

Research Article

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Preventing Brain Rot Through Character Education at SMP Negeri 1 Manyaran

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in preventing brain rot through character education at SMPN 1 Manyaran. Brain rot refers to the decline in critical thinking ability due to excessive consumption of superficial digital content, which impacts students' cognitive function and behavior. This research uses descriptive qualitative method, with interviews, observations, and literature studies as data sources. The results showed that PAI teachers play a significant role in instilling Islamic values, integrating character education in learning, and taking a personal approach in guiding students. This strategy is implemented through habituation of worship, teaching digital ethics, and strengthening self-control and discipline in the use of technology. However, the implementation of character education still faces challenges, such as students' high dependence on social media, lack of parental involvement, and teachers' low digital literacy. As a solution, the school developed a Ramadhan journal program to help students manage their time and reduce excessive digital consumption. This study confirms that collaboration between schools, parents and the government is crucial in improving the effectiveness of Islam-based character education in the digital era.

Keywords: Brain Rot; Digital Literacy; Character Building; Islamic Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era is developing rapidly, where technology is not only experiencing an increase but also exponential growth. This progress brings various changes in human life, including in the world of education and socio-culture. One of the most influential aspects is social media, which is increasingly popular and provides convenience in social interaction, information dissemination, and broad expression of opinions (Netrawati, 2022). However, despite its benefits, social media also poses great challenges for the younger generation, especially in terms of cognitive, social and emotional development. Junior high school students are in a critical phase of development, where their character, mindset and identity are being formed. At this age, they are still vulnerable to external influences, including excessive digital content that lacks educational value. The education system must be able to equip students with critical thinking skills and self-control, so that they can use technology wisely. Without proper direction, excessive use of social media can have a negative impact on students' intellectual and emotional development, so strong character education is needed as a mitigation measure.

One phenomenon that arises from excessive digital consumption is brain rot. This term refers to mental and intellectual decline due to excessive exposure to superficial content, such as short videos that are not cognitively challenging, quick information without in-depth analysis, and superficial social interactions. Brain rot was chosen as the "Word of the Year" by Oxford University Press, signaling that the phenomenon is gaining global attention, especially among the younger generation. This phenomenon is dangerous in education, as it can weaken focus, reduce critical thinking capacity, and inhibit the ability to filter information logically (Özpenç, 2024). Research shows that overexposure to screens and digital technology can impair the brain's executive functions, including working memory, inhibitory control, and attention regulation (Lai & Chang, 2020). This causes students to experience difficulties in resisting distraction, managing study time, and maintaining long-term concentration. In addition, another impact of digital overstimulation is the increased tendency of unproductive multitasking, which makes information processing shallower (Shanmugasundaram & Tamilarasu, 2023).

In addition to cognitive aspects, the brain rot phenomenon is also related to psychological and social disorders. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is one of the factors that encourage individuals to continue consuming social media content endlessly. The fear of being left behind from social trends can lead to increased stress, anxiety, as well as decreased self-esteem, which ultimately has a negative impact on students' mental health (Montag & Markett, 2023). On a broader scale, uncontrolled consumption of digital media can also weaken individuals' analytical power on social issues, amplify disinformation, and reduce social trust in society. Consequently weakening a country's national resilience, making a country more vulnerable to information manipulation. Countries with low cognitive abilities are more prone to national resilience degradation (Angelone & Ang, 2023).

Junior high school students are arguably still in an unstable psychological condition, not yet able to fully control themselves. Without realizing it, they will spend their free time consuming social media content, which can lead to the spread of students' personal information. It even has the potential to also affect the psychological and cognitive of the students themselves which has a negative impact if no preventive measures are taken. Preventive measures can be taken with proper character education to students, with the hope of being able to direct students in social media. Talking about character education, it cannot be separated from Islamic religious education, where character education is very closely involved. The role of teachers, especially Islamic religious education teachers, includes a series of interrelated actions, which are carried out in certain situations. The action aims to support the progress, behavior change, and development of students in accordance with educational goals.

