

---

## Fitrah-Based Meaningful Learning in Islamic Religious Education: A Case Study of Life Skills Development at Bintang Madani High School

Ulfah Salwa Hasibuan<sup>1\*</sup>, Munawar Rahmat<sup>2</sup>, Saepul Anwar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Faculty of Sosial Sciences Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

---

### Article Info

Article history:

Received: December 03, 2025

Revised: February 23, 2026

Accepted: March 30, 2026

Published: June 30, 2026

---

### Keywords:

Islamic Religious Education, Meaningful Learning, Fitrah, Life Skills, Holistic Education.

---

### ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is often criticized for emphasizing memorization and normative understanding rather than helping students develop practical life skills needed in contemporary society. This qualitative single-case study explores the implementation of fitrah-based Meaningful Learning at Bintang Madani High School in cultivating students' life skills, particularly autonomous motivation, adaptability, and reflective self-awareness. Data were collected from one PAI teacher and four students through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using a hybrid thematic coding approach supported by NVivo 15 software. The findings reveal three main features of the learning model: (1) the contextualization of theological content through contemporary issues relevant to students' lives, (2) the integration of domestic life skills and industrial internship experiences, and (3) the use of restorative discipline and reflective learning programs. These practices encourage students to engage with religious learning more meaningfully, adapt to real-life social and vocational contexts, and develop greater awareness of their own beliefs, actions, and responsibilities. The study suggests that the integration of fitrah-based education and Meaningful Learning provides a promising approach for making PAI more relevant to students' everyday experiences. The findings also offer practical insights for educators and curriculum developers seeking to strengthen the connection between religious learning and life-skill development.

© Hasibuan *et al.* (2026)



This is an open-access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license

---

### Correspondence Address:

[ulfahs@upi.edu](mailto:ulfahs@upi.edu)

---

### Please cite this article in APA Style as:

Hasibuan, U. S., Rahmat, M., & Anwar, S. (2026). Fitrah-Based Meaningful Learning in Islamic Religious Education: A Case Study of Life Skills Development at Bintang Madani High School. *Mimbar Agama dan Budaya*, 43(1), (185-200). <https://doi.org/10.15408/mimbar.v43i1.51250>

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping the character, moral resilience, and life skills of students amidst the complexities of 21st-century life (Singsuriya & Rimpeng, 2025). From an Islamic educational perspective, the educational process aims not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to develop human nature as a fundamental potential encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions (Desfita et al., 2024). Therefore, PAI learning should ideally facilitate the formation of students who are adaptive, reflective, and possess integrity in facing social change in the modern era. However, PAI learning practices in various schools still face several challenges. Various studies show that PAI learning tends to be dominated by rote learning, teacher-centered, and places greater emphasis on theoretical and text-oriented aspects (Amaly et al., 2023; Baiza, 2022). This condition often results in religious material being detached from the context of students' real lives. As a result, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is less effective at developing the critical thinking, problem-solving, and life skills students need in everyday life (Sinaee, 2025).

In response to this issue, the concept of Meaningful Learning emerged as a learning approach that emphasizes the connection between new knowledge and students' prior knowledge and experiences (Agra et al., 2019; Ghazali, 2025). In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), meaningful learning enables religious material to be understood in context and to be relevant to the realities of students' lives. This approach aligns with the development of contemporary Islamic educational epistemology, which positions students as active subjects in the learning process and moral development. Through reflective discussions and learning activities connected to students' real-life experiences, religious teachings are not only understood at the cognitive level but also interpreted more personally in everyday situations (Brambilla et al., 2015; Lundgren & Poell, 2016). In addition, changes in Islamic Religious Education are evident in the way schools approach discipline and character formation. Many schools have gradually shifted from punitive disciplinary models toward restorative approaches that encourage responsibility, self-awareness, and active student participation. Programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are considered more effective at developing empathy, social sensitivity, and students' sense of responsibility than conventional punishment-oriented systems (Abejón-Fuentes et al., 2025; Mullet, 2014).

Alongside Meaningful Learning, this study is grounded in the concept of *fitrah*, which occupies a central position in Islamic educational thought. *Fitrah* is generally understood as the innate disposition and God-given potential inherent in every human being, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions. From this perspective, education is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge but also a means of nurturing and realizing these inherent capacities, enabling individuals to develop their full potential and fulfill their responsibilities as members of society and servants of God (Desfita et al., 2024; Halstead, 2004).

The significance of developing human potential has long been emphasized within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Al-Ghazali viewed education as a process of cultivating the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and nurturing virtuous character, arguing that knowledge should ultimately lead individuals toward moral refinement and closeness to God (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Similarly, Al-Attas (1991) maintains that the purpose of education extends beyond the acquisition of information and technical competence. Rather, education should foster *adab*, understood as the

proper recognition and placement of oneself, knowledge, and reality within the framework of divine order. In this sense, educational success is measured not only by cognitive achievement but also by the development of ethical responsibility, self-awareness, and balanced personal growth (Al-Attas, 1991).

