

Transformational Islamic Religious Education: The Role of Self-Efficacy in the Formation of Students' Religious Character

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ABSTRACT

Islamic religious education in the modern era must be informative and transformational, namely, to be able to form students' religious character completely and sustainably. One of the key factors in the success of this transformation is self-efficacy, namely, students' belief in their ability to carry out religious values in everyday life. This study aims to examine how the role of self-efficacy is built through Islamic Religious Education learning that is designed contextually and applicatively. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The study subjects consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers and senior high school students implementing transformation-based learning in Bandung. The study results show that students' self-efficacy is formed through 1) a religious and supportive school environment, 2) a meaningful and contextual learning model, 3) consistent character guidance and habituation, and 4) disciplinary policies that support student self-control. Therefore, transformational Islamic Religious Education is effective in forming students' religious character if it synergistically involves all elements of the school to strengthen their self-efficacy in carrying out religious teachings consistently and consciously.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The character crisis among students has become a serious global and national concern. This phenomenon cannot be separated from the increase in deviant behavior, violence in the school environment, and the shift in moral values in society. At the international level, UNICEF data reveals that one in three children worldwide experience bullying at school, indicating the urgency of creating a safe and supportive learning environment (Andayani & Syarifah, 2024). The issue of student character not only covers individual moral aspects but is also closely related to the social and spiritual dimensions of their lives.

Various international studies have also highlighted the urgency of implementing religious character in students' social lives. Research by Muñoz-García and Villena-Martínez (2020) in Spain on 720 respondents showed a significant relationship between religious belief and obedience with prosocial behavior, including environmental concern. These results emphasize teachers' importance in sustaining students' understanding of religious values in social practice. The same thing was found by Moulin-Stožek et al. (2018) through research in Peru and El Salvador, which confirmed that the level of religiosity is inversely related to risky behavior and positively related to students' prosocial attitudes. Even amidst anti-Muslim discourse in the West, a study by Francis et al. (2020) shows that interfaith friendships can shape positive perceptions and support the development of a religious character-based curriculum.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Women and Children Protection noted that as many as 62% of students experienced physical or psychological violence during their lives (Andayani & Syarifah, 2024). Verbal violence and bullying are also problems that disrupt students' psychological well-being, which show an increasing trend and require systemic attention (Reswita & Buulolo, 2023). This condition is exacerbated by the increasing cases of sexual violence against children, most of which are not reported because they involve perpetrators from the immediate environment (Karmi & Aliarosa, 2022). This phenomenon reflects the weak internalization of moral and spiritual values in education.

The national education system must be more adaptive by integrating religious and character values substantively into the curriculum. The contextual learning approach has been proven to increase student participation and reduce the tendency toward deviant behavior (Narayana et al., 2021). This needs to be supported by teacher training in implementing character education effectively (Ferianti et al., 2023), as well as the implementation of policies such as Child-Friendly Schools that ensure that student's rights are protected and respected (Azizah et al., 2024; Rangkuti & Maksum, 2019).

The synergy between schools and families is also key to character formation. Parental involvement is needed to ensure that the moral values taught in schools align with those instilled at home. In this case, a values-based sex education program can help students understand the boundaries of interpersonal relationships and raise awareness of sexual violence (Christiana, 2019). This integrated approach is expected to reduce the character crisis while producing a generation that is academically superior, ethically, and spiritually strong. In the effort to form spiritual and moral character, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role. Islamic Religious Education provides religious understanding and forms character through values such as honesty, tolerance, and responsibility (Elihami & Syahid, 2018; Tholibin et al., 2022). This role is increasingly relevant amid a society facing value disorientation due to globalization and

materialistic culture (Mulyadi et al., 2023; Sakur et al., 2022). Unfortunately, most Islamic Religious Education programs still use a conventional approach that emphasizes memorization and texts without internalizing values contextually (Adiyono et al., 2023; Albana et al., 2023).

To answer these challenges, it is necessary to transform the approach to learning Islamic Religious Education from normative-instructional to transformational learning. This model emphasizes reflective processes and personal experiences that enable students to understand religious values theoretically and live them in everyday practice (Muammar et al., 2024). Learning strategies such as group discussions, collaborative projects, and reflection activities are important in supporting active student involvement (Wee et al., 2024).