PAI (Islamic Religious Education) teachers can integrate Islamic teaching values in learning to prevent Brain Rot. As applied in SMPN 1 Manyaran, PAI teachers can teach the concept of Islamic teachings such as amanah (responsibility) in the use of social media, self-control (mujahadah an-nafs), and the importance of tabayyun (information verification) before spreading the news. A PAI teacher must be able to immerse and enter into the world of students, so as not to appear to lack understanding of technology. The teacher's ability to adapt in utilizing digital platforms as a medium for learning religious values is a major factor in achieving successful character building in the digital era. So that religious values remain relevant in shaping student character in this digital era

This research was conducted at SMPN 1 Manyaran by considering several factors. First, junior high school students are at a critical phase of development, where their character and mindset are being formed. Second, SMPN 1 Manyaran is one of the favorite junior high schools in this area, which makes it representative to analyze the implementation of character education in the digital era to prevent Brain Rot. Although there have been many studies that discuss character education in the digital era, there are still minimal studies that specifically highlight the role of PAI teachers in dealing with the brain rot phenomenon at the junior high school level. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap of previous research by providing an in-depth analysis of Islamic religion-based character education strategies in preventing the negative impact of excessive digital consumption. Thus, the results of this study are expected to make theoretical and practical contributions to the world of education, especially in developing policies and learning methods that are more adaptive to the challenges of the digital era.

This study aims to answer several questions related to the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in preventing the brain rot phenomenon through character education in the digital era at SMPN 1 Manyaran. The main question that becomes the focus of this research is how the role of PAI teachers in integrating religious character values to prevent the negative impact of excessive consumption of superficial social media content. In addition, this study will also examine the challenges faced by PAI teachers in implementing character education as an effort to prevent brain rot among students in the current digital era. By answering this question, this study is expected to provide greater insight into the role of PAI teachers in shaping a generation that is wiser in using technology, as well as providing more relevant educational policy recommendations in dealing with the negative impact of digital media in the school environment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to examine the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in preventing brain rot through character education in the digital era. Data were obtained through interviews with a PAI teacher and a Guidance and Counseling teacher at SMPN 1 Manyaran, Wonogiri, as well as direct observations of technology use in the learning process. SMPN 1 Manyaran was chosen because it is a well-regarded school and represents the characteristics of junior high school students, who are in a critical stage of developing character, mindset, and identity. Data analysis was conducted deductively by

comparing field findings with relevant theories. In addition to primary data, this study was supported by literature reviews from journals, e-books, and online media discussing character education and the role of PAI teachers in the digital context. This combination of methods allowed the researcher to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was used by comparing and confirming findings from various credible sources, such as previous research articles and other academic documents. Through this approach, the study is expected to contribute new insights into strategies for preventing brain rot through character education among junior high school students in the digital era.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Preventing Brain Rot through Character Education

This study reveals that the role of PAI teachers in preventing brain rot at SMPN 1 Manyaran is carried out through three main approaches, namely the cultivation of Islamic values in everyday life, the integration of character education in learning, and a personal approach in guiding students. This strategy aims to shape students' mindset to be more critical, responsible, and have self-control in using digital media.

3.1.1 Cultivating Islamic Values in Daily Life

The emphasis on Islamic values at SMPN 1 Manyaran is done through religious activities such as dhuha prayer, dzuhur prayer in congregation, and reading the Qur'an before the lesson begins. These activities aim to form students' spiritual awareness, instill discipline, and encourage them to be more responsible in managing time and digital activities. This is in line with Suciati's research (2018) which states that strong character building begins with the internalization of religious and moral values from an early age. A similar approach is also applied at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura, where the implementation of behaviorism theory has proven effective in instilling positive student behavior. Routine activities such as Duha prayers, recitation of Juz 30, hadith memorization, congregational prayers, BTA (Basic Theological Attitude) coaching, and motivational support become the main stimulus in shaping students' positive behavior (Hafidz et al., 2023, p. 231). In addition, teachers in these schools also provide examples of positive behavior to students, such as discipline in worship and consistent application of rules. Students' responses to this approach generally show positive changes, which proves that behaviorism theory is not only a theoretical concept but can also be practically applied in a school setting.

