

Unveiling the Dynamics of Islamic Religious Education in Madrasah Aliyah

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the problems of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School). The focus of the study is directed at aspects of the curriculum, teacher competency, students, learning methods, digital media and technology, infrastructure, family and community environment, learning evaluation, and PAI learning development strategies. This research uses a literature study method with a content analysis approach to relevant research articles, theses, and academic studies. The results of the study indicate that the problems of PAI learning in Madrasah Aliyah are multidimensional. These problems arise not only from the content of the curriculum, but also from teacher readiness in implementing the curriculum, low student learning interest, the dominance of lecture methods, limited learning media, weak digital literacy, lack of infrastructure, less than optimal family and community support, and evaluation that still tends to emphasize cognitive aspects. In the context of Madrasah Aliyah, PAI problems must be understood as systemic problems that require collaborative solutions. Possible development strategies include strengthening teacher capacity, contextual learning, integrating technology effectively, improving infrastructure, collaborating with parents and the community, and developing evaluations that encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. This article emphasizes that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah) needs to be directed toward strengthening students' knowledge, practice, morals, and abilities to face the challenges of the times.

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic Senior High Schools) holds a strategic position in fostering students who are faithful, knowledgeable, ethical, and capable of responsible social participation. *Madrasah Aliyah* functions not only as a formal educational institution but also as a space for cultivating Islamic values within adolescent life. Consequently, IRE learning in *Madrasah Aliyah* should not be viewed merely as the delivery of religious content, but rather as a process of shaping students' Islamic character. Kamal and Qomarudin emphasize that Islamic education is inseparable from the endeavor to form the "perfect human being (*insan kamil*)". This assertion indicates that the orientation of IRE in *Madrasah Aliyah* must transcend academic achievements and address the holistic formation of the student's personality.

In reality, IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* continues to face multifaceted challenges. These issues are not limited to students' lack of interest or teachers' reliance on specific pedagogical methods; they also encompass curricula, facilities, environments, policies, and evaluation systems. Kamal and Qomarudin note that the implementation of Islamic education by educational units is invariably accompanied by "various emerging problems". Thus, the challenges of IRE instruction must be analyzed comprehensively, avoiding the reductionist tendency to blame them solely on teachers' shortcomings or students' low motivation.

As a secondary education level, *Madrasah Aliyah* deals with students in late adolescence. During this phase, students develop critical thinking skills, question established values, compare sources of information, and respond to social issues with greater complexity. These conditions demand an IRE learning approach that is not merely normative but also contextual and argumentative. Harahap asserts that the challenges in IRE learning at *madrasahs* arise because students possess "distinctive family backgrounds". This citation is crucial, as *Madrasah Aliyah* students arrive with diverse social, cultural, and familial experiences, necessitating learning approaches that account for these individual differences.

From a curricular perspective, IRE in *madrasahs* features a more distinct structure compared to general schools. The IRE cluster in *madrasahs* includes *Al-Qur'an Hadis*, *Akidah Akhlak* (Islamic Theology and Ethics), *Fikih* (Jurisprudence), and *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam* (Islamic Cultural History). Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi explain that the IRE curriculum in *madrasahs* has a "more complex structure compared to general schools". While this complexity serves as a strength by broadening and deepening the material, it also presents a challenge, as teachers are required to contextualize and integrate religious material with the students' lived realities.

Furthermore, the IRE curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* must confront the demands of social and digital transformations. Contemporary students inhabit environments heavily influenced by social media, popular culture, shifting communication patterns, and vast information access. Abdurrosyid et al. emphasize that the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree (KMA) Number 183 of 2019 was formulated as a response to the intersections of "religion, nationalism, and globalization". Consequently, IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* should prepare students to comprehend religion in a moderate, critical, and responsible manner within the context of modernity. A significant issue in IRE instruction is the gap between the ideal curriculum and pedagogical practice. While the curriculum normatively demands the strengthening of faith, ethics, knowledge, and skills, instruction often remains centered on rote memorization and lectures. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi state that there remains a "gap between the idealities of the curriculum and its implementation". This discrepancy requires analysis, as *Madrasah Aliyah* teachers often operate under the pressures of administrative demands, limited facilities, strict curriculum requirements, and diverse student conditions.