Philosophically, transformational learning refers to Mezirow's theory, which emphasizes the importance of critical reflection and changes in perspective in the learning process (Nohl, 2014; Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021). This differs from traditional learning, which tends to be oriented solely towards knowledge transfer. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the transformational approach encourages students to become agents of social change who are aware of religious values and can respond to the challenges of the times wisely and morally (ERTÜRK & Nartgün, 2022; Qutoshi & Rajbhandari, 2016).

One of the keys to the success of transformational learning in Islamic Religious Education is strengthening students' self-efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy introduced by Albert Bandura refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks and face challenges (Bandura, 1997). In a religious context, self-efficacy plays a vital role in fostering students' courage to worship, maintain spiritual commitments, and be consistent in moral values (Monika & Adman, 2017). Studies show that students with high self-efficacy tend to be more consistent in carrying out religious activities, have a deep understanding of the values of worship, and demonstrate social attitudes that are in line with religious teachings (Cahyadi, 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022). However, in reality, many students still have religious knowledge but fail to apply it in real life. This condition reflects the gap between cognition and behavior, which can be bridged with self-efficacy-strengthening strategies through appropriate learning. Unfortunately, most Islamic Religious Education curricula have not systematically integrated learning strategies that support increasing student self-efficacy (Fatimah et al., 2022). This causes many students to understand religion as mere knowledge, not as a life value. In practice, low self-efficacy causes students to feel less able to apply religious teachings, especially when facing social pressure or moral challenges (Sari et al., 2023; Zeinnida et al., 2022).

Therefore, it is necessary to develop a more holistic and integrative Islamic Religious Education learning model, which not only teaches religious knowledge but also forms a comprehensive religious character (Abdal et al., 2023; Lutfiati, 2024; Sakur et al., 2022). Self-efficacy must be a core part of the learning approach so that students understand religion in theory and implement it authentically in everyday life.

In line with this urgency, this study explores how transformational Islamic Religious Education learning can increase students' self-efficacy and form a comprehensive religious character. A transformational approach focusing on changing attitudes and understanding religious values is expected to bridge the gap between cognition and action. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and teaching strategies capable of producing a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also spiritually and morally mature.

2. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe how transformational Islamic Religious Education learning shapes students' religious character through strengthening self-efficacy. Researchers try to understand the learning process in depth through direct interaction in the field. Data collection techniques in this study include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Creswell, 2010; Hasanah, 2017; Rahardjo, 2011). Observations were conducted to directly observe the classroom's Islamic Religious Education learning process, especially the interaction between teachers and students, the methods used, and the religious attitudes that emerged during learning. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers and students to explore their views on transformational learning and how it affects students' self-efficacy and religious character. The documentation collected included a Learning Implementation Plan, Islamic Religious Education modules, records of religious activities, and photo documentation during learning.

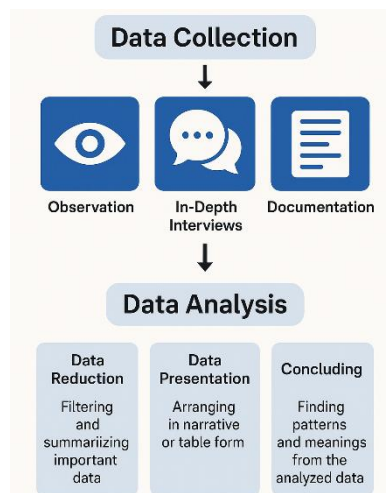


Figure 1. *Qualitative Research Process*

Figure 1 illustrates the qualitative research process, starting with data collection through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. This is followed by data analysis, which includes data reduction (filtering key information), data presentation (organizing data in narrative or tables), and concluding (finding patterns and meanings). This process ensures systematic and meaningful interpretation of data.

The research subjects consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers and senior high school students in Bandung who participated in learning with a transformational approach. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively based on specific criteria that were by the study's objectives, such as teachers who actively use innovative learning approaches and students who have been involved in the learning process. Data analysis was conducted following the Miles and Huberman model (1984), namely through three stages: data reduction (filtering and summarizing important data), data presentation (arranging in narrative or table form), and concluding (finding patterns and meanings from the analyzed data). Triangulation techniques, member checking, and discussions with colleagues were used to ensure the validity of the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals how Islamic Religious Education learning designed in a transformational manner can strengthen students' self-efficacy and contribute significantly to shaping their religious character. The transformation referred to here includes the transfer of religious knowledge and touches on students' psychological, social, and spiritual realms. The results of this study are classified into four main aspects.

