

## Efforts to Improve Religious Understanding of Islamic Education Study Programs' Students Graduated from Public Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the impact of limited Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lesson hours in public schools on the religious understanding of students enrolled in the Islamic Education Study Program at UIN Walisongo Semarang. Students from public school backgrounds often encounter difficulties in comprehending complex religious materials at the university level, especially those related to Arabic texts and classical Islamic sciences. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research involved eight participants selected for their academic challenges in adapting to religious learning. Data were collected through interviews, observations, document analysis, and literature studies. The findings highlight the existence of a significant gap in religious knowledge between public school graduates and their peers from madrasahs or Islamic boarding schools. To overcome this, various support strategies were identified, including religious student activity units, Arabic enrichment programs, guidebooks, mentoring systems, and inclusive teaching methods. The study emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts between lecturers and institutions to provide an inclusive and adaptive learning environment. These interventions aim to strengthen students' religious competence and ensure equal opportunities for academic success in Islamic higher education.*

**Keywords:** Arabic Proficiency, Inclusive Education, Islamic Religious Education, Public School Graduates

**How to Cite** Ikramina, M. B., Sya'bana, R. P., Ainuri, A. F. Y., & Ainuzzahro, M. (2025). Efforts to Improve Religious Understanding of Islamic Education Study Programs' Students Graduated from Public Schools. *Jurnal Al Maesarah*, 4(2), 214–229. <https://doi.org/10.58988/jam.v4i2.422>

### INTRODUCTION

In public schools, such as senior high schools, Islamic Religious Education often has limited lesson time in the curriculum, impacting students' religious understanding (Natuna, 2022). Islamic religious education is usually considered an additional subject less prioritized than other general subjects, so students do not gain in-depth religious knowledge (Umam, 2020). As a result, graduates from public schools tend to have limited religious understanding, affecting their

religious knowledge quality when continuing their studies in higher education, especially in the Islamic Religious Education department. This problem is even more complex when Islamic religious education students in public school face difficulties following more in-depth lecture materials, such as tafsir, Fiqh, and hadith (Ahnan, 2024). Their lack of basic religious understanding causes challenges in absorbing course materials that require stronger religious knowledge. In addition, the lack of cultivation of religious values in public schools also affects the formation of their character and attitudes as students (Judah et al., 2024).

Due to the limited time allotted for religious studies, schools cannot achieve expectations about students' attitudes and abilities and their comprehension of Islamic religious education from a cognitive standpoint alone. Due to its official allocation of only two weekly classes, Islamic religious instruction in public schools faces numerous obstacles (Daradjat, 2008). If Islamic religious teaching only focuses on the cognitive aspect, teachers may still be able to do so. However, teachers will face greater challenges when Islamic religious education must cover cognitive elements, attitudes, and skills simultaneously. Islamic religious education in public schools for students becomes very limited if it only relies on regular lesson hours. This condition is different for students who live in areas with madrasah diniyah or islamic boarding schools. They usually do not face many problems because they can access Islamic religious learning outside formal school hours. However, this kind of situation is increasingly rare nowadays. Some students may be forced to learn Islam from the free time provided by their parents, which is certainly not enough to fulfill the need for a more thorough religious education. (Azizi et al. 1, 2022)

Issues with Islamic education in public schools are frequently ranked lower than those with other topics. You'll notice that public schools teach a wide range of Islamic education-related learning resources. All of the content from the five Islamic religious education disciplines taught at madrasas, including history, Tajweed, or the laws of reading, and the laws of Fiqh, is already covered and summarized in Islamic religious education classes in public schools (for example, about the pillars of Islam and the pillars of Faith). However, in practice, Islamic religious education teachers in public school face constraints related to the time set by the government, which is only two hours of lessons a week. One of the main challenges is the limited time to deliver the material thoroughly, so the target of completing the curriculum is often not achieved. As a result, many students score unsatisfactory grades on exams. (Daulay & Putra, 2020).