The challenges in IRE instruction are also linked to students' low learning interest, which is closely correlated with student engagement, persistence, and learning outcomes. Arasy, Tsaqila, and Gusmaneli mention that low interest in IRE is characterized by a "lack of active student involvement". In the context of *Madrasah Aliyah*, this low involvement may stem from materials perceived as too theoretical, unvaried teaching methods, or instruction that fails to address the actual issues students experience.

Based on the aforementioned elaboration, this article aims to analyze the challenges of IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* through an argumentative-analytical approach. The discussion focuses on aspects of the curriculum, teachers, students, teaching methods, media and technology, facilities, family and community environments, evaluation, and proposed solutions. Harahap categorizes IRE learning challenges into aspects of "curriculum; teachers;

students; facilities and infrastructure; and the teaching and learning process". This framework serves as an initial foundation, which this article expands upon by incorporating issues regarding the digital era, the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, social environments, and IRE learning evaluation in *Madrasah Aliyah*.

Research Methods

This study employs a library research method with a content analysis approach. The library research method was selected because this article aims to examine the challenges of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* based on relevant scientific sources, rather than through primary field research. Harahap describes the approach utilized in his research as "pure library research" (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). By adopting this approach, this article utilizes research articles, theses, and academic studies as primary sources to understand the complexities of IRE instruction.

The research data consist of concepts, findings, arguments, and recommendations derived from the collected literature. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the theme of IRE learning challenges in *madrasahs*, specifically at the *Madrasah Aliyah* level. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi explain that library research is conducted by "collecting, reviewing, and analyzing data from various literature sources" (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2158). In this article, the sources used encompass studies on IRE challenges in *Madrasah Aliyah*, IRE curriculum analysis, teacher competence, student learning interest, instructional technology, facilities and infrastructure, and the educational environment.

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation. The procedure involved reading the sources, highlighting relevant sections, categorizing data according to the aspects of the problems, and constructing an argumentative synthesis. Harahap explains that data in library research are "collected and sorted" to answer the research questions (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). Based on this principle, the data in this article were categorized into nine aspects: curriculum, teachers, students, teaching methods, media and technology, facilities and infrastructure, family and community environments, evaluation, and strategies for developing IRE instruction.

Data analysis was performed using a content analysis approach. Content analysis was utilized to interpret meanings, patterns, and relationships between ideas within the literature sources. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi state that content analysis is performed by "comparing theories and arguments" from various sources (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2159). Therefore, this article does not merely summarize sources but also interprets the relationships between curriculum problems, teacher competence, student characteristics, and digital challenges within the context of *Madrasah Aliyah*. During the analysis process, this article employs an argumentative-analytical style. This means that the literature sources are not treated as a collection of separate information, but rather as a foundation for building an argument regarding why IRE challenges in *Madrasah Aliyah* are systemic in nature. Nevi and Sutandy explain that data analysis in literature studies can be used to identify "emerging patterns, themes, and trends" (Nevi & Sutandy, 2024, p. 57). Consequently, this article strives to identify the primary patterns of IRE challenges rather than simply listing the problems.

The validity of the study was ensured by comparing several sources to prevent the discussion from relying on a single article. Sources concerning *Madrasah Aliyah* were used as primary references, while sources from other educational levels were used as conceptual support. Kamal and Qomarudin discuss the challenges of IRE in *Madrasah Aliyah* directly, while Harahap provides a general framework for IRE challenges in *madrasahs*, and Nurfajrin, Zuhdi,

and Rusadi provide the basis for curriculum analysis. This strategy aligns with the view that credible sources are essential for ensuring that analysis can be conducted in a "systematic and transparent" manner (Nevi & Sutandy, 2024, p. 57).

Results and Discussion

Curriculum Orientation and the Complexity of IRE Learning in Madrasah Aliyah

The Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* holds a foundational position because it determines the direction, content, objectives, and instructional strategies of religious learning. The curriculum functions not only as an administrative document, but also as a guideline in forming students who are faithful, ethical, and capable of understanding Islamic teachings contextually. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi refer to the curriculum as the "most fundamental component" in the education system (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2158). This statement indicates that the challenges in IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* cannot be separated from how the curriculum is understood, developed, and applied by teachers in the learning process.