3.1. School Environment that Supports Self-Efficacy in the Formation of Students' Religious Character

The school environment is an educational ecosystem that greatly influences students' psychological and spiritual development (Sharma & Harmalkar, 2024; Suyitno et al., 2019). In religious character formation, a conducive and religious-nuanced school environment functions as a place for formal learning and a space for forming students' self-confidence (self-efficacy) to practice religious values consistently.

Self-efficacy, as Albert Bandura (1997) explains in his theory, is a person's belief in their ability to organize and carry out the actions needed to achieve certain goals. In this context, the goal is to carry out religious behavior such as praying on time, reading the Qur'an, being honest and polite, and behaving according to Islamic teachings in everyday life.

Schools that provide various programs to support self-efficacy in forming student character in an intensely religious atmosphere significantly contribute to student self-efficacy (Gebauer et al., 2020). Programs such as congregational prayer, morning recitation, memorization of the Qur'an, and regular religious studies are routines and processes of internalizing values that are repeated and meaningful. In this context, repeating religious activities daily strengthens students' belief that they can carry out worship well. When a student is used to reading the Qur'an every morning with his friends, he will have a concrete experience that strengthens his perception that reading the Qur'an is not something complicated or foreign but something that can be done consistently.

Furthermore, the support of teachers and school management plays a role in strengthening students' internal motivation (Akram & Li, 2024). When teachers teach and become role models in religious behavior and provide positive reinforcement when students demonstrate good behavior, students will feel appreciated, cared for, and supported. The sense of security and confidence fostered by teachers' empathetic and appreciative attitudes forms a healthy psychological foundation for developing self-efficacy (Pathak, 2025).

This argument is supported by the results of various studies showing that positive social interactions with teachers can increase students' intrinsic motivation and self-confidence in carrying out religious duties (Jayanti & Susanti, 2023; Kasum, 2025; Mutmainah & Mufid, 2018; Putra & Arifin, 2024). Teachers not only transfer knowledge but also guide students' hearts and behavior so that they can internalize Islamic teachings in their lives.

No less important is the social environment of peers. In social learning theory, Bandura (1993) also emphasizes the importance of social or role models. Peers who are religious and accustomed to doing good will be effective models for other students to imitate this behavior (Mahmudi, 2022; Mujiati, 2017; Purwaningsih, 2022). When a student sees his friend diligently

praying *dhuha*, not saying bad words, and being active in religious activities, he will be indirectly encouraged to imitate because of the social identification process. Peers create positive social pressure that strengthens the habituation of religious behavior.

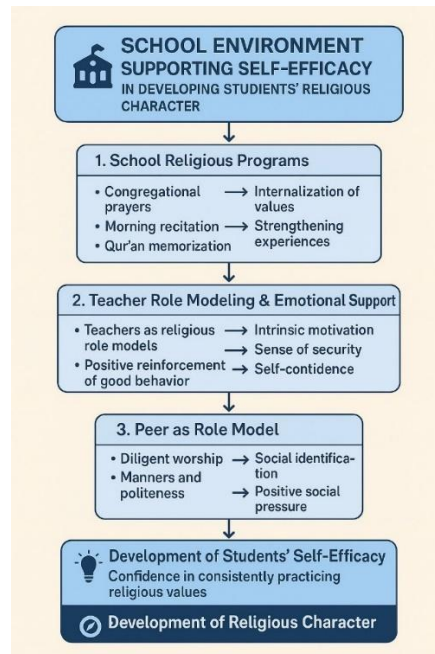


Figure 2. *Religious Character Development Process*

Figure 2 illustrates the Religious Character Development Process through the support of the school environment in fostering students' self-efficacy. This process begins with school religious programs such as congregational prayers, morning recitations, and Qur'an memorization, which help students internalize religious values and strengthen their spiritual experiences. Teacher role modeling and emotional support also play a vital role, as teachers who act as religious role models and help positive reinforcement for good behavior build students' intrinsic motivation, sense of security, and self-confidence. Additionally, peers serve as role models through diligent worship and good manners, promoting social identification and positive social pressure. These three elements enhance students' self-efficacy, enabling them to confidently and consistently practice religious values, ultimately developing strong religious character.

