

EXEMPLAR AND EDUCATIONAL PREFERENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS FIGURES ON INTEREST IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This current research aims to analyse the influence of religious figures on people's interest in choosing Islamic education in the Indonesian context. This study involved 400 respondents from various regions. From the data collected through the survey method, results show that people's perceptions of religious figures significantly influence their interest in choosing an Islamic educational institution. As many as 75% of respondents considered religious figures before deciding to send their child to an Islamic school. This research also revealed that trust in religious figures with a good reputation can increase people's satisfaction with Islamic education. In addition, there is tension between tradition and modernity in Islamic education, which indicates the need to modernize the curriculum to remain relevant to global developments. It is hoped that these findings can be a guide for policymakers in formulating strategies to increase the interest and quality of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Religious Figures; Islamic Education; Interest; Curriculum Modernization.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh tokoh agama terhadap minat masyarakat dalam memilih pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Dengan melibatkan 400 responden dari berbagai wilayah, penelitian ini menggunakan metode survei sebagai alat pengumpulan data. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa persepsi masyarakat terhadap tokoh agama berpengaruh signifikan terhadap minat mereka dalam memilih lembaga pendidikan Islam. Sebanyak 75% responden mempertimbangkan sosok tokoh agama sebelum memutuskan untuk memasukkan anak mereka ke sekolah Islam. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa kepercayaan pada tokoh agama yang memiliki reputasi baik dapat meningkatkan kepuasan masyarakat terhadap pendidikan Islam. Selain itu, terdapat ketegangan antara tradisi dan modernitas dalam pendidikan Islam, yang mengindikasikan perlunya modernisasi kurikulum agar tetap relevan dengan perkembangan global. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi panduan bagi para pembuat kebijakan dalam merumuskan strategi guna meningkatkan minat dan kualitas pendidikan Islam di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Tokoh Agama; Pendidikan Islam; Minat; Modernisasi Kurikulum

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic education sector in Indonesia, both formal and non-formal, is currently facing a decline in interest. The decrease in the number of students in Islamic educational institutions (CNN, 2023) is one of the indications (Adhitia, 2024). Several factors contributing to this decline in interest include the numerous negative occurrences within Islamic education (Asmiati et al., 2022) and parents' perception that general education is superior to Islamic education (Shopia & Ferianto, 2024).

Nevertheless, religious authorities continue to play an important role within a religious society. In the context of

education in Indonesia, which emphasizes the importance of character development, the role of Islamic education is vital in shaping a globally competitive generation (Amirudin, 2019), possesses noble character (Nisaana 'Azzalatifa et al., 2021) and has a virtuous identity (S. Anwar, 2017). In addition, the role of Islamic education in the state system is as a serving agent of change for future generations (Kafid & Rohman, 2018). Moreover, the low interest in Islamic education has become a crucial issue that needs further examination due to its urgency in shaping both society and the nation.

Systematic previous studies have found that Islamic education interests, with worship practice interests, are closely interconnected to the role of religious figures (Hidayat, 2017). On the other hand, the existence of religious extremism is also often influenced by religious figures who are involved in certain groups or institutions (Cesari, 2013). The form, character, and leadership style of religious figures can influence people's perceptions and choices (Barsalou et al., 2005). In the education context, the interests of Indonesian society are often influenced by the dominance of religious figures in Islamic educational institutions or certain communities. This condition causes the feeling of reluctance for people to enroll their children in Islamic educational institutions.

However, the role of religious figures in changing people's perceptions of Islamic education needs to be observed comprehensively. One of the factors is education quality, facilities, and curriculum. Research by Daulay revealed that although religious figures have a significant influence, highly educated parents consider aspects of curriculum quality and facilities more in choosing education for their children (Daulay

& Tobroni, 2017). On the contrary, Sutarto (2023) emphasized the importance of curriculum modernization so that Islamic education institutions remain competitive. This condition indicates that even though the role of religious figures is very dominant. Besides, the quality of education and its facilities also become the key factors in the parent's decision. Therefore, to increase people's interest in Islamic education, it needs a holistic approach that considers many certain aspects.

Previous research by Hardaker has shown that student success in Islamic schools is closely related to the teaching methods applied by religious leaders (Hardaker & Sabki, 2016). Masmuni also emphasized that discursive awareness (interest) and moral behavior are important social perspectives (Mahatma & Saari, 2021). This study builds on earlier research by shifting the focus toward interest in Islamic education from the perspective of religious figures rather than solely on learning outcomes and moral behavior. This focus aims to support efforts to increase interest in Islamic educational institutions through the role of religious leaders in Indonesia.