The distinctiveness of IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* is evident in the subject structure, which is broader than that of general schools. IRE in *madrasahs* is not present as a single subject but is divided into several religious scientific clusters. Kamal and Qomarudin note that IRE in *madrasahs* includes "Al-Quran Hadits, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqih, and Islamic Cultural History" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 140). This structure is a strength of *madrasahs* because it provides space for deepening religious material. However, at the same time, this structure also becomes a challenge because teachers need to integrate these various materials so that students do not understand IRE in a fragmented manner.

One of the problems with the IRE curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* lies in the gap between the ideal curriculum and learning practices in the classroom. Normatively, the IRE curriculum is directed toward forming religious understanding, attitudes, and practices. However, in practice, learning is often still focused on completing material and achieving cognitive grades. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi state that there is still a "gap between the idealities of the curriculum and its implementation" (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2158). This gap shows that the curriculum problem does not only lie in the document's content, but also in the ability of teachers and *madrasahs* to translate it into meaningful learning experiences.

The IRE curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* also faces issues regarding relevance to students' needs. At the *Madrasah Aliyah* age, students are in a phase of adolescent development where they begin to think critically, question values, and compare information from various sources. Therefore, IRE material needs to be linked to students' real lives, such as digital ethics, peer relationships, social responsibility, and religious moderation. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi state that some teaching materials "are still theoretical" (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2158). This becomes a problem if IRE material only stops at definitions, doctrines, and rote memorization without being directed toward value understanding and application in daily life.

From the perspective of curriculum analysis, IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* must be able to respond to social, cultural, and technological changes. Students live in a society that continues to change, so the IRE curriculum needs to prepare them to be able to understand Islamic teachings in a moderate, critical, and responsible manner. Abdurrosyid et al. explain that the development of the *madrasah* IRE curriculum cannot be separated from the context of "religion, nationalism, and globalization" (Abdurrosyid et al., 2022, p. 107). This statement confirms that the IRE curriculum should not only be oriented toward mastering internal religious material, but also needs to equip students to live as Muslims in a pluralistic Indonesian society and a dynamic global world.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be seen as both an opportunity and a challenge for IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah*. On one hand, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* provides space for differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and character strengthening. On the other hand, IRE teachers do not always have the same technical readiness in applying these approaches. Wiandani et al. found that one of the challenges for IRE teachers in implementing

the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is the "difficulties in applying differentiated instruction" (Wiandani et al., 2025, p. 482). In the context of *Madrasah Aliyah*, this challenge appears when teachers must face students with different religious ability backgrounds, for example, differences in the ability to read the Al-Qur'an, understand Arabic texts, or link *Fiqih* material with contemporary issues.

Curriculum problems are also related to the suitability of material with the local needs of the *madrasah*. *Madrasah Aliyah* exists in different social contexts, so the curriculum needs to be translated contextually according to the needs of students and the community. Loviana et al. found a problem in the form of "the mismatch of the curriculum with local needs" (Loviana et al., 2025, p. 1). In IRE instruction, local needs can relate to the community's religious culture, *pesantren* traditions, family economic conditions, adolescent problems, and social issues developing around the *madrasah*. If the curriculum is not contextualized, students may feel that IRE instruction is far from the reality they experience. The IRE curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* should not only direct students to know Islamic teachings, but also to understand the meaning and practice it in life. Kamal and Qomarudin emphasize that Islamic education aims to form "the perfect human being (*insan kamil*)" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 128). Thus, the orientation of the IRE curriculum needs to be understood holistically, namely as an instrument for forming knowledge, faith, practice, and character. Curriculum problems arise when that orientation narrows into completing material and obtaining exam grades.

Based on the aforementioned elaboration, the complexity of the IRE curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* demands that teachers and *madrasahs* be able to read the curriculum analytically. The curriculum is not enough just to be implemented as a rule, but needs to be processed into learning practices that are appropriate to the students' character and the challenges of the times. Harahap mentions that one of the problems with IRE instruction in *madrasahs* is the "curriculum" aspect (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). Therefore, improvements to the IRE curriculum in *Madrasah Aliyah* need to be directed toward strengthening teacher understanding, contextual learning, value integration, and alignment between curriculum goals and student needs.

IRE Teacher Competence in Addressing Instructional Demands and Digitalization Challenges

IRE teachers are the main actors in translating the curriculum into learning experiences. A good curriculum will not have a major impact if teachers are unable to understand students, design learning, manage classes, choose methods, and conduct evaluations appropriately. Rohmah states that the "role of the teacher is very important" in Islamic Religious Education learning (Rohmah, n.d., p. 1). In the context of *Madrasah Aliyah*, this role becomes more complex because teachers face adolescent students who are starting to be critical, have wide access to information, and need rational and relevant religious explanations.