In other words, the school environment that forms self-efficacy does not stand alone but is the result of synergy between the infrastructure of religious programs, teacher role models, and social support from peers. These three aspects create an atmosphere that facilitates students to believe in their ability to live a religious life authentically and not just as a formality. Therefore, it is important for Islamic educational institutions to not only organize religious activities symbolically but to ensure that all components of the school contribute to creating a psychosocial climate that fosters self-efficacy. This self-efficacy is an important foundation in forming a strong religious character because a student who is confident in carrying out religious commands will be more resistant to temptations, challenges, and changes in the times. This is the essence of transformative Islamic education, which forms humans who know what is right and are confident and committed to implementing it in their lives.

3.2. Meaningful and Contextual Islamic Religious Education Learning Model

During the Transformation in Islamic Religious Education, learning does not only lie in the presentation of more interesting Islamic Religious Education material but more deeply in how the learning process is designed to be meaningful and contextual and encourage the growth of students' self-efficacy, namely their belief in their abilities to live and practice Islamic values in everyday life.

One of the characteristics of the transformative Islamic Religious Education learning model is the strategic and functional division of learning time (Saihu, 2019). In its implementation, teachers not only use two lesson hours to deliver Islamic Religious Education normative material such as faith, sharia, or morals theoretically but consciously provide one special hour for applying values through practical activities, contemplation (moral reflection), or simple social actions. This pattern reflects a meaningful learning approach, where students not only know what is right but also understand why it is important and how to practice it (Vargas-Hernández & Vargas-González, 2022).

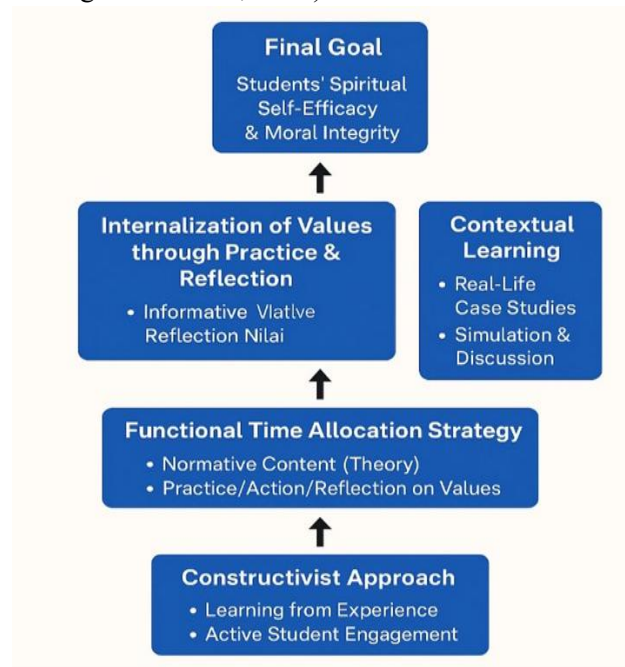


Figure 3. Contextual and Meaningful Islamic Education Model

Figure 3 illustrates the Contextual and Meaningful Islamic Education Model, which aims to develop students' spiritual self-efficacy and moral integrity as its final goal. The model begins with a constructivist approach, emphasizing learning through experience and active student engagement. It is followed by a functional time allocation strategy that balances the delivery of normative theoretical content with practical activities, actions, and reflections on values. The next stage involves internalizing values through practice and reflection, where students engage in informative and value-based reflections to deepen their understanding. Simultaneously, contextual learning is applied through real-life case studies, simulations, and discussions to connect lessons with students' everyday experiences. Together, these components create a holistic and practical Islamic education framework that fosters knowledge and character development in a meaningful and relevant way.

Within this framework, Islamic Religious Education teachers act as teachers, spiritual guides, and role models. Teachers provide concrete examples from everyday life, such as how to remain honest under pressure, be patient when facing problems, or interact with people who have different opinions in an Islamic way. This role model is important because character-building and self-efficacy are formed more through observation of real behavior than through lectures or verbal instructions.

Furthermore, the learning methods used are not one-way. Teachers use active approaches such as group discussions, religious case studies, simulations, and self-reflection. For example, in discussing the topic of honesty, students are invited to analyze real cases of corruption or dishonesty in the lives of teenagers, then discuss their impacts, and finally are asked to reflect on themselves: Have they ever faced a similar situation and how should they behave? This approach makes students feel that religious teachings are not something abstract but rather something that is directly related to the dynamics of their lives.