Many studies have discussed the problems of religious education in public schools. Some previous researchers mentioned that one of the main problems in religious education is the limited hours of Islamic education lessons, which are only held 2-3 hours a week (Suef M et al. 1, 2023) or placed in the last lesson hour where children are getting feels bored (Umam, 2020) This time limitation is a significant obstacle for students, especially for those who continue their studies at Islamic universities. As a result, the understanding of religion obtained in public schools is not deep and comprehensive enough. Hence, students who graduate from public schools often face difficulties following more complex and in-depth course material at universities.

This can affect their academic performance, especially in courses requiring a strong and applicable understanding of religion. In addition, the limited time to study religion can also affect the formation of students' religious character, which should be an integral part of education in Islamic universities. Thus, the problem of limited hours of Islamic religious education lessons in public schools needs more attention to provide the right solution for students entering the world of Islamic higher education. One crucial aspect that previous researchers have not explored is the lack of Islamic religious education lesson hours on the religious understanding of public school graduates at UIN Walisongo Semarang. Although many studies have examined the problems of religious education in public schools, no one has specifically discussed the impact of the lack of Islamic religious education lesson hours on public school graduates who continue their studies at UIN, especially UIN Walisongo Semarang.

To improve the quality of Islamic religious education in public schools and better prepare students, it is crucial to conduct additional research to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of the lack of Islamic religious education lesson hours in public schools on students. By examining in further detail how students' comprehension of Islamic religious education materials in higher education is impacted by the restricted time allotted for religious studies in public schools, as well as the difficulties they encounter during the academic adaptation process, this study seeks to close the gap. In addition, this research is also important to be conducted at UIN Walisongo to improve students' religious understanding, especially for students who graduated from public schools. The university can design more effective support programs by identifying their adaptation challenges. This improves the quality of religious education and contributes to the university's dedication to fostering students to be better prepared to face the complexity of religious materials and play an active role in society. The findings of this study are expected to identify the challenges faced by students related to the limited time to learn religion in public schools, as well as the appropriate efforts to overcome the religious knowledge gap they experience after continuing their studies at UIN Walisongo.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the experiences and challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students from public school backgrounds in adapting to religious learning at the university level. A combination of library and field research methods was employed to collect comprehensive data. Based on the qualitative framework outlined by Bogdan and Taylor (in Arifudin, 2023), the research design emphasizes collecting and analyzing descriptive data through written or oral expressions and observable behavior, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. The research subjects comprised eight students from the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at UIN Walisongo, class of 2022, who were selected due to their difficulties adapting to more complex religious material at the university level.

Data collection techniques included literature study, semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation analysis to ensure

comprehensive and credible findings. The literature study analyzed books, journals, and articles about public school' limited Islamic religious education lesson hours and their impact on students' religious understanding. Semi-structured interviews with the eight selected students allowed for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives and experiences while maintaining focus on the research objectives. Direct observations were conducted during religious learning sessions, mentoring activities, and spiritual student activity unit meetings to gain insights into students' engagement and adaptation levels. Additionally, supporting documents such as activity schedules, attendance sheets, and feedback forms were analyzed to obtain further insights into the learning environment and program effectiveness.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and triangulation techniques to ensure credibility and validity. The process began with data reduction, where relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents was categorized and coded based on emerging themes related to students' challenges and adaptation strategies. The information was then systematically presented in tables and narrative descriptions to highlight key findings and relationships. Triangulation was conducted to verify data consistency and address discrepancies by cross-referencing data from different sources with literature, followed by further validation through participant confirmation.

Several programs were implemented to optimize religious learning to address the identified challenges. These included training and tutoring sessions designed to enhance students' understanding of complex religious material, conducted in dedicated spaces provided by UIN Walisongo. Mentoring through religious student activity units was also encouraged, where regular meetings were held based on predetermined work programs. The duration of the training was flexible, with additional hours provided as needed to accommodate students' learning requirements.

