

The Socio-Demographic Impacts on Islamic Character Education: A Comparative Study of Madrasah Aliyah Students in Urban and Rural Areas

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-demographic impacts on Islamic character education among Madrasah Aliyah students, comparing urban and rural environments in Lampung Province, Indonesia. The aim of this study is to explore how social, economic, and cultural backgrounds influence students' understanding and internalization of religious moderation in character education. Data were collected through direct classroom observations, in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and madrasah principals, as well as document analysis from four selected madrasahs: Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Bandar Lampung and MA Al-Utrujiyah in urban areas, and MAN 1 Pesawaran and MA Darul Huda in rural areas. A qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design was used to analyze the differences in students' understanding of religious moderation between urban and rural areas. The findings show that students in urban areas, with broader access to information and exposure to diverse cultures, exhibit a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of Islamic values such as tolerance and diversity. In contrast, students in rural areas, who are more reliant on traditional teachings and have limited access to external information, tend to have a more rigid understanding of Islamic teachings. These differences highlight the importance of adapting Islamic character education to the socio-demographic context in both urban and rural environments. This study contributes to the development of an inclusive Islamic character education model that supports religious moderation and social harmony across various environments.

Keywords: Islamic Character Education, Religious Moderation, Socio-Demographic Factors, Urban-Rural Comparison.

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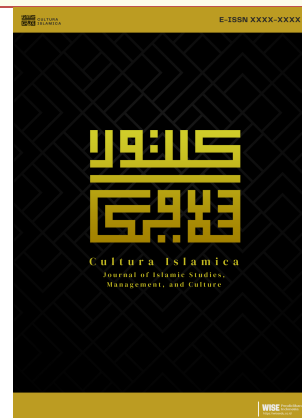
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INTRODUCTION

Islamic character education is influenced by the social and demographic factors surrounding students. Social background, such as economic status, culture, and geographical location, plays a crucial role in shaping how students internalize religious values [1], [2]. Students in urban areas, for instance, are more exposed to diverse cultures and ideologies, which may moderate their understanding of Islamic teachings [3], [4], [5]. Conversely, students in rural areas, despite limited access to information, are closer to religious traditions that may shape a stronger character foundation. The understanding of Islamic character can vary depending on these social and demographic factors, which influence how values such as tolerance, justice, and peace are taught and accepted by students [6], [7], [8].

Ideal Islamic character education aims to shape a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses noble morals grounded in Islamic teachings [9], [10], [11], [12], [13]. Character education based on religious moderation and values such as tolerance, peace, and justice are crucial for fostering students who are neither extreme nor rigid but remain steadfast in their religious principles [14], [15], [16], [17], [18]. In the context of Indonesia, which has a high level of cultural and religious diversity, Islamic character education plays a vital role in maintaining social harmony by teaching moderate and adaptive Islamic values that respond to the changing times [19], [20], [21], [22], [23]. Therefore, Islamic character education is expected to serve as a foundation for shaping individuals who can live harmoniously in diversity, both in religious and social contexts.

However, the implementation of Islamic character education in practice faces various challenges influenced by social, economic, and geographical factors. In urban areas, despite better and more diverse access to education, the greatest challenge is exposure to various ideologies that do not always align with moderate Islamic values. Conversely, in rural areas, while students tend to be closer to religious traditions, limited information and restricted access to education often lead to a narrower and more rigid understanding of religious teachings. These social and economic differences influence how students internalize Islamic values in their character education, which can affect their attitudes and behaviors in interacting with the broader society. Given these diverse conditions, it is crucial to understand the differences in the application of Islamic character education between these two environments.

Research on Islamic character education continues to evolve, particularly with a focus on the social challenges faced by students in various geographical contexts. For instance, Yusuf [24] studied character education in university-based Islamic boarding schools in Yogyakarta, focusing on the moral and social challenges in urban areas involving digital technology. Shobirin [25] examined technology-based character education in the era of Society 5.0, while Wahyudi [26] developed a digital module for character education in Aceh. Although these studies explore character education in different contexts, there is no research addressing the socio-demographic impact on Islamic character education in Madrasah Aliyah in urban and rural areas, as well as how socio-economic differences influence the internalization of Islamic values in these two geographical settings.

Although numerous studies have explored Islamic character education, particularly those linking Islamic values with students' character development in the context of modern technology and society, there remains a lack of comprehensive research examining the socio-

demographic impact on Islamic character education in Madrasah Aliyah in both urban and rural settings. Existing literature predominantly emphasizes the influence of technology and digital learning methods, as illustrated in the studies by Shobirin [25] dan Wahyudi [26]. This gap presents a significant area for further research, given the variations in social and economic contexts that may affect Islamic character education in these two environments. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap in the literature by providing a more contextualized perspective.