This learning model provides space for students to build value awareness and increase self-efficacy. When students succeed in linking religious material to their lives and are given the opportunity to try to apply these values in real situations, their belief that they are able to do so grows. This is the important point in religious education: forming spiritual self-efficacy, namely the courage and readiness of students to live according to Islamic values even amidst the challenges of the times.

Theoretically, this is also in line with the theory of constructivist learning, which emphasizes that knowledge is built through personal experience, reflection, and active student involvement in the learning process (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021; Zajda & Zajda, 2021). Students who learn through real experiences and contexts will better understand the values taught, feel emotionally involved, and are more likely to make them part of their personality.

Thus, a meaningful and contextual Islamic Religious Education learning model not only makes students cognitively intelligent but also forms their spiritual and moral integrity. Through relevant, applicable learning supported by teacher role models and reflective methods, the transformation of religious education does not only occur in the classroom but also spreads into students' real lives. This is the manifestation of true Islamic Religious Education learning, learning that not only makes students know what is right but also able and ready to do it.

3.3. Mentoring, Monitoring, and Character Building

Self-efficacy in religious education does not appear suddenly but is the result of a continuous process supported by intensive mentoring, systematic monitoring, and consistent character-building. Within the framework of transformational Islamic Religious Education learning, these three elements are an important foundation in forming students' beliefs in their ability to act according to Islamic values in real life.

Before academic activities begin every morning, students follow a series of structured religious development programs. These activities include congregational Dhuha prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, and a seven-minute lecture (kultum), which are delivered in turns by Islamic Religious Education teachers and students. These activities are a religious routine and a means of internalizing values that indirectly shape character and increase students' spiritual self-

awareness. Through this spiritual building, students are reminded of the importance of worship and encouraged to make it a part of their daily lifestyle.

More than just a routine activity, Islamic Religious Education teachers also monitor and evaluate students' attitudes and behavior daily. This evaluation is carried out directly through teacher observation of student interactions in the classroom and school environment and indirectly through reflective journals written by students. In this journal, students are asked to write down their religious experiences, challenges faced, and values they have successfully practiced daily. This process is critical because it trains students' metacognitive abilities, namely awareness of their thoughts and feelings when practicing religious teachings.

With continuous practice, students begin to recognize their thought patterns and attitudes, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and form a moral commitment to continue to improve themselves. They no longer practice religion because of pressure or obligation alone but because of self-awareness and belief that they can and are worthy of practicing Islamic values consistently. This is where self-efficacy is important: not only in the technical ability to worship or behave well but in the self-awareness they can have and in choosing to continue to do good, which is a meaningful decision.

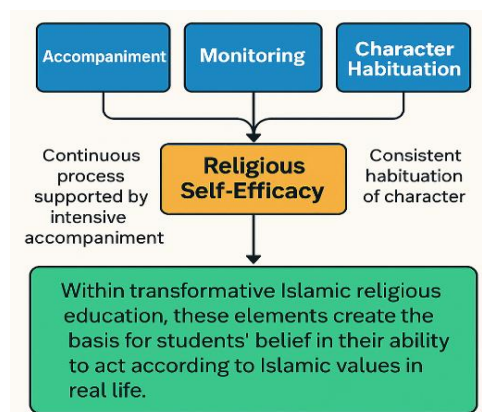


Figure 4. *The Process of Forming Students' Religious Self-Efficacy*

Figure 4 illustrates how students develop religious self-efficacy through three key components: accompaniment, monitoring, and character habituation. These elements support students in developing confidence in practicing Islamic values consistently and responsibly. Through continuous guidance and reinforcement, students internalize religious principles, forming a strong spiritual identity applicable to real-life situations.

Psychologically, this process aligns with the theory of self-efficacy developed by Albert Bandura (1997), which states that direct experience, social models, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological conditions are the four primary sources of self-efficacy. In this context, teacher guidance, religious activities, and consistent habituation fulfill all of these aspects: students experience religious practices directly, see examples from teachers and peers, receive motivation and evaluation from the school environment, and experience the positive emotional impact of spiritual discipline. Thus, guidance, monitoring, and character habituation function as complementary activities and are the core of the strategy for forming students' religious self-efficacy. Through this approach, students are helped to become individuals who know what is good religiously and who are aware, confident, and committed to practicing these values in real life. This is the true transformation in Islamic religious education.