The effectiveness of these efforts was evaluated using various indicators, such as students' improved understanding of complex religious material, successful adaptation to religious learning at the university level, positive feedback from participants, active participation of lecturers and mentors, and the sustainability of the program in supporting religious learning at UIN Walisongo. Through these comprehensive interventions and analyses, the study provides valuable insights and recommendations for optimizing religious education for students with public school backgrounds.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Challenges of Learning Islamic Religious Education in Limited Time in Public Schools**

Due to their limited high school period, students in UIN Walisongo Semarang's Islamic Education Study Program, particularly those from public schools, experience difficulties. Eight respondents provided data; most stated they only receive two to three hours of Islamic religious education instruction weekly. This time constraint impacts their capacity to comprehend more intricate Islamic religious education materials in college. According to the Ministry of Education

and Culture data, the average weekly allotment for Islamic religious education in public schools is only two to three lesson hours. According to the Merdeka Curriculum policy, the annual time allocation for Islamic religious education is about 72 to 108 hours, which means about two lessons per week, with additional hours for Islamic religion-based projects (Humaedi, 2021). This time limitation can impact a deeper understanding of Islamic religious education materials, especially when college students or students in higher education need to understand more complex concepts. For example, materials focusing on Islamic moral, spiritual, and cultural values require more time to be understood and applied daily. Therefore, although Islamic religious education has an important goal in shaping character, time constraints can hinder achieving this goal if not balanced with more effective learning methods (Puspita, 2023).

The limited learning time for Islamic religious education in senior high school/vocational high school impacts not only the frequency of learning but also the depth of students' understanding of the material. Limited Islamic religious education lessons often do not allow enough time to understand more complicated topics, such as studying spiritual texts and Arabic. This becomes a big challenge when students enter college, where they face more difficult material requiring a deeper understanding. Learning difficulties are conditions in the teaching and learning process where students cannot learn optimally as they should. Learning difficulties are symptoms seen in various forms of behavior, both directly and indirectly (Chadijah, 2017). Learning difficulties also often occur in students who graduate from public schools and continue their studies in the Islamic Religious Education department. One respondent (R1) revealed difficulty understanding more complex material on campus because religious learning at his school was not in-depth.

As stated by R1, "I come from a high school that does not have in-depth religious learning, so I find it difficult to understand the material, even a bit behind in learning it." Islamic religious education teachings are taught in schools as well. However, they are quite rudimentary and lack depth. This claim demonstrates how time restrictions and a less thorough approach in high school or vocational school impact students' capacity to learn more complex information in college.

In addition, the limited time to study Islamic religious education in public schools also affects students' readiness to face more in-depth material in college. Another respondent (R2) said, "I find it difficult with materials related to the Arabic language, such as Arabic Textual Studies and Arabic Language courses. In public schools, we are not taught specifically about Arabic." This shows that although there are Islamic Education lessons in public schools, the materials taught are insufficient to prepare students for more in-depth studies, especially in Arabic, an important component of Islamic Education.

This time constraint affects students' college preparation as well. According to respondent R1, religious studies in high school were extremely fundamental, making it challenging to study in college. R2 experienced the same situation; they struggled with Arabic language materials, which are crucial for college courses on Islamic religious education. In public schools, Arabic is only taught broadly,

leaving students unprepared for classes, including Arabic Textual Studies and Arabic Language.

However, students from Islamic boarding school backgrounds or more intense religious education do not feel the same difficulties. R3, who spent her high school years in an Islamic boarding school, said, "It was not too difficult for me because I spent my high school years in an Islamic boarding school; even before high school I had already learned the Qur'an and also at Al-Qur'an Education Park." This shows that students with a more in-depth religious education background are better prepared to deal with more complicated material at university, especially in studying spiritual texts and Arabic.

The limited time received by students who graduated from public schools makes it difficult to understand materials requiring in-depth knowledge, such as Arabic language and religious text studies. These materials are very important in higher religious education and are not sufficiently taught in public schools. Therefore, more attention must be given at the university and high school levels to ensure students can learn these subjects.