This study offers novelty by examining the socio-demographic impact on Islamic character education through a comparative study of Madrasah Aliyah students in urban and rural settings. Unlike previous studies that have focused on integrating technology into character education, this research concentrates on the differences in social, economic, and cultural contexts that influence Islamic character education. By comparing students in urban and rural environments, this study identifies how social, economic, and cultural backgrounds affect the development of students' character and the acceptance of Islamic values in their education. The research also aims to provide new insights into how socio-demographic factors shape Islamic character education in Madrasah Aliyah and proposes a more adaptive and contextual educational model for these two distinct geographical settings.

This study is of great importance given the challenges of radicalization and intolerance, particularly among the younger generation. In Indonesia, a country rich in cultural and religious diversity, Islamic character education based on religious moderation has the potential to create a more tolerant and adaptive generation. The findings from this study are expected to support the formulation of more inclusive educational policies and contribute to the development of an Islamic character education model that is more relevant to the socio-economic conditions in both urban and rural areas.

METHODS

This study was conducted in two locations that represent significant differences in social and geographical contexts: one in an urban area and the other in a rural area. The urban madrasahs selected for this study were MAN 2 Bandar Lampung and MA Al-Utrujyyah, both located in the city center of Bandar Lampung, the capital of Lampung Province. For the rural locations, this study chose two MA situated in areas with limited access to educational facilities and distinct socio-economic characteristics, such as the presence of isolated indigenous communities. The selected madrasahs were MAN 1 Pesawaran in South Lampung and MA Darul Huda in North Lampung. The choice of these locations aims to examine how different social and geographical contexts influence the implementation of Islamic character education based on religious moderation.

To understand the socio-demographic impacts on Islamic character education, a qualitative approach was employed, using a descriptive phenomenological design. This design allows the researcher to explore students' subjective experiences in responding to the values of religious moderation implemented within their Islamic character education framework. Data collection involved direct classroom observations to assess student interactions during the learning process, documentation of relevant activities, and in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and madrasah principals. Purposive sampling was used to select informants, choosing

8 students from each research location, representing diverse backgrounds and possessing an understanding of religious moderation.

In terms of data analysis, the study applied a descriptive and holistic approach, incorporating three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This process was iterative to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data. The data collected from observations and interviews were analyzed to identify key patterns and themes regarding differences in the understanding of religious moderation between students in urban and rural madrasahs. Through this approach, the study aims to provide deeper insights into the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic character education among students from various socio-economic backgrounds.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Differences in the Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors on Islamic Character Education in Urban and Rural Environments

This study reveals that socio-demographic factors, including socio-economic background, parental education level, and access to information, have a significant influence on Islamic character education among Madrasah Aliyah students in both urban and rural environments [27], [28], [29]. Students in urban areas, with broader access to technology and various sources of information, demonstrate a more complex and inclusive understanding of religious moderation [30]. Their access to digital media and exposure to diverse religious perspectives enables them to more easily internalize the values of Islamic moderation, which emphasize tolerance, diversity, and peace in social life [31]. For example, urban students are more engaged in social activities that involve religious and ethnic diversity [32], which enriches their views on the application of Islamic values in a pluralistic society.

On the other hand, students in rural areas tend to be more focused on traditional religious teachings and are limited by restricted access to information [33]. They rely more heavily on their families and local communities as the primary sources of religious knowledge. This often leads to a narrow perspective on religious moderation. Dependence on more conservative religious teachings may limit their understanding of the importance of adopting an inclusive attitude toward differences. The inequality in access to information and technology plays a significant role in influencing Islamic character education that is more open and inclusive [34]. Therefore, socio-demographic factors, especially access to information and social diversity, must be considered as crucial variables when designing more comprehensive Islamic character education.

Parental Education and the Formation of Students' Islamic Character

The findings of this study indicate that the role of parental education significantly influences the formation of students' Islamic character, with varying impacts in urban and rural settings. In urban areas, parents with higher levels of education tend to provide more comprehensive guidance on religious moderation and the importance of Islamic character in a more pluralistic social context [35]. These parents are more actively involved in engaging their children in discussions that introduce broader and more inclusive views of religion [36]. They

educate their children to be individuals who are not only obedient to their faith but also able to adapt to the cultural and social diversity around them.

