamic School, as a pioneer in the modernisation of Islamic education in the 21st century, has successfully integrated religious and general education in a harmonious manner. The school does not merely use religion as a promotional tool, but actively implements and lives religious education in daily life. This achievement is particularly significant, considering that madrasas and Islamic boarding schools have traditionally focused on religious education and have yet to fully accommodate general education at the beginning of the 21st century.

Keywords: Integration of science, parental involvement, Islamic school curriculum, Islamic Religious Education, Al-Azhar Islamic School.

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji integrasi sains dan keterlibatan orang tua dalam kurikulum sekolah Islam, dengan fokus pada implementasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di Sekolah Islam Al-Azhar Solo Baru. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus di Sekolah Islam Al-Azhar Solo Baru. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara dengan guru agama, observasi langsung oleh peneliti, dan dokumentasi. Setelah data diuji validitasnya, analisis dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan analisis interaktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Sekolah Islam Al-Azhar, sebagai pelopor modernisasi pendidikan Islam abad ke-21, berhasil mengintegrasikan pendidikan agama dan pendidikan umum secara harmonis. Sekolah ini tidak hanya menjadikan agama sebagai alat promosi, tetapi juga



mengimplementasikan dan menghidupkan pendidikan agama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Pencapaian ini sangat signifikan, mengingat bahwa madrasah dan pesantren masih cenderung fokus pada pendidikan agama dan belum sepenuhnya mengakomodasi pendidikan umum pada awal abad ke-21.

Kata Kunci: Integrasi sains, keterlibatan orang tua, kurikulum sekolah Islam, pendidikan agama Islam, Sekolah Islam Al-Azhar.

How to Cite: Dardiri, M. A. (2024). Integration of Science and Parental Involvement in Islamic School Curriculum: A Review on Al-Azhar Islamic School Indonesia. *EL-HIKMAH: Jurnal Kajian dan Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, vol. 18(2), 203-217. <https://doi.org/10.20414/elhikmah.v18i2.11031>.

Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the presence of Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren) and Madrasah (Rani et al., 2023). The Islamic boarding school itself has been an original Islamic educational institution in Indonesia for several centuries (Mutawally, 2023). Finally, the formalization of Islamic education emerged as a madrasah that accommodated the students to get formal legal recognition for the education taken at the pesantren (Mustakim, 2019; Musthofa et al., 2022). Islamic boarding schools and madrasahs have similarities in implementing Islamic education in Indonesia, namely providing a larger portion of religious materials than social and natural sciences. Thus, social sciences and natural sciences seem to be the number two sciences for students in Islamic educational institutions.

In the 21st Century, a breakthrough was born among some Muslims to present Islamic educational institutions that want to bridge the scientific gap. Thus, the term Islamic School emerged, which gave a new style to the implementation of Islamic religious education in Indonesia (Jamhari, 2009). Some of them are Al-Azhar Islamic School, Muhammadiyah School, Integrated Islamic School, which has ideological ties with the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia, and Hidayatullah School.

Al-Azhar Islamic School is the oldest Islamic school in Indonesia, and it began to exist in the 1960s. Islamic schools are trying to make a breakthrough by providing quality Islamic education to the community, especially urban Muslims (Jamhari, 2009). The presence of Islamic schools hopes to make students proficient in social and natural sciences, but at the same time, they also have good spiritual depth. Thus, religion can be values that fortify itself from bad things.

Research related to Islamic Schools has been carried out by several previous researchers. Mustakim, in his research on the transformation of Islamic education, shows that the presence of schools in the pesantren environment strengthens the existence of pesantren from various aspects, especially in terms of the integration of modern science and management without eliminating the pesantren institution. The results of Mustakim's research refute Karel Steenbrink's thesis that traditional pesantren must be transformed into madrasas and schools (Mustakim, 2019).