The problem with IRE teachers in *Madrasah Aliyah* relates to pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. It is not enough for teachers to only master religious material; they must also be able to understand students' characters and manage meaningful learning. Rohmah explains that pedagogical competence includes "understanding of students" (Rohmah, n.d., p. 1). At the *Madrasah Aliyah* level, understanding students becomes very important because students are in a phase of identity searching, have high curiosity, and often face social-religious problems that are not simple. In addition to pedagogical competence, IRE teachers are also required to have spiritual and moral competence. IRE teachers do not just teach material but also become role models in attitudes and behavior. Hidayah and Romlah associate IRE teacher competence with the concepts of "*yatlu, yuzakkihim, and yu'allimum*" in QS al-Jumu'ah verse 2 (Hidayah & Romlah, 2022, p. 218). These concepts show that IRE teachers play a role in conveying teachings, fostering personality, and teaching knowledge. Therefore, the problem of IRE teacher competence not only concerns teaching skills but also concerns role modeling and the ability to guide students morally.

The next problem is the teacher's ability to design active and contextual learning. IRE instruction is often still dominated by lecture methods, while *Madrasah Aliyah* students need space for dialogue, discussion, practice, and reflection. Harahap states that learning still largely uses the "transfer of knowledge" method (Harahap, 2023, p. 95). This pattern becomes a problem if teachers only convey religious information, while students are not involved in processing, analyzing, and linking the material with real life. The lecture method actually still has a place in IRE instruction, especially to explain basic concepts, doctrines, and material systematization. However, the lecture method becomes a problem if used singularly and continuously. Loviana et al. mention that learning which is "too lecture-oriented" can make students disconnected from the essence of religious teachings (Loviana et al., 2025, p. 8). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, IRE instruction needs to be directed toward more varied methods, such as case studies, problem-based learning, project-based learning, academic debates, text studies, and value reflection.

Active student participation in the learning process is an important indicator of method success. Yetty shows that teachers often use "lecture methods" that do not involve students actively (Yetty, 2024, p. 71). In IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah*, this condition can make students just recipients of information. In fact, students at this level are already able to develop arguments, express opinions, and analyze religious issues. Therefore, teachers need to turn the IRE classroom into a directed dialogue space that remains based on scientific manners (*adab*). One strategy to activate learning is the use of structured teaching materials, such as LKPD (*Student Worksheet*). Yetty found that the use of *student worksheets* can "improve student learning outcomes" in IRE instruction (Yetty, 2024, p. 71). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, LKPD can be developed not only as a question sheet, but as a guide for activities such as doctrine analysis, case studies, group discussions, character reflection, and religious projects. Thus, LKPD becomes a tool to shift learning from teacher-centered to student-centered.

Another challenge faced by IRE teachers is the digitalization of learning. *Madrasah Aliyah* students live in a digital environment and obtain religious information from various platforms. Sastriani states that the teacher is no longer the "sole source of learning information" (Sastriani, 2018, p. 1). This statement shows that IRE teachers need to adjust their roles. It is not enough for teachers to be information conveyors; they must be mentors who help students sort religious information, understand scientific authority, and use digital media responsibly.

Low digital literacy among teachers is a serious problem in IRE instruction. Some teachers are not accustomed to using digital media creatively, so instruction is less in accordance with the learning styles of today's students. Sastriani found that low use of digital features is caused by the "low competence" of teachers (Sastriani, 2018, p. 14). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, this problem can cause a distance between the world of learning in the classroom and the digital world that students experience every day. As a result, IRE instruction can be considered less interesting and less relevant. The digital era also brings the challenge of value disruption. Technology not only brings new learning tools but also brings mindsets, communication cultures, and lifestyles that affect students. Hasibuan and Rifa'i mention that digitalization causes "value disruption" in Islamic Religious Education (Hasibuan & Rifa'i, 2025, p. 1). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, value disruption can appear in the form of changes in communication manners, consumption of unverified religious content, instant culture, and weak self-control in the use of social media.