In contrast, in rural areas, although parents are strongly committed to their children's religious education, the limitations in educational levels often restrict the depth and quality of the Islamic character education they provide. Many parents in rural areas place greater emphasis on adherence to more conservative religious teachings and are less likely to encourage their children to explore more pluralistic and inclusive Islamic values [37]. This leads to a character education that is more focused on values of loyalty and avoidance of differences, rather than on acceptance and diversity. These findings highlight the need for empowering parents, both in urban and rural areas, to better educate their children to understand Islam in a more open and contextualized manner [38].

The Influence of Access to Technology and Media on Islamic Character Education

Access to technology and media, which is more readily available to students in urban areas, has been shown to have a significant impact on their understanding and application of religious moderation in their lives [39], [40]. Students in urban environments are more exposed to information from various sources, including social media, which allows them to access a wide range of perspectives on religious moderation [41]. This exposure enriches their understanding of the importance of Islamic values that emphasize tolerance, empathy, and recognition of diversity [42]. By using technology and media, they can engage in discussions and learn from different religious viewpoints, which broadens their perspective on the application of Islamic values in social life.

In contrast, students in rural areas, who often face limitations in access to technology and media, are more restricted in obtaining information that could expand their understanding of religious moderation [43]. While they have a strong understanding of the religious teachings they learn at their madrasah, these limitations hinder their ability to comprehend the more pluralistic social context and to apply religious moderation in their daily lives. The lack of access to technology can be a barrier to developing a more open and inclusive Islamic character [44]. Therefore, to create equality in the formation of Islamic character in both environments, improving access to technology and media in rural areas is crucial to broadening students' perspectives on diversity and religious moderation.

The Role of Social Environment in the Formation of Students' Islamic Character

This study also reveals that the social environment plays a significant role in shaping students' Islamic character [45], and this is highly dependent on the level of diversity present in their surroundings. In urban environments, which are more socially, religiously, and culturally heterogeneous, students are more often involved in cross-cultural interactions that encourage them to develop moderate attitudes towards differences [46]. Social interactions with various groups allow them to more easily accept inclusive Islamic values, emphasizing tolerance and harmony. Participation in interfaith activities and social engagements involving diverse social and cultural backgrounds provides them with opportunities to directly practice religious moderation in their social lives.

Meanwhile, students in rural areas, who are often in more homogeneous environments with limited exposure to religious or cultural diversity [47], tend to maintain a more focused

understanding of the religious teachings they receive within their community. While this does not imply that they are unable to develop moderate attitudes, their greatest challenge lies in the lack of opportunities to interact with various social and cultural groups, which can hinder the development of a more open Islamic character. This highlights the importance of creating opportunities for rural students to engage in broader social interactions, both through school activities and other social programs, so they can better understand and apply more inclusive religious moderation values.

Challenges in Implementing Religious Moderation in the Islamic Education Curriculum

This study also found that although religious moderation has been integrated into the Islamic education curriculum in Madrasah Aliyah, its implementation faces challenges in both urban and rural environments. In urban areas, despite a better understanding of the importance of religious moderation, some educators still struggle to apply a curriculum that emphasizes moderation in a contextual and practical manner within students' daily lives. Some teachers continue to rely on more traditional teaching methods, which focus on memorization and adherence to religious teachings without providing space for students to critically analyze and apply moderation values in a pluralistic social context [48].

In rural areas, the main challenge is resistance to more moderate teaching, with many teachers and parents preferring a more conservative approach. Limitations in teaching materials that introduce religious moderation values and the lack of training for teachers on moderation-based teaching further exacerbate the implementation of such values [49]. These findings suggest that it is important to evaluate and adjust the Islamic education curriculum, not only to teach religious knowledge theoretically, but also to integrate religious moderation values with a more practical approach that aligns with the social realities in each environment.

Discussion

This study indicates that socio-demographic factors, such as socio-economic background, parental education level, and access to information, influence Islamic character education in both urban and rural environments. Students in urban areas, who have broader access to technology, are better able to internalize inclusive religious moderation values [50]. This aligns with the findings of Heri and Dian, who state that access to digital information enriches students' perspectives on tolerance and diversity [51], [52]. In rural areas, limited access to information and technology hinders students' understanding of diversity. The implication of these findings is the need to improve access to technology in rural areas to create more open and inclusive Islamic character education. Parental education also plays a significant role in shaping students' Islamic character. Parents in urban areas, with higher education levels, tend to provide a broader understanding of religious moderation [53]. This supports the findings of Richard and Qazi, who show that highly educated parents are more active in teaching values of diversity. In contrast, in rural areas, parents with limited education tend to focus on more conservative religious teachings. This leads to a more closed character education [54], [55]. Therefore, empowering parents in both environments is essential to educate children with a more inclusive approach.