Overall, the limited time and depth of Islamic religious education learning in high schools/vocational schools is a big challenge for students at UIN Walisongo Semarang, especially those from public schools. Due to limited learning in public schools, most find it difficult to understand more complex material in higher education, such as religious text studies and Arabic. Students who have a more in-depth religious education background, such as in dormitory or Islamic boarding school, tend to be better prepared. To overcome this, universities need to strengthen Islamic religious education learning by providing additional programs and establishing collaboration with public schools to improve the quality of learning. This will help students who graduated from public schools to be better prepared for learning in higher education.

### **The Impact of Limited Islamic Education Lesson Hours on Students' Religious Understanding and Adaptation**

Time has a major influence on the effectiveness of an activity. The better one utilizes time efficiently and effectively, the more results can be achieved. This also applies to learning time at school. Generally, learning time at school lasts about 12 to 14 hours, depending on each school's policies. (Wahidah, 2016)

Class time and break time are separated in terms of time allocation. The class hour also changes whether a student is in elementary, junior, or senior high school. Nonetheless, there is a notable disparity between the time spent studying Islamic Religious Education or religious subjects in madrasahs and public schools. Only two hours a week are dedicated to teaching Islamic religious education in public schools. Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, History of Islamic Culture, Qur'an Hadith, and Arabic Language are the five topics that make up Islamic religious education in madrasahs, on the other hand. Each topic has a specific amount of time allotted for weekly meetings.

It cannot be denied that the lack of Islamic Religious Education class hours has a significant impact on students, especially those who continue their studies at Islamic universities. One of the most influential impacts is the limited hours of Islamic education lessons on their religious understanding.

As expressed by R7: *"I feel it affects my understanding of religion because Islamic religious education learning in public schools is only taught in a basic way, not comprehensively related to religious knowledge."* The same thing was also stated by R4: *"Yes, it is very influential. After entering college, there are a lot of new materials and terms that I know because this study program is more in-depth. The material is still general and basic in public schools, so my religious understanding is limited to these general materials."* R1's statement also reinforced this, *"It affects. With the limited class hours in public school, I only get a little Islamic religious education material, and even then, the basic material,"* and R4 stated, *"Yes, I feel that my religious understanding is more behind with other friends"*.

In contrast to R5, who spent time at the boarding school while attending high school, she has a different view. *"Yes, even though I have received additional religious knowledge from the boarding school after entering college there is still a lot of knowledge that I have not learned, if I don't understand it, I feel left behind from other friends. But it is not a heavy burden to understand it, by learning to flow with the flow of learning it is quite easy to follow it,"* and R6's statement said, *"No, because in addition to studying Islamic religious education in public school. I also study it at madin (madrasah diniyah)."*

This argument leads to the conclusion that students only have a superficial and incomplete understanding of religion as a result of public schools' absence of Islamic Education class hours. This impacts their poor knowledge of more intricate theological ideas since they learn more about them at Islamic universities. Due to this, students find it difficult to adjust to more complex religious content, which suggests that public schools' Islamic religious education curriculum needs to be strengthened to increase students' preparedness to comprehend religious information at a higher level.

On average, Students from public schools take longer to adjust to the Islamic religious education curriculum in higher education. This happens because of the different learning approaches between public schools and universities. As expressed by R2, who attended high school but lived in an Islamic boarding school, *"Yes, I have to adjust the learning in the islamic boarding school with that in college because the learning perspective is different."* The statement shows that it takes longer to adapt to the Islamic religious education curriculum in college because of the differences in teaching methods and materials. This difference requires a deeper adjustment process to understand learning well.

The same thing was also experienced by students who graduated from public schools. They indicated that the adjustment process in understanding religious material occurred more slowly than their peers with a religious-based educational background, such as in a madrasah or islamic boarding school. As expressed by R1, *"It takes me a little slower to adjust than those who were in Madrasah,"* and reinforced by R7's statement, *"Of course, I need more time than my friends who came from madrasah or islamic boarding school."*

The statements of these three respondents underline that students who graduated from public schools face challenges in understanding more complex religious material. The inability to immediately grasp religious terms, Arabic-based learning concepts, and other religious materials requires them to allocate

additional time and effort. This further emphasizes the importance of academic Support and learning strategies that can help students with a general education background to catch up in a faith-based educational environment.