IRE instruction needs to utilize technology meaningfully, not just follow digital trends. Hasibuan and Rifa'i found strategies such as "blended learning, gamification of values, and digital da'wah projects" (Hasibuan & Rifa'i, 2025, p. 1). These strategies are relevant for *Madrasah Aliyah* because students can be directed to become positive content producers, not just social media consumers. For example, students can create digital character campaigns, short religious videos, religious moderation posters, or critical analyses of religious content on the internet. Digitalization of IRE instruction must also consider the learning wellbeing of students. Technology can assist learning, but excessive use can affect students' emotions, social relations, and spirituality. Gasmi mentions that the intensity of digital technology use affects

the "emotional and spiritual stability of students" (Gasmi, 2026, p. vi). Therefore, IRE teachers need to use technology proportionally, namely as a means of learning and internalizing values, not as a total replacement for the educational relationship between teachers and students. The problems of teachers, methods, and digitalization show that IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* requires teachers who are adaptive. Nevi and Sutandy emphasize that "mastery of technology by teachers is also very important" (Nevi & Sutandy, 2024, p. 55). However, mastery of technology must be accompanied by pedagogical competence and personality role modeling. The ideal IRE teacher is not only able to use digital media but is also able to make that media a means of character building, strengthening religious understanding, and developing students' critical power.

Student Characteristics Toward Facilities, Infrastructure, and Educational Environment

Madrasah Aliyah students are the main subjects of IRE instruction. They are in a complex phase of development, namely late adolescence which is marked by identity searching, the desire for independence, critical thinking ability, and openness to outside influences. Harahap mentions that student problems in IRE instruction include "truancy, unwillingness to learn, and lack of concentration" (Harahap, 2023, p. 94). This condition shows that student problems are not only related to academic ability, but also to motivation, attitude, environment, and psychological conditions.

Low learning interest is one of the main problems for students in IRE instruction. Learning interest influences student activity, persistence in reading, courage to ask questions, and earnestness in following instruction. Arasy, Tsaqila, and Gusmaneli mention that low interest in IRE is characterized by "lack of active student involvement" (Arasy, Tsaqila, & Gusmaneli, 2025, p. 82). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, low active involvement can happen because material is considered too theoretical, methods are less varied, or students feel that IRE instruction is not directly related to their life problems. Learning interest is also related to learning achievement. Kholidah and Amirudin found that learning interest has a "positive and significant influence" on IRE learning achievement (Kholidah & Amirudin, n.d., p. 1). These findings show that improving IRE achievement is not enough to be done by adding assignments or increasing exams. Teachers need to foster interest through relevant instruction, interesting methods, appropriate media, and positive pedagogical relationships. At the *Madrasah Aliyah* level, students will be more interested if IRE instruction discusses real problems such as social interaction, digital ethics, social responsibility, and the future of religious life.

Students also have different family backgrounds and religious experiences. These differences influence their readiness to follow IRE instruction. Harahap mentions that students have "distinctive family backgrounds" (Harahap, 2023, p. 94). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, there are students who come from religious families and are accustomed to religious education, but there are also students who have not received enough religious reinforcement at home. These differences require IRE teachers not to generalize the religious abilities and experiences of students. The family environment is an important factor in the success of IRE instruction. Religious education cannot only take place in the classroom, because Islamic values need to be practiced at home. Salamayanti, Syafe'i, and Akmansyah mention one of the problems of IRE is "lack of support from family" (Salamayanti, Syafe'i, & Akmansyah, 2024, p. 1). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, the lack of family support can impact weak prayer habits, low learning discipline, and lack of supervision over social interaction and the use of gadgets.

The community environment also influences IRE instruction. Students live in a society that can support or weaken the religious values taught in the *madrasah*. Kamal and Qomarudin mention the importance of "synergy in the three centers of education" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 139). The three centers of education include family, *madrasah*, and community. If the three do not run in the same direction, students can experience value inconsistency between what is taught in the *madrasah* and what they see in social life. Besides family and community, the digital environment also becomes a factor that greatly influences students. Social media, popular culture, and digital content can shape the way of thinking, communication style, and

adolescent value orientation. Ariani et al. state that social media and popular culture can make adolescents "lose their identity" (Ariani et al., 2025, p. 1). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, IRE instruction needs to help students build a mature Islamic identity, namely an identity that is religious, critical, open, and responsible.