Access to technology and media plays a significant role in shaping religious moderation [56], [57], [58]. These findings support the research by Jiadong Yu, which shows that exposure

to diverse religious perspectives through digital media enriches students' understanding in urban areas. In contrast, limited media access in rural areas restricts students' ability to understand diversity [59]. The implication of these findings is the importance of providing access to technology in rural areas so that students can develop a more inclusive view of religious moderation. The social environment also plays a major role in Islamic character education. In urban areas, social diversity allows students to engage in cross-cultural interactions, which encourages them to develop moderate attitudes [60], [61]. Drajat and Aziz emphasize that social diversity leads to learning tolerance [62], [63]. In rural areas, the more homogeneous environment limits students' opportunities to learn about differences [64], [65]. This highlights the need to create opportunities for rural students to interact with various social groups, enabling them to develop an inclusive attitude toward differences.

The implementation of religious moderation in the Islamic education curriculum faces challenges in both urban and rural environments. In urban areas, despite a better understanding of moderation, some educators still struggle to apply it contextually. These findings align with those of Sonny, Faizol, and Mukhibat, who indicate that the religious moderation curriculum is still limited to theoretical approaches [66], [67], [68]. In rural areas, the main challenge is resistance to moderate teaching, with many teachers and parents preferring a more conservative approach [69], [70]. Therefore, evaluating and adjusting the curriculum is crucial so that Islamic education can integrate religious moderation in a more practical manner, in line with the social realities of each environment. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of considering socio-demographic factors, access to information, parental involvement, and social diversity in Islamic character education. Improving access to technology, empowering parents, and creating opportunities for broader social interactions are key steps in fostering an inclusive Islamic education. However, this study has limitations, such as a limited sample size, which opens the door for further research across various regions to examine the implementation of religious moderation throughout Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of socio-demographic factors on the implementation of Islamic character education among Madrasah Aliyah students, comparing its effects in urban and rural environments. The research findings show that students in urban areas, with broader access to technology and exposure to diverse cultural experiences, tend to have a more inclusive and moderate understanding of Islamic values. In contrast, students in rural areas, limited by restricted access to resources and information, tend to hold narrower views on religious moderation. This difference underscores the importance of adopting more tailored educational strategies that account for socio-economic disparities, so that Islamic character education can be adapted to both urban and rural contexts. The study also emphasizes the crucial role of parental education, which significantly influences the internalization of Islamic values among students.

In urban areas, parents with higher levels of education contribute to a broader understanding of religious moderation, while in rural areas, limited educational backgrounds often lead to a more conservative approach to character education. Furthermore, the research shows that access to technology and media in urban areas facilitates a more dynamic and

pluralistic view of Islamic values, whereas students in rural areas face barriers in this regard. Based on these findings, it is crucial to bridge the educational access gap and exposure between urban and rural areas. Increasing access to technology and implementing inclusive educational practices can contribute to the formation of a more moderate and tolerant generation, in line with the principles of religious moderation. This study calls for the development of a more comprehensive and contextually relevant Islamic character education policy to address these socio-demographic influences and enhance the effectiveness of character education across various regions in Indonesia.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the sample used in this study is limited to four madrasahs located in two different geographical areas, urban and rural regions in Lampung Province. While this sample provides a relatively representative picture of the differences in the implementation of Islamic character education based on religious moderation, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire Indonesian territory, given the diverse social and cultural contexts across different regions.

The second limitation is the data collection method, which relied on direct observation and interviews with students, teachers, and madrasah principals, which may have been influenced by respondent subjectivity. Additionally, although the number of informants was adjusted according to purposive sampling techniques, the limited number of participants may not cover the full range of perspectives present at each madrasah.

Another limitation is the external factors, such as the influence of local culture, which may affect the understanding and application of religious moderation at each madrasah, and which could not be fully controlled in this study. Therefore, further research involving a larger sample size and a more diverse mix of quantitative and qualitative methods is recommended to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Islamic character education based on religious moderation in various social contexts.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

SA contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript, including methodology, results, and discussion. MN assisted in developing the conceptual framework, data collection, and providing manuscript feedback. NR contributed to data collection, analysis, and writing the results and discussion. PG helped with the literature review, data analysis, and contributed to the conclusion and recommendations. AD supported data collection, conducted interviews, and provided feedback in drafting the background and discussion. All authors revised the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in preparing this manuscript, specifically to enhance language quality, check grammar, and manage references. AI's role was limited to refining the manuscript structure, ensuring clarity, and verifying citation consistency. All content, including research design, data collection, analysis, and conclusions, was generated by the authors, who take full responsibility for the scientific and intellectual content.

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