Viewed from this perspective, fitrah-based education shares important assumptions with Meaningful Learning. Both approaches emphasize the active involvement of learners in constructing understanding through meaningful engagement with knowledge and experience. However, while Meaningful Learning primarily provides a pedagogical framework that connects new knowledge with learners' prior experiences and existing cognitive structures, fitrah offers an Islamic epistemological foundation that directs learning toward the holistic development of the human person. The integration of these perspectives therefore provides a promising framework for rethinking Islamic Religious Education, particularly in efforts to make religious learning more relevant to students' everyday lives while supporting the development of autonomous motivation, adaptability, and reflective self-awareness.

Although the need to improve Islamic Religious Education has been widely discussed, previous studies still show that efforts toward educational reform remain relatively separated across different areas of discussion. Based on the existing literature, earlier research generally falls into several major categories. The first group mainly focuses on conceptual and philosophical discussions regarding Islamic education and curriculum development. For example, Sinaee (2025) discusses the differences between rational and textual approaches in Islamic education, while Manaf et al. (2025) focus on the development of a holistic-integrative curriculum in Islamic schools. Even though these studies contribute important theoretical perspectives, most still discuss the issue at a broader conceptual level and offer limited explanation of how such ideas are implemented in everyday classroom practices. The second group of studies examines the use of technology and digital innovation in Islamic education. For example, Wedi et al. (2025) and Zakariyah et al. (2025) examine digital learning models and the integration of AI in Islamic schools. However, these studies tend to place meaningful learning mostly within the context of digital tools and technology-based instruction. As a result, less attention is given to students' personal, psychological, and spiritual development during the learning process. Singsuriya & Rimpeng (2025) discuss the relationship between religious literacy and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. However, their study pays limited attention to students' internal psychological development, such as autonomous motivation, particularly in addressing contemporary social challenges.

Among the existing literature, the studies by Muntaha et al. (2025) primarily discuss the contribution of Meaningful Learning to students' spiritual development, whereas Shaleh et al. (2024) focus on integrating Islamic education with life-skill development through a holistic educational framework. However, both studies provide limited empirical explanation of the pedagogical processes through which fitrah-based educational principles are translated into everyday classroom practices. Building on this gap, the present study investigates the pedagogical mechanisms through which fitrah-based Meaningful Learning is enacted in Islamic Religious Education at Bintang Madani High School. Unlike previous studies that treat Meaningful Learning as a general instructional strategy or fitrah as a philosophical premise, this study conceptualizes their integration as a situated pedagogical process in which Islamic values are actively reconstructed through students' lived experiences and reflective engagement. By examining how this approach is operationalized in classroom interactions, as well as the enabling

conditions and constraints that shape its implementation, the study develops an empirically grounded pedagogical framework of fitrah-based Meaningful Learning. This framework explains how such integration contributes to students' autonomous motivation, adaptability, and reflective self-awareness in Islamic learning contexts.

## 2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with a single-case study design. The design was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of how fitrah-based meaningful learning is implemented in the context of Bintang Madani High School. Instead of aiming for broad generalization, the study focuses on exploring the learning processes, classroom experience, and educational practices related to students' life-skill development.

The research was conducted at Bintang Madani High School, which has systematically integrated fitrah-based education into its curriculum and student development programs. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the implementation of fitrah-based Meaningful Learning and their ability to provide rich, experience-based information relevant to the research objectives. The participants consisted of one senior Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher and four Grade 11 students (two male and two female students). The teacher served as the primary informant because of his central role in designing and implementing the educational programs examined in this study. Meanwhile, the students were included to provide complementary perspectives on their learning experiences, personal reflections, and the application of religious values in everyday life, thereby enabling the findings to be interpreted from multiple participant perspectives rather than relying solely on the teacher's account.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, data were collected through three complementary techniques over a one-month period in November 2025. Although the fieldwork was conducted within a limited timeframe, participants were invited to reflect retrospectively on their experiences of engaging in fitrah-based Meaningful Learning across various classroom activities and school programs implemented throughout the academic semester. Consequently, interpretations regarding students' autonomous motivation, adaptability, and reflective self-awareness are derived from participants' retrospective accounts, corroborated through classroom observations and institutional documents, rather than from direct longitudinal observation.

1. **In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. Interviews with the teacher focused on learning strategies and implementation challenges, while interviews with students explored their experiences in programs such as ShopeePay Later discussions, Essential Skills activities, and "The Journey" reflections program. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.
2. **Participant Observation:** Classroom and school activities were observed in four sessions involving PAI learning, vocational activities, and reflective disciplinary programs. The observations were carried out to understand how the learning process was implemented in practice.
3. **Document Analysis:** Several institutional documents were also reviewed, including lesson plans (RPP), the fitrah-based education guidebook, and restorative discipline

records. These documents were used to support and compare the findings obtained from interviews and observations.

