

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN FOSTERING STUDENTS' INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AT SMPN 2 BALONG

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Abstract :

Islamic Religious Education requires learning practices that develop students' willingness to learn from within rather than relying primarily on external pressure, particularly amid increasing digital distractions and diverse student learning conditions. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in developing students' intrinsic motivation, examine the implications of that role for students' motivation, and identify the challenges encountered at SMPN 2 Balong Ponorogo. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, with data obtained through observations, in depth interviews, and documentation involving the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while credibility was established through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that teachers function as planners, facilitators, motivators, and evaluators who create learning experiences that support student participation and personal engagement. These roles were associated with stronger learning autonomy, confidence in completing learning tasks, positive teacher student and peer relationships, and greater interest in Islamic Religious Education. The principal challenges involved low confidence, uneven Qur'anic reading ability, digital distraction, fluctuating learning interest, and inconsistent parental supervision. The findings position teacher support as a central mechanism for developing sustainable intrinsic motivation in Islamic Religious Education

Keywords : *Islamic Religious Education; Teacher Role; Intrinsic Motivation; Student Autonomy; SMPN 2 Balong*

Abstrak :

Pendidikan Agama Islam memerlukan proses pembelajaran yang tidak hanya menyampaikan pengetahuan keagamaan, tetapi juga menumbuhkan kemauan belajar yang berasal dari dalam diri siswa, terutama di tengah meningkatnya distraksi digital dan keragaman kondisi belajar siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam menumbuhkan motivasi intrinsik siswa, mengkaji implikasi peran tersebut terhadap motivasi siswa, serta mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi guru di SMPN 2 Balong Ponorogo. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan data yang diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru Pendidikan Agama Islam, dan siswa. Data dianalisis melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sedangkan keabsahan data diperiksa melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru berperan sebagai perancang, penggerak, motivator, dan evaluator yang menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang mendukung keterlibatan siswa. Peran tersebut berkaitan

dengan meningkatnya kemandirian belajar, kepercayaan diri, hubungan positif, serta minat terhadap pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. Tantangan utama meliputi rendahnya kepercayaan diri, kemampuan membaca Al-Qur'an yang beragam, distraksi digital, fluktuasi minat belajar, dan pengawasan orang tua yang belum konsisten. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa dukungan guru merupakan mekanisme penting dalam menumbuhkan motivasi intrinsik yang berkelanjutan dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam; Peran Guru; Motivasi Intrinsik; Kemandirian Siswa; SMPN 2 Balong

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) occupies a distinctive position because its educational objectives extend beyond cognitive mastery toward the formation of attitudes, religious awareness, and responsible conduct. Within this orientation, students' motivation is not merely a condition for academic participation but also a foundation for internalizing religious values through conscious learning. This concern becomes increasingly relevant as adolescents encounter competing sources of attention through digital media, social interaction, and entertainment. Recent research on Muslim university students likewise indicates that religious character requires systematic educational support rather than relying solely on students' acquisition of religious knowledge (Rukiyati et al., 2025). Studies of Islamic character education in higher education similarly emphasize the need to connect religious knowledge with students' ethical and personal development (Dimyathi et al., 2025).

Intrinsic motivation is particularly important because it reflects students' willingness to engage in learning based on interest, personal value, and satisfaction rather than dependence on external rewards or pressure. In IRE, this orientation is especially meaningful because learning is expected to influence students' attitudes and daily practices. Recent evidence shows that teacher support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can strengthen students' motivational engagement, while systematic reviews of self-determination based educational interventions demonstrate positive effects on intrinsic motivation and students' psychological needs (Wang et al., 2024; Meulenbroeks et al., 2024). Consequently, the teacher's role should be understood not only as transmitting religious knowledge but also as designing learning experiences that allow students to participate, experience competence, develop meaningful relationships, and recognize personal value in learning.