Karen Bryner, in her research, alluded to Islamic schools in Indonesia as a piety project, where Islamic schools have succeeded in filling empty spaces that Islamic educational institutions do not touch to solve the problems of Urban middle-class Muslims (Bryner, 2013). Basyit also strengthened Bryner's conclusion by mentioning several factors that affect the existence of Islamic schools in Indonesia, namely the awareness of modern Muslims to design superior education, the declining quality of public schools, the skepticism of some people toward the quality of Islamic boarding schools and madrasas, the improvement of the community's economy, and the government's alignment with private schools in increasing internationalization (Basyit, 2019). Yanwar Pribadi also studied the relationship between Islamic schools and the urban middle-class Muslim community. In his research, he emphasises that urban Muslim societies tend to choose Islamic schools as a place to educate their children due to concerns about the purity of Islam (Pribadi, 2022).

Regarding the educational process in Islamic schools, Charlene Tan, in her research, emphasized that Islamic schools have a different tradition from other Islamic education in Indonesia. Islamic schools emphasize mastery of religious and general sciences, attach importance to understanding rather than memorization, and develop activities oriented to students' life skills (Tan, 2014).

The researcher sees that previous research related to Islamic schools is very focused on discussing the relationship between Islamic schools and urban middle-class Muslims. Meanwhile, in-depth research on what and how the educational process is still a rare area of research. Thus, this research will focus on implementing Islamic Religious Education in Islamic Schools in terms of educational materials and parental involvement in education. With this focus, findings on the implementation of the Islamic religious education curriculum and the involvement of parents outside of school in terms of religious education will be a novelty in this study.

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study at Al-Azhar Islamic School Solo Baru. Data collection techniques use interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with religious teachers. Observations are carried out directly by researchers, and documentation is carried out by accessing data about Al-Azhar Islamic Schools through the official website and Islamic Religious Education books published by Al-Azhar Islamic Schools. The data obtained were tested for validity using triangulation methods, namely juxtaposing and verifying data obtained from interviews with observation and documentation. After a validity test, the data was analyzed using interactive analysis.

Genealogy of Islamic Schools

Islamic schools are a new entity in the treasure trove of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. The presence of Islamic schools at the end of the 20th Century cannot be separated from the anxiety of the

Indonesian Muslim community about the lagging of Muslims in the world of education. At that time, Islamic educational institutions represented by Islamic boarding schools and madrasas, known as traditional educational institutions, closed themselves off from modernization, losing competition with leading public schools and Christian schools. So, some people see the need for a breakthrough or leap that can boost the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Efforts to improve the quality of Islamic education have been tried by the Minister of Religion Mukti Ali in the 1970s by overhauling the Madrasah curriculum (Azra et al., 2007). He combined the Madrasah curriculum with a scheme of 70% general material and 30% religious material, hoping that madrasah graduates have general knowledge that could be used as capital to enter Public Universities (Mukhtar, 2001).

Efforts to modernize and actualize madrasas have given birth to a new problem, namely the marginalization of religious education – although, at a certain point, it has succeeded in pulling madrasas from the periphery to the middle of national education. This marginalization is even more evident when MAPK's idea to produce a cadre of ulama in the Munawir Sadzali era does not produce optimal results (Azra, 2009).

In this anxiety, a group of Muslims emerged who initiated Islamic Schools as a new alternative to modern and Islamic Islamic educational institutions. If madrasas try to divide subjects into 70% general and 30% religious, then Islamic schools try to integrate general materials with religion with various versions of its integration (Tan, 2011). Several variants of Islamic schools have emerged in recent decades, including Al-Azhar Islamic School.

Islamic schools strive to produce graduates who are "intelligent" as well as "moral" at one time (Basyit, 2019). Being intelligent in this context means having a good understanding of scientific and social materials. Meanwhile, having morals can be understood as practicing Islamic teachings well and

wisely. With that spirit, it is hoped that graduates of Islamic schools will be able to become great scientists as well as have good Islamic personalities.