The objective of this study is to determine the extent of influence that religious leaders have on public interest in choosing Islamic education in Indonesia. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for formulating strategies to enhance public interest in Islamic education through the roles of religious leaders and existing institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach to measure the influence of religious leaders on public interest in

choosing Islamic education in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it effectively identifies relationships between variables through a structured questionnaire survey. The study utilizes primary data collected directly from respondents. The survey was conducted using a questionnaire designed to measure public perceptions of religious figures and their influence on the interest in choosing Islamic education.

The population for this study consists of Indonesian Muslims with school-aged children (elementary, middle school, high school, and university). A purposive sampling technique was used to select relevant respondents, specifically parents or guardians who are considering Islamic education for their children. A sample of at least 400 respondents from various cities in Indonesia (Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar) was selected to ensure representative results, taking into account variations in economic, educational, and geographical backgrounds.

To minimize bias from respondents who may have pre-existing views on Islamic education, the study considered the respondents' diverse backgrounds, including their experiences with both Islamic and general education. Opening questions in the questionnaire were used to identify initial predispositions, allowing the analysis to take into account both neutral and already-formed opinions.

The main instrument of the study was a closed-ended questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree), which measured perceptions of religious leaders, the influence of religious leaders in decisions regarding Islamic education, comparisons between Islamic and general education, and the level of trust in Islamic educational

institutions. Demographic data such as age, occupation, and social background were also collected to build respondent profiles.

Data collection was conducted both online, through platforms like Google Forms, and offline, at Islamic educational institutions, mosques, and Muslim communities in the designated locations. Data analysis was performed using linear regression to assess the influence of religious leaders on interest in Islamic education, supported by statistical software like SPSS. Reliability and validity tests were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the research results.

Several limitations of the study include the possibility that the population representation may not be fully comprehensive, potential bias from respondents more exposed to Islamic education, and subjectivity in perception during data collection. Nevertheless, this study aims to provide a clear picture of the influence of religious leaders on interest in Islamic education in Indonesia and how religious leaders can be utilized to enhance the appeal of Islamic educational institutions in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 400 respondents from various regions of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar. The respondents were parents with school-aged children who are currently considering Islamic education as an option. The findings of this study reveal several key trends regarding the influence of religious leaders on the interest in choosing Islamic education.

This research involved respondents who come from various social and geographical backgrounds. As many as 45% of respondents were aged 35-45 years, indicating that the majority were parents who were experienced in dealing with children's educational challenges. This age group generally has a mature and diverse view regarding education, both religious and general. Study by (Yulianti et al., 2018). Shows that parental education, especially those with higher education, has a positive impact on their involvement in children's education, including religious education. Highly educated parents tend to have a broader understanding and be proactive in choosing the best education for their children.

In terms of education, the majority of respondents (60%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. This level of education indicates that they are more exposed to various perspectives and can evaluate the quality of education offered by Islamic educational institutions compared to general education. Research by Daulay and Tobroni (2017) supports these findings, showing that parents with higher education tend to be more selective in choosing Islamic schools, taking into account the quality of the curriculum and the religious values offered. (Daulay & Tobroni, 2017). The results of the data produced by researchers are as follows:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Categories	Number of respondent	Percentage (%)
Age	25-34 years	80	20.0
	35-44 years	180	45.0
	45-54 years	100	25.0
	55 years above	40	10.0
Education	Undergraduate	240	60.0

	Post graduate	80	20.0
	Senior / Vocational high school	60	15.0
	Ungraduated	20	5.0
Child Custody	Having child	350	87.5
	Having no child	50	12.5
Education involvement	Active (participation in education activity)	220	55.0
	Not active	180	45.0

Perception Toward Religious Figure

The perception towards religious figures is an important factor influencing interest in Islamic education. Survey results show that 75% of respondents consider religious figures as the main factor in deciding to choose Islamic education. This finding is consistent with Al-Mutairi's research, which states that religious figures with high credibility can influence public perception of Islamic educational institutions (Luwayhiq & Al-Mutairi, 2001, p. 423). The implications of this finding are highly relevant to the marketing strategies of Islamic educational institutions, where involving religious figures with integrity as ambassadors or advisors can increase public trust. Furthermore, collaboration with religious communities becomes an effective strategy in reaching potential students.

As many as 40% of respondents stated that trust in the religious figure leading the educational institution is the main factor in decision-making. This aligns with the embodiment theory by Barsalou et al., which asserts that the social representation and character of religious figures shape public views of educational institutions. Religious figures known for their integrity and high dedication are more trusted, thereby influencing parents' decisions in choosing Islamic education

(Barsalou et al., 2005). The results of the table can be seen as follows:

Table 2. Result of Perception towards Religious Figures.