Previous research on IRE has established several pathways through which teachers influence students' motivation. Sholeh et al. (2024), for example, identified teaching strategies, teacher support, and contextual factors as

important components in increasing students' motivation in IRE. Qualitative research by Japeri et al. (2023) similarly found that teacher appreciation and students' sense of responsibility contributed to intrinsic motivation, while religious activities and Qur'anic learning could provide supporting conditions. More recent studies show that interactive learning, relevant media, personal approaches, and recognition of students' efforts can strengthen learning interest, although time and resource limitations remain challenges (Kurniyadi & Fatimah, 2025). These studies therefore establish that teacher practices matter, but they tend to examine learning motivation broadly rather than tracing how different teacher roles contribute specifically to the development of intrinsic motivation.

A second body of research emphasizes the relationship between IRE teachers and religious character formation. Lubis and Murniyetti (2023) found that religious character can be developed through teacher modeling, habituation, and advice, while Harahap et al. (2025) identified exemplary behavior, guidance, habituation, discipline, and motivation as interconnected teacher roles in religious activities. Research on IRE implementation at junior secondary schools likewise shows that religious character formation depends on the integration of learning, religious activities, and supporting environmental conditions (Arrosyid' & Nursikin, 2024). These findings strengthen the argument that teachers influence students beyond classroom knowledge. Nevertheless, they primarily address religious character or general learning motivation and provide limited explanation of the psychological processes through which teacher practices foster students' internally regulated willingness to learn.

The gap becomes clearer when considering the specific dimensions of intrinsic motivation. Self determination research emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as central psychological needs supporting autonomous motivation, while recent evidence indicates that autonomy supportive environments can help prevent declines in intrinsic motivation among secondary students (Engler & Westphal, 2024). However, existing IRE studies rarely integrate these dimensions with the concrete roles performed by PAI teachers in a particular junior secondary school. This study therefore positions the teacher simultaneously as planner, facilitator, motivator, and evaluator and examines how these interconnected roles are reflected in students' autonomy, competence, relatedness, and interest. The study also

considers internal and external challenges, including Qur'anic literacy, digital distraction, family support, and students' heterogeneous learning conditions.

Against this background, the present study focuses on SMPN 2 Balong Ponorogo to provide a contextually grounded account of how PAI teachers cultivate intrinsic motivation through classroom interaction, learning design, personal support, religious habituation, and evaluation. Its novelty lies in connecting the practical roles of PAI teachers with the four dimensions of intrinsic motivation identified in the research framework while simultaneously examining the constraints that may weaken the internalization of learning motivation. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the role of PAI teachers in developing students' intrinsic motivation, examine the implications of those roles for students' autonomy, competence, relatedness, and interest, and identify the internal and external challenges encountered in the process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in depth understanding of how Islamic Religious Education teachers develop students' intrinsic motivation in a natural school setting. The research was conducted at SMPN 2 Balong Ponorogo. The temporal scope covered the implementation of IRE learning and related student activities documented during the field study the source manuscript does not specify exact fieldwork dates, so no unsupported dates are added. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study examined teacher practices, student experiences, interpersonal relationships, and contextual challenges that require interpretation within their natural setting (Khairiyah et al., 2026).

The participants comprised the school principal, IRE teachers, and students selected according to their direct involvement and relevance to the research focus. Data were obtained through classroom and activity observations, in depth interviews, and documentation. Observation focused on student participation, willingness to ask and answer questions, learning independence, teacher student interaction, peer interaction, and religious habituation. Interviews explored teacher roles, students' motivational experiences, perceived changes, and obstacles. Documents were used as supporting evidence for instructional and school activities. The use of multiple sources and techniques strengthened contextual understanding and reduced dependence on a single form of evidence (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024).

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative model through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data were organized into four analytical categories of teacher role planner, facilitator, motivator, and evaluator and four dimensions of intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, relatedness, and interest or enjoyment. Challenges were categorized as internal and external. Data credibility was established through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information from the principal, teachers, and students and by cross checking interviews, observations, and documents. Such triangulation is consistent with contemporary qualitative case study practices in educational research (Khairiyah et al., 2026).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Roles as an Integrated Motivation-Support System

The findings show that PAI teachers perform four interconnected roles: planner, facilitator, motivator, and evaluator. As planners, teachers first identify students' abilities and learning conditions before selecting learning activities and religious habituation appropriate to their needs. As facilitators, they use questions related to students' experiences, interactive activities, group work, and problem-based situations to increase participation. As motivators, teachers recognize students' effort, courage, and progress rather than focusing exclusively on final achievement. As evaluators, they use assessment to identify difficulties and encourage students to improve rather than treating assessment merely as a grading mechanism. This integrated role configuration indicates that teacher support operates as a learning environment rather than as isolated motivational interventions. The pattern is consistent with Sholeh et al. (2024), who found that teacher strategies and contextual support are important in strengthening IRE learning motivation, while Kurniyadi and Fatimah (2025) similarly identified interactive learning, relevant media, personal approaches, and appreciation as motivational strategies.