In contrast to R4, who said, "Not everything, only specifically for those related to Arabic." this is also supported by R8, who stated, "Yes, it is true in some subjects, not all." This shows that not all Islamic religious education materials are problematic in their adjustment. Respondents only felt difficulties or needed adjustments in materials related to Arabic. Meanwhile, for other materials, the adjustment was not felt so significant. Adaptation is more required in materials related to Arabic, while other subjects are easier to follow.

From some of the students' responses, it can be concluded that Islamic religious education students from public schools face challenges in adapting to the curriculum in higher education, especially related to differences in learning approaches and specifications of certain materials, such as Arabic. Adapting to this curriculum is key so students can follow the lectures well and understand the material optimally.

### **Efforts to Optimize Islamic Religious Education Learning**

In college, students from public schools frequently struggle to comprehend Islamic Religious Education coursework. Their disparate educational backgrounds – they previously only got rudimentary religious instruction – cause this. Students from *Islamic boarding school* backgrounds typically have a stronger understanding of religion and are in a distinct predicament. Formal education at Islamic boarding schools offers an alternative viewpoint on education. Islamic Boarding School emphasizes professionalism and knowledge mastery more than other educational institutes. In addition to professionalism (*amal pious*) and knowledge, islamic boarding schools also underscore the importance of morals, both in relations with the Creator (vertical) and in human relations (horizontal) (Siswati, 2018). This difference can cause students from public schools to feel left behind and have difficulty adjusting to more complex learning materials at the college level.

Therefore, various initiatives are required to maximize their capacity to learn Islamic religious education. Special academic mentoring programs, extra classes to improve fundamental religious knowledge, and the creation of study groups with students from different backgrounds to help one another are some examples of these initiatives. To meet the requirements of all students, whether they attend public schools or Islamic boarding schools, lecturers must also use inclusive and adaptable teaching strategies. This method is anticipated to improve religious comprehension and provide every student with a welcoming and fair learning environment.

To overcome the gap in religious understanding among students, some respondents conveyed how they deepened religious knowledge outside of lecture hours. There were also suggestions and input from students regarding the Support needed to strengthen their ability to learn Islamic Religious Education. These suggestions underline the importance of providing Support tailored to their specific needs so that the adaptation process and understanding of religious material can run more effectively. One of the alternatives to optimize the learning

ability of Islamic Religious Education students is by joining several religious student activity units; as R4 said, "None, but I still follow religious activities on campus such as participating in religious student activity units activities" by utilizing campus religious activities as a means to deepen religious understanding. This shows that religious student activity unit activities are important in supporting students' spiritual needs. Supported by R5, who said, "Providing additional guidance on religious knowledge for students who are lacking in religious understanding. Maybe the Ma'had program implemented by UIN today can be one of the solutions". The statement highlights the importance of additional guidance, such as the Ma'had program, to help students with limited religious understanding.

Informant R6 stated "the existence of a special guidebook for the material" that by providing a guidebook as a structured and easily accessible learning resource, students can focus more on understanding learning materials without being confused about finding appropriate references independently. This guidebook can also be the main tool to strengthen basic understanding, especially for students with different educational backgrounds, such as public school graduates. In addition, guidebooks help create uniformity in learning standards so that all students have the same foundation in studying Islamic Religious Education more effectively and efficiently.

In addition, R7 also revealed "Support for deepening Arabic knowledge, such as providing special classes to learn Arabic for those who lack the ability, especially high school graduates. An introduction is fine, because Arabic is very important for students majoring in Islamic Education. Public school graduates usually only encounter Arabic on campus, so they are not surprised when given more in-depth material." This shows that it is important to introduce Arabic to students from public schools so that they can better understand more complex Islamic religious education materials.

In contrast to R8, who said, "I integrate religious learning with technology." This statement shows that technology can be an effective alternative to support religious learning, making it more interesting and relevant to the needs of the times. Technology makes it easier to access information and allows for more interactive and flexible learning, which can be adjusted to students' learning styles. With technology, religious learning materials can be delivered in various formats, such as videos, applications, or online platforms, which make it easier for students to understand and apply religious teachings in their daily lives. This also helps bridge the gap between conventional learning methods and the needs of students more connected to the digital world.