In the Qur'an it is also mentioned in Surah Al-Maidah verse 87, that:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُحَرِّمُوا طَيِّبَاتٍ مَا أَحَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْنَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُ الْمُعْنَدِينَ

"O you who believe! Do not forbid that which is good which Allah has made lawful for you, and do not exceed the limits. Verily, Allah dislikes those who transgress limits." (QS. Al-Maidah: 87)

This verse teaches the importance of balance in life, including in the use of social media and digital technology. Islam does not prohibit its followers from utilizing technology, but reminds them not to overdo it to the extent that it can harm themselves and others. In this context, excessive use of social media that causes brain rot can be categorized as an unbalanced attitude and can have a negative impact on students' cognitive and spiritual development. PAI teachers at SMPN 1 Manyaran try to instill these values in students' lives, by teaching the importance of self-control (Mujahadah an-nafs) and awareness to choose useful content. Through the habituation of worship and discussions related to digital ethics based on Islamic teachings, it is hoped that students will be able to use technology more responsibly and not get caught up in patterns of content consumption that damage their thinking.

3.1.2 Integration of Character Education in Learning

PAI learning places great importance on character education, moral improvement and faith. Teachers do not only focus on improving spiritual material, but also on moral formation, self-control, and ethics in social interaction, including in the digital world. For example, teachers provide examples of how Islam teaches the importance of trustworthiness in communicating on social media and teaches digital ethics based on Islamic values. Planting character values to students is

done in order to be able to direct students to the right path, instead of limiting students to walk. Technology comes to facilitate human life, therefore it is not appropriate for us to reject the ease of technology. Therefore, it is necessary for the role of PAI teachers in directing children to the right path, guiding them in the era of digitalization at this time.

Some of the values emphasized at SMPN 1 Manyaran include trustworthiness, patience and self-control, and being wise in accessing information. Students are taught to be responsible in the use of technology and not to misuse technology for something negative, such as spreading hoax news or harmful content. In Islam, self-control is part of noble character, as well as digital ethics and the practical and sustainable application of character values (Umam, 2019). Self-control, especially for students, needs to be emphasized to prevent brain rot, there is a sahih hadith that states that "The strong man is not the one who wins in wrestling. Indeed, a strong person is one who can restrain himself when angry" (HR Al-Bukhari number 6114 and Muslim number 2609). Some students especially junior high school students are still in the stage of self-discovery, so they are more vulnerable to their emotions, emotional control needs to be taught so that students will not be negatively affected.

Wise in social media needs to be taught to students as well, tabayyun or verification of information before believing and disseminating it, as mentioned in QS. This character-based learning is in line with Predi Ari Repi's research (2024) which shows that the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum allows PAI teachers to become facilitators in shaping student character in the digital era. However, this study found that the integration of character education in learning is not fully effective without support from parents and school policies that are firmer in regulating the use of devices in the educational environment. Research by (Lakilaki et, al 2025) shows that excessive digital exposure has an impact on decreasing students' attentional control, making it more difficult for them to filter relevant information and tend to consume superficial content. Therefore, Islamic-based character education is integrated with digital literacy, so that students are able to choose useful content, avoid hoax news and maintain communication ethics on social media (Repi, 2024)

3.1.3 Personal and Exemplary Approach in Guiding Students

In addition to classroom learning, PAI teachers at SMPN 1 Manyaran also take a personal approach by guiding students directly. This strategy is implemented through religious dialog, personal consultation, and supervision in the use of social media. According to Wulandari (2023), a personal approach is very effective in shaping student character because it allows for a stronger emotional bond between teachers and students. In interviews, PAI teachers mentioned that students tend to be more comfortable discussing with PAI teachers than with counseling teachers in terms of moral and spiritual issues (Ridwan, 2023). This shows that the role of PAI teachers is more than just educating, but also modeling and guiding students' lives. This closeness allows teachers to be more effective in instilling the values of self-control and forming a critical mindset in facing the challenges of the digital era.

In addition, PAI teachers also apply the exemplary approach as one of the main methods in fostering student behavior. The exemplary approach, as explained by Hafidz et al. (2022), is one of the approaches applied by the Prophet Muhammad in the success of his da'wah. Therefore, if a teacher bases his educational method on the exemplary approach, he must provide concrete examples to students by emulating the morals of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Examples of this exemplary approach include adherence to worship such as praying Dzuhur in congregation, dressing according to the rules, and discipline in attending religious studies (Hafidz et al., 2022, p. 102). Through this approach, students can imitate the behavior of teachers who are important figures in their moral development (Hafidz, 2022). With a combination of personal approach and exemplary behavior, PAI teachers at SMPN 1 Manyaran not only guide students intellectually, but also inspire them to apply Islamic values in their daily lives. This creates a strong foundation for students in dealing with the negative impact of excessive digital consumption.