Data were analyzed systematically using a hybrid thematic analysis approach supported by NVivo 15 software, combining deductive and inductive coding strategies. During the deductive stage, the coding process was informed by the study's conceptual framework, particularly the principles of Fitrah-Based Education and Meaningful Learning. Constructs including autonomous motivation, adaptability, reflective self-awareness, and life skills served as sensitizing concepts that guided the interpretation of participants' experiences rather than as rigid predefined coding categories. Subsequently, the inductive stage allowed additional codes to emerge directly from the empirical data, capturing context-specific educational practices such as the *Cekatan* program, The Journey, restorative discipline, and contextual *fiqh* learning. These emerging codes were iteratively refined into broader themes through constant comparison across interviews, classroom observations, and institutional documents. The analysis procedure in NVivo consisted of several stages: (1) importing verbatim interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documentary data; (2) conducting open coding to identify meaningful units and recurring pedagogical practices; (3) organizing related codes through axial coding to examine relationships between learning practices and students' experiences; and (4) developing overarching themes that were subsequently interpreted using the study's conceptual framework. Visual project maps generated in NVivo are presented in the Results section to illustrate the relationships among the identified themes.

To enhance the rigor and credibility of the study, several strategies were employed. First, methodological and source triangulation were conducted by comparing interview data with classroom observations and institutional documents. Second, formal member checking was conducted with the teacher participant, who played a central role in designing and implementing the educational programs examined in this study, to verify the accuracy of interpretations of pedagogical practices. Member checking was not conducted with student participants because repeated follow-up sessions were not feasible within the school's timetable and to minimize additional research burden on minor participants. To strengthen the credibility of students' perspectives, interview data were triangulated with classroom observations and institutional documents. Third, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process using NVivo 15 to document coding decisions, theme development, and analytical procedures, thereby enhancing transparency and reducing potential researcher bias.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from an institutional research ethics committee, and official research permission was granted by the school via a signed research authorization letter. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Given that the student participants were minors, interviews were conducted within the school setting under institutional authorization. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and student assent was secured after providing age-appropriate explanations of the study. To protect participants' confidentiality, all identifying information was anonymized during transcription, analysis, and reporting.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Results

##### Contextualization of Islamic Religious Education Learning through Meaningful Learning Based on Fitrah

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning transformation strategy at Bintang Madani High School is implemented through the reconstruction of material oriented towards meaningfulness for students' lives. Based on thematic analysis of the data corpus obtained from interviews and observations, coding patterns were found that indicate the relationship between the curriculum and empirical reality. Visually, thematic mapping using NVivo 15 software (as illustrated in Figure 01) shows that this contextualization strategy rests on three key elements: actualizing Fitrah-Based Education (FBE) components in the classroom, contextualizing fiqh with contemporary issues, and strengthening the teacher ecosystem as facilitators.

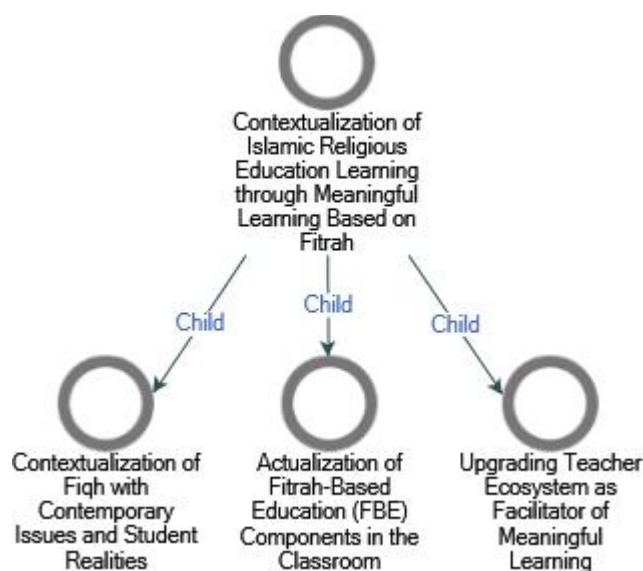


Figure 1. NVivo 15 Coding Map — Contextualization of Islamic Religious Education

As illustrated in the thematic map, the research results show that the implementation of fitrah-based meaningful learning at Bintang Madani High School is achieved by linking Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material to students' experiences and realities. Learning is not solely oriented toward conveying religious concepts in theory, but toward building understanding relevant to the context of students' daily lives. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education teachers no longer position themselves as dogmatic preachers, but rather as facilitators who bridge religious texts with students' real-life concerns. This is evident when the material on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh muamalah*) is directly contrasted with the digital economy, a phenomenon closely related to the daily lives of teenagers. One of the Islamic Religious Education teachers explained this discursive moment in greater detail:

*"In Islamic Religious Education lessons, especially during discussions on fiqh muamalah, the students tend to be very critical. For example, when I brought up the issue of ShopeePay Later, the class, which had initially been rather quiet, suddenly became much more active. The students asked various questions, not only about whether it was considered halal or haram, but also about how Islam views consumerist behavior."*

This pedagogical shift was deeply felt by the students, who experienced a transition from abstract memorization to practical ethical reasoning. A grade 11 student (Student 1, female) reflected on her experience during the classroom discussion on the digital economy:

*"In my previous schools, Fiqh lessons mostly focused on memorizing rules about what is halal and haram without really discussing the reasoning behind them. However, when we analyzed how ShopeePay Later works during class discussions, my perspective started to change. I became more critical of my own online shopping habits and began to view them through an Islamic ethical lens. Through that discussion, I realized that religion is closely connected to the financial decisions we make in everyday life."*

The findings suggest that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Bintang Madani High School is characterized by a contextual orientation that links religious learning with issues encountered in students' everyday lives. Within this setting, religious instruction appears to extend beyond the transmission of normative knowledge by providing opportunities for students to engage with contemporary social realities and reflect on their implications from an Islamic perspective. As reflected in classroom discussions and learning activities, theological concepts are frequently situated within real-world contexts, allowing students to explore moral questions and social challenges in ways that are meaningful to their lived experiences.