From the perspective of Self Determination Theory, the four roles provide conditions for satisfying students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The planning role supports competence because teachers adapt activities to students' abilities; the facilitation role creates opportunities for autonomy through participation and expression; the motivational role strengthens students' perception that their efforts are valued and the evaluative role provides feedback for continued improvement. Recent meta analytic

evidence confirms that educational interventions based on Self Determination Theory can strengthen intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence, although effects on relatedness are less consistent (Wang et al., 2024). The present findings extend this perspective by showing how the three psychological needs can be operationalized through a recognizable sequence of teacher responsibilities in IRE rather than through a single classroom technique.

An important qualification is that autonomy in this setting does not mean the absence of teacher direction. Students remain within curricular and behavioral boundaries, while teachers provide structured choices, opportunities to respond, and space to attempt tasks independently. This finding is important because it demonstrates that autonomy-supportive PAI teaching can coexist with religious guidance and classroom structure. It also corresponds with research showing that autonomy-supportive teaching can protect students' intrinsic motivation during secondary education (Engler & Westphal, 2024). The specific contribution of this study is therefore the identification of an integrated teacher support model in which structure and autonomy are not treated as opposites but as complementary conditions for developing intrinsic motivation in PAI learning.

Changes in Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness, and Interest

The implications of the teachers' roles are visible first in students' autonomy. Students increasingly reported and demonstrated willingness to study PAI, complete assignments, and engage in religious activities without waiting for continuous instructions from teachers or parents. This shift is important because intrinsic motivation involves participation that is experienced as personally meaningful rather than merely compelled. The finding is consistent with the broader evidence that autonomy supportive educational environments strengthen students' self directed engagement (Wang et al., 2024; Engler & Westphal, 2024). Unlike studies that measure motivation primarily through questionnaire scores, however, this research identifies autonomy through observable practices such as independent task completion, voluntary learning, and greater willingness to engage in religious activities. This provides a contextual extension of Self-Determination Theory within PAI learning.

The second implication concerns competence. Students became more willing to answer questions, present ideas, read the Qur'an, and confront difficult learning materials instead of immediately avoiding tasks. Teachers'

willingness to let students try, make mistakes, receive feedback, and improve their performance appears to have created repeated experiences of mastery. This finding reinforces the argument that intrinsic motivation develops when students perceive themselves as capable of successfully managing meaningful challenges. Meulenbroeks et al. (2024) similarly found that learning designs that actively involve students can foster intrinsic motivation, while Wang et al. (2024) identified competence as one of the psychological needs most consistently supported by Self Determination Theory interventions. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that competence in PAI includes not only academic understanding but also confidence in performing religiously relevant tasks, particularly Qur'anic reading and public expression.

Relatedness emerged through more comfortable teacher student communication and stronger peer cooperation. Students who had previously hesitated to ask questions became more willing to communicate with teachers, while group activities created opportunities for students to assist one another. This finding confirms the importance of supportive interpersonal relationships in sustaining motivation. Sholeh et al. (2024) emphasize the teacher's interpersonal and pedagogical role in increasing learning motivation, while Zhang and Kim (2024) found that teacher support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness was positively associated with students' motivational beliefs and engagement in university classrooms. The distinctive contribution of the present study is that relatedness is shown not as an additional social outcome but as part of the motivational mechanism through which students become more willing to participate in PAI learning.