Factor	categories	Number of respondent	Percentage(%)
Religious figure influence towards Islamic education	Very influential	300	75.0
	Quite influential	70	17.5
	Less influential	20	5.0
	No effect	10	2.5
Religious figures aspects that considered important	Moral education	280	70.0
	Existence in education	120	30.0
	Social activities	100	25.0
	Commitment in education	150	37.5
Interest towards Islamic education	High	220	55.0
	Medium	140	35.0
	Low	40	10.0

A study by Hardaker and Sabki shows that the teaching approach employed by religious figures, such as *kyai* (Islamic scholars), significantly impacts educational outcomes. This emphasizes that religious figures not only serve as spiritual leaders but also as educators who influence the quality of education received by students. Religious figures who actively participate in the learning process can positively affect students' motivation, academic achievement, and moral character development (Hardaker & Sabki, 2016).

Social Influence of Religious Figures

A total of 68% of respondents believe that the presence of religious figures in educational institutions has a positive impact on the development of leadership and social values in their

children. The research by Mahatma and Saari supports this finding, showing that religious figures can serve as social leaders who inspire positive change in society (Mahatma & Saari, 2021). Religious figures actively involved in social and educational activities play a role in shaping the moral character and leadership skills of students.

Religious figures often serve as role models within the community, and their lifestyles can influence the attitudes and behaviors of students. Huda asserts that the character of religious figures plays a vital role in shaping the moral values of students (Huda, 2020). Religious figures known for their modest lifestyle, honesty, and strong dedication to worship serve as positive role models for both children and parents, ultimately influencing their decision to choose Islamic education.

Research by Mulyana et al. (2023) also indicates that religious figures with good reputations can influence public attitudes towards Islamic educational institutions (Mulyana et al., 2023). Religious figures who are active in social and humanitarian activities create a positive image for the educational institutions they lead, thereby increasing public interest in enrolling their children in these institutions.

Comparison of Islamic Education and General Education

When comparing Islamic education with general education, 60% of respondents believe that general education is superior in terms of career preparation and access to higher education. Research by Cipto et al. (2023) shows that general education emphasizes the technical competencies and skills required to compete in the global job market. General education often offers a broader and more flexible curriculum, allowing

students to explore various fields of study and careers (Priyono et al., 2023).

Conversely, 40% of respondents feel that Islamic education is superior regarding moral and religious character formation. They argue that Islamic education offers a holistic approach that encompasses both spiritual and academic aspects. Anwar (2017) emphasizes that Islamic education focuses on moral values and character development, which are crucial for shaping a generation with noble morals and global competitiveness (H. Anwar, 2017). The data from this research is presented in the following table.

Table 3. Comparison of Islamic and General Education.

Aspect	Islamic education	General education	Difference (%)
Carrier preparation	30.0	55.0	-25.0
Moral Character formation	50.0	20.0	+30.0
Access to higher education	25.0	60.0	-35.0
Comprehensive curriculum	35.0	65.0	-30.0

Satisfaction toward Islamic Education

This analytical study evaluates the respondent's level of satisfaction with Islamic education, covering various learning activities within it. The following are the survey results regarding respondents' satisfaction with Islamic education.

Table 4. Results of Respondent Satisfaction Towards Islamic Education.

Aspect	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very dissatisfied (%)
Curriculum	30.0	25.0	20.0	15.0	10.0
Facilities and infrastructure	20.0	25.0	30.0	15.0	10.0
Teaching quality	35.0	25.0	20.0	15.0	5.0

A total of 55% of respondents expressed satisfaction with Islamic education, particularly regarding the balanced curriculum between religious studies and general knowledge. Previous research by Afif and Herman supports these findings, indicating that a teaching approach that addresses the individual needs of students can increase parental satisfaction with Islamic education. This approach includes developing a curriculum that considers both the academic and spiritual needs of students as well as providing adequate supporting facilities (Afif, 2016; Herman et al., 2023)

However, 45% of respondents were dissatisfied with the facilities and infrastructure in Islamic educational institutions. Research by Asmiati et al. (2022) indicates that limited facilities and funding are the main challenges in improving the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia. To address this issue, Islamic educational institutions need to invest in the modernization of facilities and technology, as well as build partnerships with the private sector and donor organizations (Asmiati et al., 2022).