The school also recognizes that curriculum transformation cannot be achieved without changes in teachers' pedagogical perspectives. The implementation of fitrah-based meaningful learning requires strong Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and continuous reflective practice among teachers. To support this process, Bintang Madani High School developed a professional learning community through an ongoing teacher development program known as *Cekatan*. One informant explained the role of this program as follows:

*"Thank God, we have a program called Cekatan every third week of the month to improve teachers' knowledge and teaching practices. In those sessions, we do not only listen to theory, but also reflect together and discuss classroom cases. When a teacher starts returning to conventional one-way lecturing, we evaluate it collectively in the Cekatan forum. Together, we redesign the lesson plans so the material can connect more closely with the students' fitrah and their real-life experiences."*

These findings suggest that fitrah-based learning is not treated merely as an instructional outcome for students, but is also supported through the continuous strengthening of teachers' pedagogical capacity. In practice, the *Cekatan* program functions as both a professional and reflective support system that helps teachers avoid returning to routine rote-learning practices. Through this collaborative environment, educators are encouraged to adopt more reflective, contextual, and student-centered approaches to teaching.

## Life Skills Development through Essential Skills and Experiential Learning Programs

In this study, life skills development is not positioned as a separate supplementary material, but rather as an integral part of the students' learning experience. The project map visualization in Figure 02 clearly demonstrates how the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and experiential learning methodology produces a systematic competency cluster. The focus of development includes mastery of essential skills for domestic independence, social worship skills, and direct experience in the community and industry, which collectively shape students' resilience and independence.

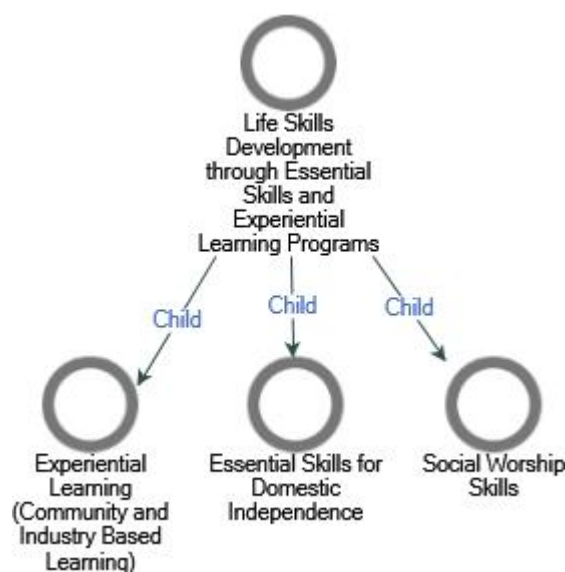


Figure 2. NVivo 15 Coding Map - Life Skills Development

As visualized in the thematic mapping, the development of life skills within the Fitrah-Based Education framework at this school directly responds to the challenges of disruptive lifestyles of the modern generation. Field observations indicate that many students are accustomed to instant convenience, which ironically degrades their basic domestic independence. In response to this phenomenon, the Essential Skills program was organically integrated. One informant explained the rationale for this program by highlighting the urgency of fundamental skills:

*"Today, many children face challenges in developing basic independence. That is why we introduced the Essential Skills program. In practice, we found that some students still struggle with simple tasks such as folding or ironing their own clothes. Although these may appear to be minor matters, we believe it is difficult for students to develop broader social responsibilities if they remain dependent on others for basic personal tasks."*

Building upon this foundation of personal responsibility, the development of students' life skills is further expanded into social and vocational contexts, as illustrated in the experiential learning node (Figure 2). To support this process, the school organizes community service

activities through the Goes to Village program as well as vocational internship opportunities, both of which are designed to expose students to real-life social challenges and strengthen their spiritual resilience in practical settings.

The integration of domestic and vocational skills into the curriculum also contributed to the development of students' sense of responsibility and adaptability. One student (Student 2, male) reflected on how these non-academic experiences influenced his personal growth:

*"At first, I honestly felt annoyed when we were asked to practice ironing and folding clothes because it seemed like ordinary household chores. But after doing it regularly, I started to notice changes in myself. I became more independent at home, and when I joined the industrial internship, those habits of discipline and neatness helped me adjust more quickly. It also made me feel more confident about facing life after high school."*

Through this approach, the institution seeks to connect spiritual values with practical workplace competencies, indicating that holistic Islamic education can help students integrate moral principles with everyday life skills and adaptability required in the 21st century. The findings also show that activities such as ironing clothes or assembling electrical outlets are not viewed merely as vocational exercises, but as part of a broader process of character formation. By encouraging students to care for themselves independently, the school attempts to build resilience, responsibility, and personal dignity. In this context, practical skills are closely linked to spiritual and moral responsibility in daily life.

