



## Zoning System and Religious Character of 10th-Grade Students (Phenomenological Study in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran implements the zoning system and the New Student Admission System (SPMB) with various challenges and the role of Islamic education in responding to the existing issues. The method used in this study was a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation with the subjects of the study, including 10th-grade students as the main respondents, an Islamic Religious Education teacher, and the SPMB committee as reinforcement. Data analysis was conducted by data collection, data analysis, reduction, and presentation based on Miles and Huberman's theory. In its implementation, the zoning system runs optimally following the technical instructions from the Education Office of Central Java, although facing several insignificant constraints. Based on the students' real experiences, the existing diversity becomes an encouragement of the social adaptation process and strengthens a tolerant attitude and religious discipline. Islamic Religious Education learning that is adaptive, humanistic, inclusive, and emphasizes religious character values, such as love for the environment, tolerance, friendship, anti-bullying, love of peace, strong determination, and social concern can be developed sustainably.



### Introduction

The rapid development of technology in the disruption era 4.0 has positioned education not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a role to foster and instill character values, particularly religious character as the main foundation of students' personalities (Hambali & Mu'alimin, 2020).

However, education in Indonesia has never been separated from Government policy, including ensuring access to proper and quality education. In 1994, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, implemented a controversial policy, known as *Sekolah Unggulan* Program (Superior School Program). This policy caused social inequality, where there was only a small number of high-achieving students who obtained access to proper and good-quality education (Damayanti & Niswatin, 2023).

In 2017, Muhamdijir Effendy implemented a new policy known as the zoning system (Ramadhani, 2025). This policy is strengthened by the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture of 2018 concerning the New Student Admission (Mendikbud, 2018).

On the other hand, this policy results in new problems, including the emergence of diversity (heterogeneity) among students, either from social, cultural, or economic backgrounds (Madjid, 2023). This condition requires education not only to focus on cognitive aspects but also to focus on character development, especially religious character. The development of religious character for students is really important to prevent the destruction of a nation due to the moral decline in its society (Lickona, 2022).

Specifically, 10th-grade students in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran are from various backgrounds as a result of the zoning system policy in the new student admission. The quota distribution is that 33% are from the zoning system, 32% from affirmation, 30% from achievement, and 5% from parental job transfer/mutation (Admin, 2025). This heterogeneity (diversity) creates challenges in the education process, especially in developing religious character, which is one of the crucial aspects in forming students' personalities. In this case, Islamic Religious Education has a strategic role in fostering students' religious character oriented towards the formation of noble morals reflected in students' attitudes and behavior (Puspitasari & Yusuf, 2022, pp. 57-68).

Some previous studies, as conducted by Yusmarlina (2021), demonstrated the school's efforts in fostering students' character through instilling values, teacher role modeling, and habituation in various activities. Meanwhile, Hanafi & Endarti (2024) focus on the implementation aspect of the zoning system in PPDB. Another study by Amalia & Yani (2021) indicates challenges in fostering the character of heterogeneous students due to the zoning system. However, these studies still focus on Junior High School level and have not specifically studied students' religious character through a phenomenological approach at the Senior High School (SMA) level. According to the problem above, the researcher decided to conduct a study on how the zoning system is implemented, challenges faced, school strategies, and students' real experiences in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran.

### Theoretical Review

This study is based on three main theories, namely the zoning system theory, the religious character theory, and the phenomenological theory. According to Niken in Sari, the Zoning System for new student admissions is a set of rules governing the admission of students at various levels, such as kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, high school, and vocational high school, based on the zone or area of residence. This is a measure taken by the government to ensure that all students have equal access to educational resources and services. This rule is officially stipulated in Permendikbud Number 44 of 2019 (Niken et al. in Sari & Dewi, 2023).

The Religious Character Theory referred to in this study is a character based on Islamic teachings. Quoting from the *Education Model Guide: Strengthening Character Education Through Habitual Activities in Course and Training Institutions* by Rasim et al. (2019), which states that the sub-values of religious character include love of peace, tolerance, steadfastness, self-confidence, anti-bullying, friendship, protecting the weak, and love for the environment.

Arianto and Handayani stated that phenomenology is a way to deeply understand individual and group experiences, particularly those related to how they feel and give meaning to phenomena that occur, more precisely about the zoning system and its relationship with students' religious character. Thus, it is hoped that this can provide a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' perceptions (Arianto & Handayani, 2024).

## Method

This study was a field study using a phenomenological qualitative approach, a study conducted by combining various data collection techniques (specifically in-depth interviews) to understand the meaning and essence of someone's life experiences, empirically based on the social and humanitarian phenomenon (Ida Zahara Adibah et al., 2025).