Student problems are also related to academic, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Gasmi mentions that *student wellbeing* in IRE instruction is formed through the integration of "academic, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions" (Gasmi, 2026, p. vi). This means that IRE instruction is not enough to just target grade achievement, but also needs to pay attention to learning comfort, teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, emotional stability, and spiritual peace. In *Madrasah Aliyah*, attention to this aspect is important because students often face academic pressure, social conflict, and the influence of digital media. Facilities and infrastructure also become an important problem in IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah*. IRE material requires facility support, such as libraries, prayer rooms (*mushala*), instructional media, prayer practice tools, internet access, and religious activity rooms. Harahap mentions that "facilities and infrastructure" are included in the problems of IRE instruction in *madrasahs* (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). Limited facilities can make IRE instruction tend to be verbal, theoretical, and less able to provide concrete learning experiences to students.

Kamal and Qomarudin place facilities and infrastructure as part of the internal factors of IRE problems in *Madrasah Aliyah*. They mention internal problems include "facilities and infrastructure, students, educators, and curriculum" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 140). This shows that the quality of IRE instruction is not only determined by teachers and students, but also by the facilities available. *Fiqih* instruction, for example, requires prayer practice tools; Al-Qur'an Hadis instruction requires *mushaf* and audio media; while SKI instruction requires reading sources and visual historical media. The quality of facilities and infrastructure is also related to student learning interest. Kartika, Husni, and Millah found an influence of facility quality on "student learning interest" in IRE instruction (Kartika, Husni, & Millah, 2019, p. 127). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, adequate facilities can help teachers develop more varied and interesting instruction. Conversely, limited facilities can make instruction only rely on lectures and textbooks, so students more easily experience saturation.

Practical facilities become a special need in IRE instruction. Salamayanti, Syafe'i, and Akmansyah mention one of the IRE problems is "insufficient facilities for practical classes" (Salamayanti, Syafe'i, & Akmansyah, 2024, p. 1). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, prayer practices, simulations of corpse management (*pengurusan jenazah*), Hajj pilgrimage simulations, or *da'wah* practices require adequate facilities. Without practical facilities, IRE instruction is at risk of only producing theoretical understanding, not religious skills that can be practiced. Problems with facilities and infrastructure are also often related to funding limitations. Kamal and Qomarudin state that government assistance to private *madrasahs* is "much lower" compared to public *madrasahs* (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 139). In the context of *Madrasah Aliyah*, especially private *madrasahs*, this condition can affect facility quality, teacher welfare, and the availability of instructional media. Therefore, the problem of facilities and infrastructure cannot only be charged to the teacher, but needs to be seen as an issue of *madrasah* management, community support, and educational policy.

Based on the aforementioned elaboration, the problems of students, facilities and infrastructure, and the educational environment are interrelated. Students who receive less family support, learn in a social environment that is less conducive, and face facility limitations will find it more difficult to achieve the goals of IRE instruction holistically. Kamal and Qomarudin mention that external factors of IRE problems include "parents, community involvement, and government concern" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 128). Therefore, IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* requires the support of an educational ecosystem that involves teachers, students, families, the community, *madrasahs*, and the government.

Strategies for Developing IRE Learning in Madrasah Aliyah

Evaluation of IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* is an important part of knowing the success of instruction and student development. However, the problem that often arises is that

evaluation is still more dominant in the cognitive aspect. In fact, Islamic Religious Education does not only aim to measure knowledge, but also to foster religious attitudes and skills. Rohmah emphasizes that IRE does not only emphasize "the cognitive aspect only" (Rohmah, n.d., p. 1). Therefore, IRE evaluation needs to include the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in a balanced manner.

The dominance of written tests becomes one of the problems of IRE evaluation. Written tests are indeed important to measure concept understanding, doctrines, laws, and history, but they are not enough to assess the practice of values and religious skills. Ginting and Prastowo mention that teachers can conduct written tests, group assignments, and "observe students' daily deeds" (Ginting & Prastowo, 2021, p. 50). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, IRE evaluation should not only take the form of tests, but also attitude observation, prayer practice, portfolios, religious projects, and self-reflection. Evaluation problems are also seen in the difficulty of assessing the affective domain. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, tolerance, and manners (*adab*) are not easily measured with multiple-choice questions. Rohmah states that IRE is more important on the "affective and psychomotor aspects" (Rohmah, n.d., p. 1). *Madrasah Aliyah* teachers need to compile clear attitude and practice assessment rubrics so that evaluation is not only based on subjective impressions. Affective assessment can be done through teacher journals, self-assessment, peer assessment, behavioral observation, and guidance notes.

Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes the importance of formative assessment, but its implementation is not always easy. Wiandani et al. found challenges in the form of "limited time for formative assessments" (Wiandani et al., 2025, p. 482). In IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah*, formative assessment is important to know the development of student understanding and attitudes while the learning process is taking place. However, time constraints, the number of students, and administrative burdens often make teachers focus more on summative assessment. IRE evaluation must also be used as a basis for improving instruction, not just producing report card grades. Nevi and Sutandy mention that conclusions and recommendations need to be compiled based on "analysis results" (Nevi & Sutandy, 2024, p. 57). In the context of *Madrasah Aliyah*, IRE teachers need to analyze evaluation results to find out material that students have not understood, methods that are less effective, students who need guidance, and values that have not been internalized. Thus, evaluation becomes a tool for improving instruction, not just a measurement tool.

The first strategy in developing IRE instruction is strengthening teacher capacity. IRE teachers need to understand the curriculum, develop methods, use digital media, and compile comprehensive evaluations. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi recommend "strengthening teacher capacity" as an important need (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2157). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, capacity strengthening can be done through training, MGMP (*Subject Teacher Consultations*), academic supervision, learning communities, digital media workshops, and mentoring in compiling teaching tools.

The second strategy is the development of contextual learning. IRE material needs to be linked to actual problems faced by students, such as digital ethics, social relations, religious moderation, the environment, and responsibilities as citizens. Nasution mentions that IRE instruction must be "as contextual as possible" with social facts and the development of science and technology (Nasution, 2023, p. 68). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, a contextual approach can make students see that IRE is not just test material, but a life guide that is relevant to their reality.

The third strategy is the diversification of learning methods. IRE teachers need to reduce reliance on lectures and develop more active methods. Loviana et al. emphasize that teacher methods must be "more diverse" and involve students actively (Loviana et al., 2025, p. 8). Methods that can be used in *Madrasah Aliyah* include case studies, group discussions, presentations, directed debates, *project-based learning*, *problem-based learning*, simple research learning, and reflection-based religious practices.

The fourth strategy is the meaningful integration of technology. Technology must be used to support IRE instruction, not just to beautify material appearance. Hasibuan and Rifa'i emphasize the importance of "value-based digital literacy" (Hasibuan & Rifa'i, 2025, p. 1). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, teachers can invite students to create digital *da'wah* content, analyze

religious hoaxes, compile moral posters, or create social media etiquette campaign projects. This strategy can make technology a means of internalizing Islamic values.

The fifth strategy is the improvement of facilities and infrastructure. IRE instruction requires facilities that support understanding, practice, and religious habituation. Kamal and Qomarudin offer a solution in the form of "completing the necessary facilities/infrastructure" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 128). *Madrasah Aliyah* can prioritize the procurement of IRE libraries, prayer practice tools, audio-visual media, directed internet access, representative prayer rooms, and religious activity rooms. If funding sources are limited, the *madrasah* can establish cooperation with committees, alumni, the community, and partner institutions.

The sixth strategy is strengthening cooperation with families and the community. IRE instruction cannot succeed if the values taught in the classroom are not reinforced at home and in the social environment. Kamal and Qomarudin suggest that *madrasahs* establish "good cooperation with parents, the community, and the government" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 128). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, this cooperation can be done through adolescent parenting programs, routine communication with guardians, religious social activities, prayer guidance, and involvement of community leaders.

The seventh strategy is forming teacher learning communities. IRE teachers need space to discuss, share good practices, and conduct learning reflection. Loviana et al. assess that "teacher learning communities" are important as a space for sharing practices (Loviana et al., 2025, p. 8). In *Madrasah Aliyah*, learning communities can involve teachers of Al-Qur'an Hadis, Akidah Akhlak, Fikih, SKI, Arabic Language, BK (*Guidance and Counseling*), and homeroom teachers. This collaboration is important because student guidance cannot be done by one teacher separately.