### Restorative Discipline and Spiritual Reflection in Building Student Character

A fundamental aspect of character transformation in this institution lies in the paradigm shift from punitive supervision to moral empowerment. Coding results of discipline policies and spirituality programs (such as The Journey) indicate a strong correlation between critical reflection and the development of autonomous motivation. The structure of interrelationships between these themes is mapped in detail in Figure 03, which highlights how education-based discipline and internalization of the meaning of worship serve as key catalysts for the development of students' moral integrity without external pressure.

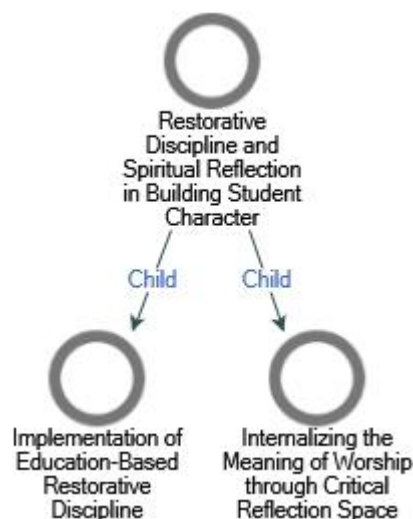


Figure 3. NVivo 15 Coding Map — Restorative Discipline and Spiritual Reflection

As mapped in the thematic model, the most significant transformation in building moral integrity at Bintang Madani High School lies in dismantling the punitive discipline system into an empowering, restorative approach. Students who violate the agreement are no longer faced with physical sanctions or humiliating administrative penalties. A key informant described in detail how 'punishment' was transformed into academic responsibility:

*"Here, the consequences must be educational. For example, a child who is consistently late for a month. The consequence is not corporal punishment, but having to research religious material and give a sermon in front of the rest of the class. Initially, they are embarrassed, but the process of preparing the lecture material actually allows them to learn and reflect independently."*

The restorative impact of this approach is evident in the experience of a student who underwent the disciplinary process. His narrative shows a shift from feelings of embarrassment toward constructive self-reflection:

*"When I was asked to deliver a short sermon in different classes because I came late, I initially felt very embarrassed. But while preparing the material on my own, I began to reflect on my mistake. In the end, it did not feel like punishment alone; it made me more aware of my responsibility toward the school community."* (Student 4, male).

Alongside this restorative disciplinary model, the strengthening of student agency is also supported through the spiritual reflection program known as *The Journey*. This program is intentionally designed as a reflective space where students are encouraged to interpret and understand their religious practices more personally. One teacher explained:

*"In Islamic Religious Education classes, we no longer simply dictate to students. Instead, we ask questions such as, 'What does prayer mean to you? Is it only about fulfilling an obligation?' From there, very open and honest discussions begin to emerge."*

The students' experiences during *The Journey* also indicate a gradual transition from externally driven religious compliance toward more personal and reflective spiritual awareness. One student described how her motivation for prayer changed over time:

*"Before studying at this school, I prayed mostly because I was afraid of my parents getting angry or because of school sanctions. But during The Journey, the teachers gave us space to ask honest questions about our doubts instead of simply telling us what to do. Now, I pray because I personally feel the need for that spiritual connection, not because someone is watching me."* (Student 3, female)

These findings suggest that the dialogical and reflective learning process implemented by the school may support the development of more autonomous spiritual awareness among students. In this context, religious practice is shaped not primarily by fear of authority or punishment, but by students' efforts to find personal meaning and understanding in their spiritual lives.

### 3.2 Discussion

#### **Teacher Ecosystem as a Catalyst for Meaningful Learning and Pedagogical Transformation**

The findings from Bintang Madani High School indicate that the transformation of Islamic Religious Education cannot be understood merely as changes to administrative documents, curriculum structures, or textbook content. The successful implementation of the Fitrah-Based Education (FBE) framework at this school is strongly supported by the strengthening of the upstream educational architecture, namely the "Cekatan" program, which systematically and continuously trains teachers' holistic capacities. These field findings are highly consistent with current global literature, which emphasizes that the Meaningful Learning approach can only be realized in the classroom if educators possess robust Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and can integrate it with the demands of 21st-century skills. Simultaneously, teachers are required to position themselves not only as instructors but also as *qudwah* or agents of spiritual role models for students (Samad et al., 2023; Zaqiah et al., 2024). Their reflective practices and personal example significantly influence students' spiritual development (Saepurrohman & Erihadiana, 2024).

Furthermore, the institutionalization of this weekly training ecosystem represents the presence of visionary transformational leadership within the institution (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025). Rather than expecting teachers to individually adapt to complex curricular changes, the institution provides structured support through professional learning communities, cluster-based mentoring, and reflective supervision. Through these ongoing training activities, teachers are given a supportive space to reflect on their teaching practices, reconsider rigid and repetitive instructional habits, and redesign theological material to make it more relevant to the realities of contemporary student life.

This process of teacher empowerment is important for moving Islamic Religious Education beyond one-way, dogmatic knowledge transmission. In practice, teachers are encouraged to shift their roles from simply delivering religious information toward becoming facilitators who help students construct meaning from their learning experiences. Such a transformation allows students to move beyond formal compliance and develop a deeper sense of spiritual awareness based on internal understanding and personal reflection.