Curriculum and Implementation

Islamic Religious Education material cannot be separated from six main topics, namely the Qur'an, Hadith, faith, worship, morals, and Islamic Cultural History. The six topics in the Madrasah curriculum are concocted into four subjects, namely the Qur'an Hadith, Moral Beliefs, Fiqh, and Islamic Cultural History. Meanwhile, the school curriculum is summarized into one subject: Religious Education and Ethics.

Islamic religious education materials in schools look very minimalist. It is at this point that the difference between a school without an Islamic label and an Islamic school is seen. Islamic schools strive to provide religious education to students beyond the minimum targets given by the government, such as adding teaching materials and lesson hours and conditioning the school environment with Islamic culture and values.

Al-Azhar Islamic School Solo Baru is one example of many Islamic schools in Indonesia that have implemented this strategy. Religious learning finally no longer stops at the level of knowledge alone but is also internalized in practice and personality formation. There are four curriculum development programs carried out by Al-Azhar Islamic School Solo Baru, namely: 1) Islamic Personality Development; 2) Foreign Language Proficiency; 3) Mastery of Science and Technology; and 4) *Life Skill Development* (Skills, Independence, and Personality) (Al-Azhar, n.d.).

Table 1. Curriculum Development Area of Al-Azhar Islamic School Solo Baru

Field of Development	Information
Islamic Personality Development	The purpose of developing an Islamic personality is to form superior individuals who have a straight faith, true worship, and noble morals, which are reflected in daily behavior both at school and at home, which is integrated through activities:

Foreign Language Mastery	<p>morning meetings, pledges, testimonials, and tahfidzul Quran, independent dhuha prayers, dhuhur and Ashar prayers in congregation in mosques and other Islamic activities.</p> <p>The superior personal dimension in the field of foreign language mastery is reflected in English and Arabic Community activities, the habit of memorizing 10-30 vocabulary words every week, short conversations and discussions, special performances, English camps, and student visits to Singapore.</p>
Mastery of Science and Technology ,.	<p>The superior personal dimension in the field of mastery of science and technology, is carried out through the IT-based curriculum program, where learning activities are integrated using multimedia devices supported by Wifi devices and internet networks and equipped with a representative multimedia computer laboratory</p>
Life Skill Development (Skills, Independence, and Personality)	<p>The success of an educational process is not only measured from the academic aspect, in terms of mastery of science and technology, but also needs to be equipped with global skills, life skills, and noble values (Akhlaqul Karimah).</p>

The four developments have a relationship with each other, so they cannot be separated. The development of the Islamic personality is aimed at realizing a superior person in religion, which is shown by upright faith, strong faith, true worship, and noble morals in daily activities, as well as integrative life at school and at home. Integration between school and home is very important to realize a complete and complete Muslim personality. In summary, the educational curriculum at Al Azhar Islamic School can be divided into two: religious subject clusters and general subject clusters with religious values (Zuhdi, 2006).

One simple indicator to measure the success of religious education is to look at the compatibility between ideal practices in schools and the reality outside of school. When the prayers of students at school and home are equally good, then religious education can be said to be successful, because a good *musholli* personality is formed. Al-Azhar Islamic School carries out the synchronization between ideals and reality by building good communication with parents to motivate their children, as well as filling out the control card

provided by the school. The student's guardian did not hesitate to admit that it was wrong if his child did not pray at home for some reason and promised to discipline his child again to perform prayer (NHH, personal communication, 5 June 2023).

The strengthening of Islamic religious education can also be seen from the school's seriousness in educating students to read the Qur'an. The school provides more than ten special Iqro' teachers in the Primary School unit to provide intensive guidance to children who are still weak in reading the Qur'an (NHH, personal communication, 5 June 2023). With the existence of this special Iqro teacher, the task of religious teachers becomes lighter, and the results of children's Qur'an readings can be standardized properly.