3.4. Discipline Policy as a Strengthenener of Religious Character

The formation of religious character in education depends not only on the learning process in the classroom but is also greatly determined by the policies and culture of discipline that are consistently applied by the school (Huda et al., 2021; Nurussolihah, 2022). If designed wisely and contextually, these policies play a significant role in creating an environment conducive to the growth of religious values, including discipline, responsibility, and self-control.

One unique and strategic policy found in schools that prioritize religious character education is collecting students' cell phones every morning before class. These phones will only be returned when students return home from school. At first glance, this policy may seem trivial or merely an administrative action, but when viewed from the perspective of character education, it has a very deep and significant meaning.

First, this policy directly reduces digital distractions often interfering with students' concentration, especially when taking Islamic Religious Education lessons and worship activities such as tadarus, dhuhur prayers, or morning sermons. Amid a digital era full of social media notifications, online games, and unlimited internet access, gadgets in students' hands are often a significant obstacle to presenting solemnity in learning and worship. Therefore, keeping cell phones away is not just an act of prohibition but part of the habit of focus and presence, namely presenting oneself completely physically and mentally in the learning process and getting closer to Allah.

Second, this policy is a real means of instilling the values of discipline, responsibility, and obedience to the rules. Students are indirectly trained to hand over their cellphones consciously, without coercion, and receive them back in the same condition. From this process, they learn the meaning of delaying desires, controlling themselves from digital consumer habits, and obeying the applicable system as part of a harmonious collective life. These values are the foundation of a religious character, where a Muslim is taught to submit to the rules, refrain from harmful things (including digital dangers), and be honest in every situation.

Third, in the long term, an environment that is free from distractions and systematically controlled will help students develop spiritual and moral discipline. They are accustomed to being present in a calm learning atmosphere, fundamental social interactions (not virtual), and a religious school atmosphere. This atmosphere will form a habitus, namely an internalized mindset, and behavior that religious life is not abstract but is possible to realize if the environment supports it and the policy is disciplinary.

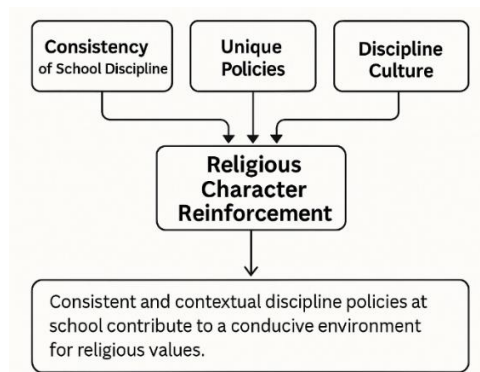


Figure 5. *Religious Character Strengthening Process*

Figure 5 Strengthening students' religious character depends on the consistency of school discipline, unique policies, and contextual disciplinary culture. All three create an environment that supports the internalization of religious values so that students obey the rules and develop spiritual responsibility and integrity in everyday life.

From the perspective of educational Religious Character Strengthening Process theory, this policy is in line with the behaviorist and social cognitive approaches, where student behavior is formed through environmental reinforcement, habituation, and modeling from the social system where they learn (AbdulJalil, 2019; Tullah, 2020). Albert Bandura (1993) emphasized the importance of environmental structuring in forming religious behavior. When the environment supports the practice of values, students will find it easier to internalize these values as part of their identity.

Thus, school disciplinary policies, such as collecting cell phones, are not merely administrative rules but strategic instruments supporting the formation of religious character. They strengthen self-control, develop spiritual discipline, and train obedience, ultimately shaping students into individuals who know and understand religious values and can live them with awareness and responsibility. This kind of policy shows that religious character education is not enough just to be taught but must be designed, conditioned, and trained continuously through the school system and culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the four main aspects of the Islamic Religious Education learning process, this study concludes that transformational Islamic Religious Education learning can only be successful if it is based on the synergy between the environment, learning approach, teacher role, and school policy. First, a religious and supportive school environment. Second, a meaningful and contextual Islamic Religious Education learning model. Third, the role of teachers as spiritual companions and role models. Fourth, school policies that discipline and foster self-control. Overall, these four elements form a solid foundation for fostering student self-efficacy, namely the belief and readiness to carry out religious values consistently, consciously, and responsibly in various life situations. This self-efficacy is the main capital in forming a strong, relevant, and adaptive religious character to the challenges of the ever-evolving era.

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