R9 said, "In my opinion, Support from lecturers of subjects related to religious studies is very important. With the Support of lecturers, we as students from public schools feel enthusiastic and not inferior in the lecture." Highlighting the importance of lecturers in providing motivation and building self-confidence in students from public schools; as Liang Gie said (Sudirman, 2020), motive or encouragement is an encouragement that is the basis for someone to do something or learn. This is key to creating an inclusive learning environment and supporting their development. Lecturers who provide emotional and academic Support can

help students feel more appreciated and accepted, increasing their enthusiasm for learning. By building self-confidence, lecturers can motivate students to participate more actively in learning, overcoming feelings of inferiority or fear that they may feel due to different educational backgrounds. In addition, the role of lecturers in providing appropriate direction and constructive feedback is very important so that students feel more confident in the progress they have made in studying Islamic Religious Education material. (Tanjung, R. 2020).

Another solution is to add teaching hours, which can provide more time for students to study the material more deeply and comprehensively. The word "addition" etymologically comes from the word "tambah," which is given the prefixes "pe" and "an," which means something that is added to what already exists to make it more (Poerwadarminta, 2006). Meanwhile, lesson study time refers to the hours (units of time) needed to guide, teach, or train certain materials or topics programmed through direct meetings. The efficiency and effectiveness in managing and utilizing this lesson study time depend greatly on the ability of Islamic Religious Education teachers to plan and optimize the use of this time.

As stated by R10, "There are additional hours specifically for studying fiqh or the Qur'an." There is an additional study program to strengthen students' understanding of basic religious material, aiming to gain a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of Islamic teachings. This program is expected to provide an opportunity for students to study material that has not been fully understood in class, as well as to deepen their religious insight more comprehensively. In addition, with additional study, students can get more intensive guidance from competent teachers or ustadz to overcome their difficulties in understanding more complex religious concepts. This program can also strengthen the bonds of the student community through beneficial religious activities.

And supported by R11, who said, "Support for Islamic Religious Education students from public schools is very much needed. Provide special guidance so that they can adapt more quickly. In my opinion, the Ma'had program at UIN Walisongo Semarang is quite helpful for students from public schools." Assessing that the Ma'had program has been quite helpful, another special guidance is still very much needed to accelerate the adaptation of students from public schools. Although the Ma'had program provides important basic teaching, students with a general education background often need more time to adjust to deeper and more complex material, especially in religion. Therefore, additional, more focused guidance programs, such as intensive training or special classes, can be an effective solution to accelerate their understanding, strengthen their religious foundations, and reduce feelings of inferiority that may arise due to differences in educational background. This special guidance can also help students feel more confident and ready to face challenges in learning Islamic Religious Education in college.

In addition, other alternatives can be used to strengthen Islamic Religious Education learning, namely through religious studies. Religious studies are one of the media of preaching in Islam that is very effective in enhancing the religious foundations of Muslims. (Kartika et al., 2022). Participants can gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings, deepen their understanding of religious values,

and broaden their comprehension of numerous facets of life based on Islamic principles by engaging in religious studies. Religious studies can strengthen Students' religious foundations, including debates, Q&A sessions, and material presentations by ustadz or preachers. This is especially true for students with a general education background. The quality of religious education in higher education will be enhanced due to students' increased understanding of the content covered in Islamic Religious Education lectures and their increased spiritual connection to God.

As stated by R12, "Add many religious study programs that are relevant to Islamic Religious Education courses, especially for public school graduates, add additional lessons on books for public school graduates so that they have the same understanding as their friends from madrasah or Islamic boarding school graduates." So, religious activities and additional book lessons can also be used to reduce the gap in understanding between students from public schools and Islamic boarding schools. Enrichment of religious activities can include regular religious study programs, scientific discussions, and other religious activities that can deepen students' understanding of Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, additional lessons on yellow books or classical Islamic texts can help students understand the material often taught in Islamic boarding schools, such as Fiqh, tafsir, and hadith. With these programs, students from public schools who may not have received in-depth teaching on these books can gain knowledge equal to their peers from Islamic boarding schools. This is also expected to create equality in religious understanding among students and help them feel more confident and ready to face more complex material in Islamic Religious Education studies.