The cultivation of Islamic values is not only seen in the aspect of *ubudiyah* but also touches the fields of science, health, and hygiene. This can be seen in efforts to provide clean school facilities – such as bathrooms, the habit of brushing teeth during the day before high prayers, the strict implementation of health protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of adequate health facilities, conducive classrooms, and so on.

The field of hygiene and health, which is sometimes a rarity in Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools and madrasas, has received very good attention in Islamic schools. This confirms that Islamic schools bring a new breath to Indonesia's tradition of Islamic education.

The attention of Islamic schools to science and technology increases the intensity of attention to religious values. The relationship between science, society, and religion, which dialogues with each other, will strengthen the existence of Indonesian Islamic education in the global arena. It is not surprising that Charlene Tan said that Islamic schools are the most successful Islamic educational institutions in integrating science and religion (Tan, 2011). Thus, religion is not only a doctrine that is instilled in students but also understood and used as inspiration to produce new findings. The spirit of integrating science with religion and not being antipathetic to Western science

is also emphasized by Fazlur Rahman for advancing Islamic education in Indonesia.

"...to accept modern secular education as it has developed generally speaking in the West and to attempt to "Islamize" that is, to inform it with certain key concepts of Islam. This approach has had two distinct goals, although they are not always distinguished from one another: first, to mold the character of students with Islamic values for individual and collective life, and, second, to enable the adepts of modern education to imbue their respective fields of learning at higher levels, using an Islamic perspective to transform, where necessary, both the content and the orientation of these fields" (Rahman, 1982).

In the quote above, Rahman suggested that schools should not reject and accept knowledge born from the West but need to be Islamized by incorporating key Islamic concepts. It is aimed at 1) shaping the character and character of children with Islamic values and 2) modern scientists combine their scientific and social sciences with Islamic values. This means that the integration of Islamic science is a legacy or heritage that must be combined with modern science so that Islamic education does not dwell on ancient, static, and non-contextual reasoning. What Rahman suggested is in line with the development of Islamic education in Indonesia today. Many educational institutions are trying to integrate science and religion at every level, from elementary school to higher education, using their own formats (Tayeb, 2018).

The practice of Islam in the Al-Azhar Islamic School can be categorized as "Puritan Moderate Islam". Borrowing a classification from Moch Nur Ichwan, Puritan Moderate Islam is a religious thought of Islam that is moderate but influenced by several Puritan Islamic teachings that emphasize the purification of faith, *anti-bid'ah*, and superstition, anti-liberalism-pluralism-secularism, use a strict legal orientation in worship, be more sensitive to moral issues, be more aware of the exclusive interests of Muslims, but at the same time approve of national and state development non-Islamic ideology (Ichwan, 2014).

Students, Parents, and Jam'iyah

Students and parents in Islamic schools have profiles that are Islamic boarding schools and madrasas. The profile of Islamic school students is urban middle-class Muslims (Pribadi, 2022). Karen Bryner, in her dissertation, revealed that there are at least four reasons behind middle-class Muslim parents choosing Islamic schools as an alternative education for their children (Bryner, 2013).

The first is academic quality. This reason is the most important for middle-class Muslim parents. For elite parents, quality education must be given to their children. So, they are trying to find a favorite school with good academic quality. Not infrequently, they send their children to schools abroad such as Singapore, Australia, or America, or at elite Christian schools in the country. The problem is when these elite parents are Muslims, forcing them to provide religious education outside of school, such as calling a private religious teacher to their home. At this point, the presence of Islamic schools becomes very relevant, namely, on the one hand, providing general education with good quality, and at the same time, there is the cultivation of knowledge and moral values of Islam (Bryner, 2013). So, it is not surprising that the profile of parents or students at school socially and economically is often above pesantren and madrasas (Rifai, 2006).