Data collection was conducted directly by the researcher, who was the instrument. The researcher served to determine the focus of the study, select an informant as a data source, conduct data collection, assess data quality, analyze data, interpret data, and draw a conclusion (Sugiyono, 2022, p. 221). The researcher used three main techniques for data collection, including observation related to the school activities and geographical conditions. Moreover, an in-depth interview was conducted on 10th-grade students as major informants, followed by an Islamic Religious Education teacher, and the Committees of the New Student Admission System (SPMB) as the reinforcement. Another technique was documentation, which was conducted to obtain data in the form of writings, photos, or images related to the study.

In conducting data analysis, Miles and Huberman, cited in Sugiyono, stated that the data analysis process in a qualitative study was conducted interactively and continuously until completion, until the data reach saturation (Sugiyono, 2022, pp. 367-369). The initial step conducted was data collection, which was conducted using an in-depth interview technique with 10th-grade students as major respondents, Islamic Religious Education Teacher, and SPMB committees as reinforcement. After the data were collected, the data were reduced or summarized, and the core points were selected to facilitate further data collection. In a phenomenological study, data reduction is conducted by analyzing meaningful questions to participants who reflect their subjective experiences (Arianto & Handayani, 2024).

After data reduction, the data were presented. Miles and Huberman stated that the most common and frequently used method for presenting data in a qualitative study is through narrative text (Sugiyono, 2022, pp. 370-373). The next step after data presentation was to draw a conclusion and carry out data verification. In the initial stage, the conclusion was still provisional and could be changed at any time if new findings were made in further data collection.

However, if the conclusion in the initial stage has been supported by valid and consistent evidence, when the researcher returns to the field to collect data, the conclusion becomes a credible conclusion and can be realized into themes (Miles et al., 2014). In the phenomenological study, drawing conclusions and verification is carried out through member checking, which is the process of rechecking the findings written by the researcher with the participants/informants to ensure that what is written by the researcher truly reflects participants' actual experiences and meaning, not the researcher's own writing (La Kahija, 2017).

By applying the four data analysis stages by Miles and Huberman, the researcher aims to explore the core meanings of Islamic Religious Education teachers' experiences, SPMB Committees' experiences, and particularly 10th-grade students' experiences related to the implementation of the zoning system and the formation of students' religious character in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran.

## Result and Discussion

### A. The Implementation of the Zoning System in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran

In 2025, the implementation of the zoning system in PPDB/SPMB in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran was conducted based on the technical instructions from the Education Office of Central Java. All the processes were carried out online and did not provide an offline process, from early June to early July, 2025. The distribution of admission pathways consisted of 33% for the zoning system, 32% for affirmation, 30% for achievement, and 5% for parental transfer. Moreover, a policy was also stipulated regarding the transfer of remaining quotas from the affirmative and parental transfer to the zoning quota. This aims to expand access to education and educational services.

### B. Constraints in the Implementation of the Zoning System

Overall, the implementation of the zoning system in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran ran properly. However, there were several constraints, including a limited number of verifiers, which were not balanced with the number of applicants; therefore, the verification of registration documents was delayed. Moreover, there was a lack of understanding among some of the community regarding the registration procedures and the distribution of admission pathways in SPMB (New Student Admission System). These constraints showed that the implementation of the zoning system requires human resource support and improved public literacy so that, in the future, the system can run optimally.

### C. The Impact of the Zoning System on the Learning Process

According to the results of interviews with the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, who also serves as a member of the SPMB committee, the implementation of the zoning system did not have a significant impact on the learning quality in class (specifically 10th grade) because the composition of students can be considered relatively balanced. However, some students who were from the zoning pathway tend to have relatively low learning motivation compared to those from other pathways. This condition requires the role of a teacher, especially an Islamic Religious Education teacher, to implement adaptive, humanistic, and inclusive learning so that students can be directly and actively involved in accordance with their background conditions and abilities.

### D. The Impact of the Zoning System on the Formation of Students' Religious Character

#### 1. Love Peace and Tolerance

Islamic Religious Education learning in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran emphasizes instilling love of peace and tolerance through various methods, including the dialogue method, group discussion, deliberation, and case study. Through this approach, students are trained to express their opinions politely, accept differences, and not force their will. A diverse (heterogeneous) learning environment, as a result of the zoning system, becomes a means for students to appreciate each other, respect, and maintain a harmonious relationship among students.

#### 2. Strong Determination and Self-Confidence

Strong determination and self-confidence are developed with project and case study-based learning, which provides space for students to think critically and behave in accordance with the values of Islamic teachings. A humanistic and inclusive approach implemented by the Islamic Religious Education teacher makes students feel appreciated, encouraging them to

express opinions and uphold values they believe to be right in their daily lives. This is proven by the results of interviews with 6 students who stated that they will continue to uphold beliefs as long as they are right and open to receiving opinions from other students, as long as they do not deviate from positive values.