3.2 Challenges in Implementing Character Education to Prevent Brain Rot

3.2.1 Students' Dependence on Social Media

One of the main challenges in implementing character education at SMPN 1 Manyaran is students' high dependence on social media. Based on interviews with counseling teachers, many students are addicted to digital platforms, which has a negative impact on their critical thinking skills, concentration, and discipline in learning. This habit makes students more easily distracted and less able to manage time effectively, making character education that aims to form positive habits

difficult to implement. Research by Angelone & Ang (2023) shows that excessive digital media consumption leads to apathy towards social issues, social isolation, and decreased direct interaction with family. Therefore, collaboration between PAI teachers and parents is needed in overcoming the impact of brain rot (Al Husaini, 2025).

3.2.2 Lack of Parental Involvement

In addition, the lack of awareness and involvement of parents in controlling their children's use of social media is also a factor that exacerbates the brain rot phenomenon. PAI teachers and counseling teachers highlighted that most parents tend to allow their children to access social media without clear boundaries, without providing adequate guidance on how to use technology healthily. In fact, the role of parents is crucial in shaping good digital habits for their children, both by providing direct supervision and by instilling disciplinary values in the use of technology in the family environment. This is in line with Muhammad Thalib's view, which states that education is basically the responsibility of parents, namely fathers and mothers as central figures in education. Fathers and mothers have the responsibility to help humanize, civilize, and instill values in their children. This guidance does not end until children reach adulthood, which is when they are expected to become perfect or full human beings. Therefore, parents cannot and should not leave the matter of children's education to formal educational institutions alone. It is precisely family education that is most responsible for the development of children in facing their future (Hafidz, 2019, p. 180). Thus, the lack of parental involvement in guiding their children regarding the use of social media can have a negative impact on children's character development. Schools need to establish closer communication with parents so that they are more proactive in supervising their children's use of devices at home.

3.2.3 Teachers' Lack of Digital Literacy

Another challenge is the lack of understanding of digital learning methods among some teachers. Some teachers feel left behind in technological development compared to students, who are more familiar with various digital platforms. This results in a lack of effectiveness in delivering technology-based learning materials that should support character education in the digital era. To overcome this obstacle, training and improving digital literacy for teachers is needed so that they are better able to integrate technology in learning and guide students in using social media wisely and responsibly. Teachers in the digital era must have high adaptability to be able to integrate technology in education effectively. Therefore, digital literacy training for teachers is one of the important steps that needs to be taken, so that they can be better prepared to guide students to face the challenges of the digital era (Setiani, 2022). In addition, showed that the use of technology such as Microsoft PowerPoint can increase the effectiveness of PAI learning. However, inhibiting factors such as hardware malfunction and the lack of IT skills of some teachers often become obstacles in the utilization of such technology. Therefore, in addition to digital literacy training, schools also need to ensure the availability of adequate technological facilities and infrastructure to support the implementation of digital-based learning. Thus, PAI teachers can be more optimal in delivering character values through interesting and interactive digital media (Hafidz 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the vital role of PAI teachers in preventing brain rot by instilling Islamic values, integrating character education into lessons, and guiding students personally. At SMPN 1 Manyaran, teachers act as both educators and moral mentors, shaping students' mindsets and behaviors to meet the challenges of the digital era. Islamic values are fostered through activities like dhuha prayers, Qur'an reading, and teaching concepts such as responsibility, patience, and information verification. These efforts aim to encourage wiser use of social media. However, challenges arise from students' social media dependency and limited parental supervision, which negatively affect critical thinking and learning habits. Another obstacle is the low level of digital literacy among teachers, reducing the effectiveness of technology-based character education. To address this, SMPN 1 Manyaran has introduced programs like the Ramadan journal to help students manage their time and limit excessive digital use. Strengthening cooperation among schools, parents, and government institutions is crucial for maximizing the impact of Islamic character education. Although this study offers meaningful insights, its findings are limited by the focus on a single school. Future research should involve a broader range of schools and explore more effective digital approaches to character education, ensuring that future generations are not only intellectually capable but also morally strong in the digital age.

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