Regarding marketing, the provision of Islamic education services carried out by Islamic schools is very appropriate. They succeeded in targeting "market share" that is not included in the target of madrasas and pesantren. So, Islamic schools can become a new alternative to Islamic education for certain groups. Although, in the future, it is not uncommon for stigmas to appear that Islamic schools commercialize religious education, the presence of Islamic schools becomes very important to fill the space that classical Islamic educational institutions have not touched for a long time.

Second, a solid moral base. Elite parents are very worried about the development of juvenile delinquency and the challenges of globalization that

are happening today. So, they see religion as the most basic thing to fortify their children so that they do not fall into delinquency. Good religious education cannot be found in public schools, both private and public. Thus, Islamic schools are an undeniable alternative.

The harshness of city life experienced by these elite parents is a strong driver. At the very least, they want their children to be better than them in terms of religion. Indeed, the awareness of the importance of religious values in these elite parents may make them carry out religious worship poorly. However, at least it can motivate them to be better. It is not uncommon in a family that the parents do not pray, while the child obediently prays because of the effects of education at school (NHH, personal communication, 5 June 2023).

Religious education is not only given to students but also to parents through various activities. Such as routine *dhuha* studies on certain days that are specifically followed by parents (NHH, personal communication, 7 June 2023). In this study, parents received advice on religion to support the growth and development of their children in Al-Azhar schools.

Third, teachers and teaching methods. Elite parents view Islamic school teachers as teaching with great dedication. This view makes parents believe that schools will treat their children well and kindly amid their parents' busyness. The teaching method applied is student-centered education (*student-centered pedagogies*). So, learning does not stop at memorization but also understanding and reasoning (Tan, 2014).

Fourth, the full-day school system. The busyness of elite parents working until the afternoon makes them unable to supervise their children after school during the day. With a full day of school until 15.00, parents feel calm because their children are in a good environment.

Teachers and Parent Involvement

Optimal results in an educational process can not only be expected through formal activities at school without parental participation (Ginanto et al., 2024; Thartori, 2018; Ubale et al., 2016). Parents' involvement in educational activities carried out at Al-Azhar schools. In the process of religious education, teachers always coordinate with students' guardians regarding the process of practicing *ibudiyah* at home, such as monitoring through prayer control books, coordination of children's reading and memorization of the Qur'an, and so on. Children who need special religious treatment will be consulted with parents regarding the addition of special hours outside school hours. Parents are also asked to be active in guiding and motivating their children. However, in some cases, this communication is sometimes replaced by "representatives" of parents, such as grandparents, uncles, and household assistants, because parents are busy working outside the city (NHH, personal communication, 7 June 2023).

Formally, parental involvement is organized in the organization of the student guardian association known as *Jam'iyatul Walidain*, known as Jam'iyah for short. This organization functions as a facilitator for parents to express their opinions on the technical implementation of education in schools. The presence of Jam'iyah is a support system for schools in the implementation of education, both morally and materially. So that the school does not feel like it runs alone or functions as a childcare (NHH, personal communication, 7 June 2023).

Parents who are satisfied with the pattern of education in Al-Azhar will easily promote the school to their colleagues who both have the profile of an urban elite society. They think that Al-Azhar school is very suitable for their busy working conditions, they want their children to study religion but not in Islamic boarding schools because they do not want to be separated and grow and develop together. This condition makes the majority of the profile of parents of students dominated by the middle class so that the Jam'iyah

organization can contribute greatly to the provision of infrastructure and cooperative relations between schools and outside parties.

Conclusion

Al-Azhar Islamic School, as one of the pioneers in the modernization of Islamic education in the 21st Century, deserves appreciation. The presence of the institution is a new alternative that works on the vacant land of Islamic educational institutions that are relatively untouched by madrasas and Islamic boarding schools, namely the urban middle-class Muslim.

Islamic schools are also considered to be able to concoct religious education and general education to coexist harmoniously, not making religion just a sweetener for school promotion but implemented, practiced, and lived. This is one of the great achievements, considering that Islamic boarding schools and madrasas are still too partial to accommodate general education in the early 21st century.

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