### 3. Anti-Bullying, Relationship, and Protecting the Weak

Anti-bullying and relationship values are instilled through moral materials (*akhlaq*), exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and habituation of group work that emphasizes empathy and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). Moreover, the school also has a social care program realized through various activities, including caring donations, assistance for underprivileged students, and social services. These programs require students to care for and protect the weak or marginalized students, as well as develop solidarity among students. This finding is in line with Hendri Marhadi et al.(2024), who stated that the formation of students' character must begin with the formation of students' character and moral values, exemplary moral values, habituation of positive interactions, and instilling the importance of empathy towards others. The results of the interview with students showed that they have a high level of empathy towards friends who are considered vulnerable or marginalized. Moreover, they have a solid bond of friendship.

### 4. Love for the Environment

The character of love for the environment is developed through the integration of Islamic Religious Education materials regarding cleanliness and human responsibilities as the caliph on earth. Students are always involved in various activities, such as community service, maintaining school cleanliness, and the school environmental care movement. Understanding regarding maintaining the environment is part of *iman* (faith), encouraging students to have positive habits and responsibilities to the school environment. According to the results of the interview, students already demonstrate a high level of care towards the environment, especially the school environment. This is proven by the active participation of students in various school activities related to the school environment, such as classroom duty rotations, Friday Clean-Up activities, and so on.

## Discussion

The findings show that the implementation of the zoning system in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran has contributed to equal access to education without causing significant academic inequality. Diversity (heterogeneity) of students resulting from the zoning system opens strategic space in fostering religious character. Through the school religious habituation program and Islamic Religious Education learning that is adaptive, humanistic, inclusive, and emphasizes love of peace, tolerance, strong determination, anti-bullying, friendship, social care, and love for the environment that can be developed sustainably.

Strengthening these values are in accordance with the values of Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of noble morals in society. As emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in a hadith narrated by Abu Darda':

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو كُرَيْبٍ حَدَّثَنَا قَبِيصَةُ بْنُ الْلَّئِثِ الْكُوْفِيُّ عَنْ مُطَرِّبٍ عَنْ عَطَاءَ عَنْ أَمِّ الدَّرْدَاءِ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ مَا مِنْ سَيِّءٍ يُوضَعُ فِي الْمِيزَانِ أَثْقَلَ مِنْ حُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ وَإِنَّ صَاحِبَ حُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ لَيَنْلَعُ بِهِ دَرَجَةً صَاحِبِ الصَّوْمِ وَالصَّلَاةِ

(Tirmidzi - 1926): Abu Kuraib narrated to us, Qabishah bin Al-Laits Al-Kufi narrated to us from Al-Mutharrif from 'Atha' from Ummu Darda' from Abu Darda', who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, say: "Nothing weighs heavier in the scales than good character, Indeed the person with good character will have attained the rank of the person of fasting and prayer...." (Abi Isa Muhammad bin Isa bin Saurah At-Tirmidzi, 2002)

The hadith above emphasizes that the formation of character, which is in Islamic terminology known as *akhlaq*, is really vital and highly valued in Islamic teachings. Therefore, instilling religious character values fostered by school in the form of anti-bullying, friendship, love for the environment, tolerance, and so on, are in accordance with the values of Islamic teachings. Thus, the implementation of the zoning system in SPMB in SMA Negeri 2 Ungaran not only has an impact on administrative aspects of student admission but also contributes to the development of students' religious character when combined with Islamic Religious Education that is humanistic, adaptive, inclusive, and oriented to strengthening social and moral values.

### Conclusion

According to the results of the study and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the zoning system in the New Student Admission System (SPMB) has been carried out in accordance with applicable regulations and is able to realize equal access to education. Although its implementation still faces several technical constraints, such as limited human resources, an insufficient number of document verifiers, and a lack of community understanding regarding the admission mechanism, the implementation of the zoning system does not have a significant impact on the quality of learning at school.

The diversity of students' backgrounds resulting from the implementation of the zoning system becomes a strategic opportunity for the school in instilling religious character values. Islamic Religious Education learning that is adaptive, humanistic, inclusive, and emphasizes religious character values, such as love for the environment, tolerance, friendship, anti-bullying, love of peace, strong determination, and social concern can be developed sustainably. Learning process using dialogue technique, discussion, group work, role modeling, habituation, and direct experience has been proven to create students' religious attitudes in their daily life. Thus, according to respondents' real experience, the implementation of zoning system not only has administrative impact on students admission but also contributes to fostering and shaping students religious character, reflected in tolerance attitude, love of peace, friendship, anti-bullying, love for the environment, and other religious characters that are in line with noble morals, which are then realized into community life according to the values of Islamic teachings.

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