Analysis of Religious Figures’ Influence on Islamic Education Interest

This study analyzes the influence of religious figures on public interest in choosing Islamic education. The analysis aims

to determine to what extent religious figures still affect this interest. The results of the linear regression analysis, based on the collected data, are presented in the following table:

Table 5. Results of Linear Regression Analysis.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Average pf Squares (MS)	F calculated	Sig. (p-value)
Between groups	1054.32	3	351.44	8.25	0.001
Within groups	16422.89	396	41.43	Nan	Nan
Total	17477.21	399	Nan	Nan	Nan

Results of linear regression analysis indicated the existence of a significant positive relation between the influence of religious figures and public interest in Islamic education. This result is in line with Sahrian's (2022) study, which revealed that public perception towards religious figures is influenced by their interest in Islamic education. This regression coefficient of 0.65 indicates that an increase in trust in religious figures might lead to increasing public interest in choosing Islamic education (Table VI).

The result of the ANOVA Test indicates the influence of religious figures towards Islamic education interest is very significant, with F-value =8.25 and P-value =0.00. The study by M. Rasyid et al. (2024) also emphasizes that well-known religious figures have the potential to increase public interest and participation in Islamic education. This finding underscores the important role of religious figures in contributing to public interest towards Islamic education and highlights the significant involvement of these figures in educational institutions.

Religious Figures Embodiment

Besides analyzing the linear regression results, which show a significant influence, this study also evaluates respondents' views on the embodiment of religious figures in shaping interest in Islamic education. The role of religious figures is assessed based on their lifestyle, credibility, and positive image, which play a role in influencing the public's decision to choose Islamic education. The analysis results are presented in the following table:

Table 6. Results of Religious Figures Embodiment.

Factor	Percentage (%)
Influence of Religious Figures Lifestyle	70.0
Religious Figure Credibility	65.0
Religious Figures Positive Image	60.0

The research results show that 70% of respondents agree that the lifestyle and character of religious figures play an important role in building public trust in Islamic educational institutions. Cesari's (2013) research supports this finding, stating that religious figures with a good moral reputation are more trusted by the public. (Cesari, 2013). A lifestyle that is consistent with religious values increases positive perceptions of the educational institutions they lead.

In addition, research by Holis et al. (2024) confirmed that the life role models of religious figures could influence children's educational choices and interest in learning in society (Holis et al., 2024). Religious figures who demonstrate commitment to religious values and dedication to education serve as positive role models for students and parents, influencing their decisions to choose Islamic education.

Implication towards Islamic Education Policy

The findings of this research indicate that Islamic education policies in Indonesia need to consider the important role of religious figures in educational institutions. The presence of religious figures with a good reputation and high credibility can increase public trust in Islamic educational institutions. In addition, Islamic education policies must emphasize curriculum modernization, especially in the integration of science and technology, to maintain the relevance of Islamic education to global needs.

In the context of the tension between tradition and modernity, elements that need to be modernized include pedagogical approaches and learning content, especially in science, technology, and digital literacy subjects. This modernization aims to ensure that students have competencies that are relevant to the challenges of the 21st century without eliminating the essence of religious education, namely the formation of moral and spiritual character. For example, interdisciplinary approaches that combine religious knowledge with contemporary science, such as teaching morals through ethical case studies in the use of technology, can be applied. In addition, Islamic history material can be taught using technology-based interactive methods, such as e-learning and virtual simulations, to attract the interest of today's generation of students.

However, essential traditional elements such as learning the Koran, hadith, and fiqh must still be taught in depth to maintain Islamic identity and values. The main focus must remain on strengthening Islamic values while innovation is carried out in aspects that support students' relevance to the

modern world. Modernization in Islamic education must be carried out selectively and gradually so that it does not conflict with the main goal of Islamic education, namely to form people with noble character and global competitiveness.

Research by Hasan (2023) emphasizes that educational policies that are adaptive and responsive to technological developments can improve the overall quality of Islamic education. Future policies need to integrate aspects of technology and science into the curriculum while maintaining basic religious values (Hasan, 2023).

Kundayanti et al. (2024) indicate that infrastructure and technology challenges in Islamic education need to be addressed to improve quality. Islamic education institutions need to invest in developing facilities and technology, as well as building partnerships with the private sector and donor agencies to increase the necessary resources and support (Kundayanti et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This research shows that religious figures have an important role in shaping public interest in Islamic education in Indonesia. Public trust in religious figures involved in Islamic educational institutions significantly influences parents' decisions in choosing schools for their children. Although general education is often considered superior in terms of career preparation, Islamic education still has an important role in forming the moral character and religious values of the younger generation.

In the future, Islamic education policies need to prioritize curriculum modernization that is relevant to the demands of the times without ignoring basic religious values. In addition, continuing to encourage the involvement of religious figures who can strengthen public trust in Islamic educational institutions is an important strategy to increase the attractiveness of Islamic education.

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