The eighth strategy is to return the orientation of IRE instruction to the formation of knowledge, practice, and character. IRE instruction should not stop at administrative achievements or material completion. Kamal and Qomarudin mention that excellent *madrasahs* need to produce a generation that is "religious, of good character (*berakhlakul karimah*), and understands technology" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 139). This formulation is relevant for *Madrasah Aliyah* because students need to be equipped with strong religious understanding, good character, critical thinking skills, and the skills to face digital challenges. Thus, evaluation and strategies for developing IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* must be directed toward systemic improvement. Harahap mentions that the problems of IRE instruction include "curriculum; teachers; students; facilities and infrastructure; and the teaching and learning process" (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). Because the problems are broad, the solutions must also cover many aspects. Teachers need to be strengthened, students need to be involved, the curriculum needs to be contextualized, technology needs to be directed, facilities need to be improved, families need to be involved, and evaluation needs to be made more comprehensive. Only with such an approach can IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* become more relevant, meaningful, and have an impact on the character building of students.

Conclusion

The challenges of IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* are multidimensional in nature. These issues encompass the curriculum, teachers, students, teaching methods, media and technology, facilities and infrastructure, family and community environments, and evaluation. Kamal and Qomarudin refer to the problems of IRE in *Madrasah Aliyah* as a combination of "internal problems" and "external problems" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 140). Therefore, the problems of IRE instruction cannot be resolved solely by improving one aspect; rather, they require a systemic and collaborative approach. From the curriculum aspect, the main problem lies in the gap between the idealities of the curriculum and its classroom implementation. The *madrasah* IRE curriculum has a rich structure, but its implementation is often still theoretical and not yet fully contextual. Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi mention the existence of a "gap between the idealities of the curriculum and its implementation" (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi,

2025, p. 2158). Therefore, *Madrasah Aliyah* teachers need to understand the curriculum deeply and translate it into instruction that is relevant to students' lives.

From the aspects of teachers and students, the problems of IRE instruction relate to pedagogical competence, mastery of technology, administrative burdens, low learning interest, and the influence of the digital environment. Nevi and Sutandy emphasize the importance of "mastery of technology" for IRE teachers (Nevi & Sutandy, 2024, p. 55), while Arasy, Tsaqila, and Gusmaneli demonstrate that low learning interest is characterized by a "lack of active student involvement" (Arasy, Tsaqila, & Gusmaneli, 2025, p. 82). These two points indicate that IRE instruction must move toward a direction that is more active, digital, contextual, and character-building.

Strategies for developing IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* need to be directed toward strengthening teacher capacity, contextual learning, methodological variation, value-based technology integration, improvement of facilities and infrastructure, family-community cooperation, and comprehensive evaluation. Harahap states that the problems of IRE include "curriculum; teachers; students; facilities and infrastructure; and the teaching and learning process" (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). By addressing these aspects, IRE instruction in *Madrasah Aliyah* can be more relevant, meaningful, and impactful in forming students who are knowledgeable, faithful, ethical, and capable of facing the challenges of the times.

Key development strategies include:

- **Teacher capacity:** Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, and Rusadi recommend "strengthening teacher capacity" as a vital need (Nurfajrin, Zuhdi, & Rusadi, 2025, p. 2157).
- **Contextual learning:** Nasution argues that IRE should be "as contextual as possible" regarding social facts and technological development (Nasution, 2023, p. 68).
- **Method diversification:** Loviana et al. emphasize that teaching methods must be "more diverse" and actively involve students (Loviana et al., 2025, p. 8).
- **Technology integration:** Hasibuan and Rifa'i highlight the importance of "value-based digital literacy" (Hasibuan & Rifa'i, 2025, p. 1).
- **Facility improvement:** Kamal and Qomarudin propose "completing the necessary facilities" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 128).
- **Collaborative partnerships:** Kamal and Qomarudin advise *madrasahs* to establish "good cooperation with parents, the community, and the government" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 128).
- **Teacher learning communities:** Loviana et al. value "teacher learning communities" as spaces for sharing best practices (Loviana et al., 2025, p. 8).
- **Holistic orientation:** Kamal and Qomarudin envision *madrasahs* that produce a generation that is "religious, of good character, and technologically literate" (Kamal & Qomarudin, 2024, p. 139).

In conclusion, Harahap notes that the challenges of IRE involve "curriculum; teachers; students; facilities and infrastructure; and the teaching and learning process" (Harahap, 2023, p. 93). Because these problems are systemic, the solutions must be multi-faceted, involving all stakeholders in the education ecosystem.

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