Within this context, Meaningful Learning plays a significant role in supporting the development of students' *fitrah* through reflective and contextual learning experiences. The findings indicate that this approach contributes to the growth of students' autonomous motivation, spiritual awareness, and reflective moral responsibility, particularly when they are confronted with complex social realities in contemporary life (Muntaha et al., 2025). By encouraging teachers to connect theological concepts with students' prior knowledge and lived experiences, this pedagogical approach reflects the principle articulated by Ausubel (1962) that learning becomes meaningful when new knowledge is anchored to learners' existing cognitive structures rather than acquired through rote memorization.

#### **Bridging the Dichotomy Between Theology and 21st-Century Skills**

One common criticism of traditional Islamic Religious Education is that it is often perceived as overly normative and insufficiently connected to students' social and economic realities (Sinaee, 2025). Learning practices that focus primarily on memorizing religious doctrines

may not fully prepare students to address the ethical and practical challenges of contemporary life. At Bintang Madani High School, however, teachers attempt to contextualize theological learning by discussing contemporary *fiqh* issues, such as digital financial transactions via ShopeePay Later and social simulations on funeral management. These learning activities indicate that theological material can be linked to students' everyday experiences and used to encourage critical reflection on actual social issues. Through this dialogical process, religious learning functions not only as doctrinal transmission, but also as a medium for developing ethical awareness, financial literacy, and critical thinking. In this context, Meaningful Learning supports the development of students' *fitrah* by connecting Islamic values with concrete situations encountered in daily life.

In addition, the school integrates religious learning with practical life experiences through programs such as *Essential Skills* (focused on domestic and vocational independence), the *Goes to Village* community service program, and mandatory industrial internships. This curricular approach connects theological learning with vocational and social experiences, enabling students to develop their *fitrah* through learning processes that are both meaningful and socially relevant (Shaleh et al., 2024). Religious values are therefore not merely positioned as ritual obligations but as ethical foundations that guide students in their everyday responsibilities and professional lives.

This approach is consistent with community-based service-learning models in contemporary education, where direct engagement with society can strengthen empathy, collaboration, and social responsibility (Singsuriya & Rimpeng, 2025). Through direct involvement in community activities, students are encouraged not only to demonstrate religious knowledge, such as Qur'anic memorization, but also to develop empathy, teamwork, and social awareness. The findings suggest that holistic Islamic education (*kaffah*) does not place spiritual piety and vocational preparedness in opposition to one another. Instead, through *fitrah*-based Meaningful Learning, the school attempts to integrate religious values with 21st-century competencies in a more balanced and contextual way. This integration appears to support students' autonomous motivation, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities while maintaining a moral and spiritual foundation in their daily lives.

### **Restorative Discipline and Critical Reflection as Spaces for Moral Empowerment**

In the context of moral development and strengthening student agency, one of the most distinctive practices at Bintang Madani High School is the integration of restorative discipline with structured spaces for critical reflection. Instead of relying on conventional punitive sanctions, such as strict punishments for lateness, the school encourages students to deliver short Islamic reflections or sermons in front of their peers. This approach reflects the principles of restorative practices in education. Previous studies have shown that punitive disciplinary models often reduce student autonomy, reinforce hierarchical relationships, and encourage passive resistance among adolescents (Abejón-Fuentes et al., 2025; Mullet, 2014). In contrast, Bintang Madani attempts to transform disciplinary violations into opportunities for reflection and positive contribution. Through this practice, students are not positioned as problematic individuals who must simply be punished, but as active subjects who are capable of learning from mistakes and contributing constructively to the school community. As a result, self-regulation is encouraged through responsibility and social awareness rather than fear of sanctions alone.

This reflective dimension is further strengthened through a contemplative program called *The Journey*. From the perspective of religious education psychology, religious obedience based solely on fear, pressure, or institutional demands is often unstable because it relies heavily on external control (Brambilla et al., 2014). Religious values tend to become more meaningful when students are given opportunities to reflect, ask questions, and connect those values with their own experiences (Brambilla et al., 2015; Lundgren & Poell, 2016). In this context, *The Journey* appears to provide a reflective space where students can engage in dialogue, contemplation, and personal meaning-making related to religious practices. The program also encourages teachers to move beyond one-way doctrinal teaching toward more facilitative and dialogical roles. When students begin to understand practices such as prayer not merely as obligation, but also as expressions of gratitude and self-awareness, religious learning becomes more closely connected to their lived experiences. Meaningful Learning, therefore, functions not only as an instructional approach, but also as a process that supports the development of students' *fitrah* through reflective engagement with religious values.

These findings challenge the assumption that Islamic Religious Education necessarily operates through one-way indoctrination. Instead, the study suggests that reflective and dialogical learning environments can support students in developing moral awareness, reflective independence, and a stronger sense of personal responsibility in understanding and practicing religious values.