Interest and enjoyment were reflected in students' increasing willingness to engage with PAI beyond formal classroom requirements. Some students showed curiosity about religious materials and expressed greater interest in learning activities when teachers used concrete examples, discussion, reflection, and activities connected to everyday life. This finding supports Meulenbroeks et al. (2024), who demonstrate that meaningful and active learning experiences can foster intrinsic motivation, and it complements research showing that students' intrinsic motivation in Islamic education can emerge from personal interest, responsibility, and meaningful engagement (Japeri et al., 2023). Taken together, the four dimensions indicate that teacher influence is not limited to increasing participation it can gradually transform students' reasons for participating. The contribution of this study is therefore a four dimensional

account of intrinsic motivation in PAI, showing how autonomy, competence, relatedness, and interest become interconnected through everyday teacher-student interactions.

Internal and External Constraints on Intrinsic Motivation

The development of intrinsic motivation remains constrained by differences in students' confidence, learning interest, ability to manage difficult tasks, and Qur'anic reading competence. Students who perceive themselves as less capable tend to hesitate when asked to read the Qur'an, answer questions, or present their ideas publicly. These conditions suggest that low motivation cannot simply be interpreted as unwillingness; it may reflect an unmet need for competence and an accumulation of previous learning difficulties. The teacher therefore needs to differentiate support according to student readiness rather than apply a uniform motivational strategy. This finding complements research on PAI learning motivation showing that students' responsibility, teacher appreciation, and religious guidance can function as motivational supports while differences in learning conditions remain influential (Japeri et al., 2023).

Another challenge concerns students who remain dependent on external motives such as grades, instructions, rewards, or parental demands. This condition illustrates that the development of intrinsic motivation is a gradual process rather than an immediate transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Self Determination Theory explains that students can move toward more autonomous forms of motivation when they experience meaningful choice, competence, and social support. Recent evidence supports the importance of autonomy supportive environments in maintaining intrinsic motivation during secondary education (Engler & Westphal, 2024). The implication for PAI teachers is that rewards and directives should not necessarily be eliminated but should gradually be accompanied by explanation, reflection, choice, and opportunities for students to recognize the personal meaning of learning.

Digital distraction constitutes an additional external challenge. Gadgets and social media provide potentially useful learning resources, but unstructured use can compete with students' attention and reduce engagement with classroom activities. The appropriate response is therefore not simply to prohibit technology but to regulate its pedagogical use and connect digital resources with clearly defined learning purposes. This argument is consistent with recent research showing that contemporary IRE must respond to students'

changing digital environments while preserving the development of religious and ethical character (Dimyathi et al., 2025). The finding extends previous work by positioning digital distraction not merely as a behavioral problem but as a motivational context problem requiring teachers to redesign how attention, relevance, and student participation are managed.

Family support also influences the sustainability of students' motivation beyond school. Differences in parental supervision mean that some students receive reinforcement for learning habits at home whereas others must regulate their activities independently. Harahap et al. (2025) similarly identified family environment and parental supervision among the external challenges in religious character formation. The present study therefore indicates that teacher efforts cannot be considered independently from students' wider learning ecology. Nevertheless, the school remains a strategic space for strengthening internal motivation because teachers can provide consistent support, positive relationships, meaningful learning experiences, and opportunities for students to experience competence. The specific contribution of this finding is the identification of context sensitive motivational support as a necessary complement to teacher competence: intrinsic motivation develops more sustainably when pedagogical support is adjusted to students' psychological, digital, family, and learning conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that PAI teachers develop students' intrinsic motivation through four interconnected roles: planning learning according to students' needs, facilitating active participation, motivating students through recognition and personal support, and using evaluation to guide improvement. These roles contribute to students' growing autonomy, competence, relatedness, and interest, indicating that intrinsic motivation in PAI develops through repeated learning experiences rather than through rewards or instruction alone. Theoretically, the findings extend Self Determination Theory into the context of Islamic Religious Education by showing how autonomy, competence, and relatedness can be operationalized through concrete teacher responsibilities while remaining compatible with structured religious guidance. Practically, PAI teachers should combine differentiated learning, supportive interaction, meaningful feedback, reflective activities, and purposeful technology use, while schools should strengthen communication with families. The study is limited by its qualitative focus on a single school, which restricts

transferability to other educational settings. Future research should employ longitudinal or comparative designs across schools to examine whether changes in intrinsic motivation are sustained over time.

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