### **3.3 Challenges and Limitations of Implementation**

The findings of this study suggest that the implementation of *fitrah*-based Meaningful Learning at Bintang Madani High School offers valuable opportunities for making Islamic Religious Education more relevant to students' everyday lives. However, the implementation of this approach is not without challenges. One of the most prominent challenges concerns teachers' readiness to adopt learning practices that differ from conventional instructional models. The shift from teacher-centered instruction toward a more dialogical and reflective learning environment requires not only pedagogical adaptation but also changes in educators' perspectives regarding the role of students in the learning process. Although professional development initiatives such as the *Cekatan* program provide important spaces for reflection and collaborative learning, the process of pedagogical transformation appears to take place gradually and requires continuous institutional support (Wedi et al., 2025).

From the students' perspective, adapting to a learning environment that emphasizes initiative, reflection, and personal responsibility also presents its own challenges. Several participants described that activities such as *Essential Skills* and *The Journey* initially felt unfamiliar because they required students to move beyond routines centered on memorization and compliance. Engaging in reflective discussions, evaluating personal experiences, and making independent decisions demanded a level of participation that some students had not previously encountered. In this regard, the development of autonomous motivation, adaptability, and reflective self-awareness appeared to emerge through an ongoing process rather than as an immediate outcome of educational intervention. These findings suggest that meaningful learning requires sustained guidance and mentoring so that students can gradually internalize the values and dispositions promoted through the learning process.

Another challenge relates to the assessment of learning outcomes and the consistency of restorative educational practices. Teachers acknowledged that aspects such as autonomous motivation, adaptability, reflective self-awareness, and life skills are often difficult to capture through conventional assessment systems that primarily emphasize academic achievement. Many of the changes observed in students were expressed through attitudes, habits, and patterns of behavior that developed over time and were not always easily translated into formal indicators of assessment. Furthermore, maintaining restorative approaches to discipline requires ongoing commitment from both teachers and school leaders to ensure that educational practices remain aligned with the broader goals of character development and holistic learning.

Several limitations should also be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, this research was conducted as a single-case study within one educational institution, namely Bintang Madani High School. While this approach enabled a detailed exploration of the implementation of fitrah-based Meaningful Learning in its natural setting, the findings are closely tied to the school's unique characteristics of the school and educational culture. Second, the study involved a limited number of participants, consisting of one Islamic Religious Education teacher and four Grade 11 students. Consistent with the principle of information power, participants were purposively selected for their direct experience and substantial knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Malterud et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the perspectives presented in this study should be understood as context-specific rather than representative of all Islamic educational settings. In addition, the study focused primarily on the experiences of a single teacher who played a key role in implementing the learning model, while the perspectives of other teachers were not examined systematically. Because this teacher was also involved in designing and implementing the educational program, the interpretation of instructional practices may have been influenced by the perspective of a key informant closely involved in the innovation. To reduce this potential bias, the teacher's accounts were interpreted alongside classroom observations, students' interview data, and institutional documents. Nevertheless, the findings should be understood as reflecting one institutional context rather than as definitive evidence of the effectiveness of fitrah-based Meaningful Learning. Future studies involving multiple schools, teachers, and student groups may provide a broader understanding of how fitrah-based Meaningful Learning is interpreted and implemented across different educational contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the implementation of fitrah-based Meaningful Learning at Bintang Madani High School provides a contextual pedagogical model for rethinking Islamic Religious Education. The findings show that this approach is built on three interconnected dimensions: the contextualization of theological learning within contemporary digital realities, the integration of experiential and domestic life skills into the curriculum, and the application of restorative discipline alongside reflective learning spaces. Rather than aiming for universal generalization, the study suggests that the integration of fitrah epistemology with meaningful learning practices can encourage students to develop a more reflective and self-directed understanding of religion. This approach also appears to support the growth of autonomous motivation, reflective self-regulation, and adaptive capacity in responding to contemporary social and economic challenges.

The findings carry both theoretical and practical implications for educational stakeholders. For PAI teachers and school leaders, the study highlights the importance of moving beyond dogmatic and memorization-oriented teaching practices toward approaches that help students construct meaning from their learning experiences. In this process, teachers need institutional support through sustainable professional learning communities, such as the *Cekatan* program. For curriculum developers, the study provides empirical support for reducing the long-standing separation between religious knowledge (*naqli*) and rational or vocational competencies (*aqli*). The findings indicate that religious education can be integrated with practical life skills and 21st-century competencies in a more holistic manner.

Nevertheless, this research has limitations as it focuses on a single case study situated within a specific institutional culture and resource context. Consequently, the findings may not be directly transferable to schools with different structural conditions, particularly those with limited resources. Future studies could expand this research by employing mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term influence of fitrah-based pedagogy on students' behavioral development and adaptive capacity across broader educational settings.

## REFERENCES

- Abejón-Fuentes, M., Urruticoechea, A., Martín-Babarro, J., Martín-Seoane, G., Calleja-Ayllón, R., & Pérez-Jiménez, N. (2025). A Systematic Review of Positive Discipline and School Organization on School Climate | Revisión Sistemática sobre la Influencia de la Disciplina Positiva y la Organización Escolar en el Clima Escolar. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 14(3), 199–237. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijep.18104>
- Agra, G., Formiga, N. S., de Oliveira, P. S., Costa, M. M. L., Fernandes, M. D. G. M., & da Nóbrega, M. M. L. (2019). Analysis of the concept of Meaningful Learning in light of the Ausubel's Theory | Análise do conceito de Aprendizagem Significativa à luz da Teoria de Ausubel | Análisis del concepto de Aprendizaje Significativo bajo la luz de la Teoría de Ausubel. *Revista Brasileira De Enfermagem*, 72(1), 248–255. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2017-0691>
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1991). *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*.
- Al-Ghazali. (2011). *Ihya Ulum al-Din (Revival of the Religious Sciences)*.
- Amaly, A. M., Herdiana, Y., Ruswandi, U., & Arifin, B. S. (2023). THE NECESSITY AND REALITY OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 23(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v23i1.13190>
- Ausubel, D. P. (1962). A Subsumption Theory of Meaningful Verbal Learning and Retention. *The Journal of General Psychology*, 66(2), 213–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221309.1962.9711837>
- Baiza, Y. (2022). Are Contemporary Islamic Education and Their Pedagogical Approaches Fit for Purpose? A Critique and Way Forward. In *Supporting Modern Teaching in Islamic Schools Pedagogical Best Practice for Teachers*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003193432-3>
- Brambilla, M., Assor, A., Manzi, C., & Regalia, C. (2015). Autonomous Versus Controlled Religiosity: Family and Group Antecedents. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 25(3), 193–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2014.888902>
- Brambilla, M., Manzi, C., & Regalia, C. (2014). Italian validation of the Christian Religious Internalization Scale. *Tpm Testing Psychometrics Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 21(2), 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.4473/TPM21.2.2>
- Desfita, V., Salminawati, S., & Usiono, U. (2024). *Integration Of Science In The Perspective Of*

- Islamic Educational Philosophy And Its Implications In Realizing Holistic Education. *Jurnal As-Salam*, 8(2), 114–134. <https://doi.org/10.37249/assalam.v8i2.714>
- Ghazali, N. (2025). Empowering Students' Meaningful Learning. In *Empowering Students Meaningful Learning*.
- Halstead, M. (2004). An Islamic concept of education. *Comparative Education*, 40(4), 517–529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284510>
- Lundgren, H., & Poell, R. F. (2016). On Critical Reflection: A Review of Mezirow's Theory and Its Operationalization. *Human Resource Development Review*, 15(1), 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484315622735>
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Manaf, S., Darajat, Much. H., Zh, M. H. R., At Thariq, Z. Z., Syam, A. R., & Jamil, H. A. (2025). Strategic Integration of General and Religious Education in Indonesian Pesantren: Building Holistic Character for National Resilience. *Edcomtech: Jurnal Kajian Teknologi Pendidikan*, 10(2), 133–146. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um039v10i22025p133-146>
- Mullet, J. H. (2014). Restorative discipline: From getting even to getting well. *Children and Schools*, 36(3), 157–162. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdu011>
- Munajat, N., & Muqowim, M. (2025). Mapping the Nexus of Transformational Leadership, Pedagogical Competence, and Learning Management Innovation: A Scoping Review and Its Implications for Islamic Religious Education. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 22(2), 446–465. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v22i2.12057>
- Muntaha, Hunainah, & Supriadi. (2025). A Phenomenological Study on Meaningful Learning and Worship Awareness in Islamic Religious Education. *Al-Mudarris (Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Islam)*, 8(2), 293–316. <https://doi.org/10.23971/mdr.v8i2.10240>
- Saepurrohman, A., & Erihadiana, M. (2024). The Concept of Qudwah and its Implications for Teacher Personality Competence in Islamic Education. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 14(2), 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.38073/jpi.v14i2.1806>
- Samad, S. A. A., Gade, S., Basri, H., Silahuddin, & Ariani, S. (2023). Teacher's Spiritual Competence And Its Implication In Islamic Religious Education Learning In Pidie, Aceh. *Ulumuna*, 27(2), 624–648. <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i2.710>
- Shaleh, M., Tobroni, Mundir, & Umiarso. (2024). Development of a Holistic-integrative Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in an Integrated Islamic School. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 2024(113), 227–241. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2024.113.13>
- Sinaee, A. H. (2025). Rationalism vs. textualism: a comparative analysis of Islamic pedagogical approaches in Iran and Saudi Arabia. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 47(4), 454–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2451044>
- Singsuriya, P., & Rimpeng, L. (2025). Linking religious literacy to 21st century skills. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2025.2501815>
- Wedi, A., Mardiana, D., & Umiarso. (2025). Digital Transformation Model of Islamic Religious Education in the AI Era: A Case Study of Madrasah Aliyah in East Java, Indonesia. *International Journal of Learning Teaching and Educational Research*, 24(8), 842–863. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.8.37>
- Zakariyah, Muhid, A., & Arifin, M. (2025). Transformation of Al-Qur'an Memorization Learning in the Digital Age through the Blended Learning Flipped Classroom Approach. *Nazhruna Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8(3), 594–606. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i3.193>
- Zaqiah, Q. Y., Hasanah, A., Heryati, Y., & Rohmatulloh, R. (2024). The Impact of In-Service Teacher Education Program on Competency Improvement Among Islamic Religious Education Teachers Using Self-Assessment. *Education Sciences*, 14(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111257>