In contrast to R1, who said, "Currently, I often study with friends in my boarding house, I often ask my friends about material I don't understand. When I go home for a long time, I often go to the Quran education park/ madrasah where I have studied since I was little to study again with the ustadz." The informant used time with friends and a familiar independent learning environment such as the Quran Education Park to deepen their understanding of religion. This shows the importance of social Support and access to a comfortable place to study for students. And supported by R3: "yes, just studying normally in the boarding house," studying independently in the boarding house without using additional methods or special guidance. This shows that some students may feel more comfortable studying independently and more effectively.

From the respondents' responses, it is clear that they need various forms of Support, ranging from additional guidance and introduction to Arabic to strengthening religious activities. Support from lecturers and institutions through programs such as Ma'had is also very helpful. Because they need this Support, efforts or solutions to optimize Islamic Religious Education learning can be realized by implementing what they propose. These proposals, such as providing additional classes and guidebooks, introducing Arabic, and strengthening religious programs, align with their needs and experience in the learning process. This shows that collaboration between students, lecturers, and educational institutions is needed, which is expected to create inclusive and effective learning for students from various academic backgrounds.

**Table 1.** Efforts to optimize Islamic Religious Education Learning

No.	Effort	Details	Implementation
1.	Increase Islamic education lesson hours at school	Integrating religious material into other lessons or special classes.	Curriculum policy
2.	Training for Islamic Religious Education lecturers and teachers	Workshop on project-based learning methods	Institutional collaboration
3.	Use of interactive learning media	Implementation of video and quiz-based e-learning	Hybrid class
4.	Recitations are relevant to Islamic religious education courses	Thematic material themes related to Islamic religious education	Collaboration between lecturers and campus missionary institutions
5.	Additional lessons about the Yellow Book and Arabic	Basics of books for public school students	Additional classes and step-by-step modules
6.	Building a learning community for students across backgrounds	Small discussion groups to integrate religious understanding between public school and madrasah graduates	Mentoring by seniors or alums and creating weekly open discussion forums on campus
7.	Utilizing religious student activity units to deepen religious material	Integrating student activity unit programs with Islamic religious education lecture materials	Create a routine program that is relevant to student needs. For example, a workshop on reading yellow books, tahini, and tahfidz al-Quran programs

### **Implementation of Religious Knowledge of Islamic Education Students in Community Service Activities**

Community service is one of the three pillars of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, research, and teaching. This service manifests the connection between science, real action, and social change. As a real means, community service bridges universities and society in overcoming various social problems and needs. Higher education not only functions as a center for the development of science but is also expected to be able to apply this knowledge to benefit society (Soehadka, 2016). Students majoring in Islamic Religious Education are often actively involved in various community service activities as a tangible manifestation of applying the knowledge they learn in lectures. One form is through social service activities held by student organizations. In this activity, they assist in the form of basic needs such as groceries and clothing and strengthen the sense of solidarity in the community. Some organizations involved include the Department Student Association and various student activity units in UIN Walisongo.

Furthermore, students of Islamic Religious Education frequently teach in places where educational opportunities are still limited. They help children learn

more about Islamic beliefs and offer religious instruction. The activity benefits the community and develops their patience, creativity, and innovative teaching skills. They also provide service by becoming a teacher at the Al-Qur'an Education Park in their local community. Students in Islamic Religious Education actively impart Islamic ideals in daily life while assisting children to read and comprehend the Qur'an.

In addition, they also participate in various social activities of community service and fundraising for orphanages and disaster victims. These activities show that Islamic Religious Education students not only focus on formal education but also have high social awareness to help the community, especially in improving the quality of education and religious understanding.



**Figure 1.** Teaching activities for 5 days and one day of Social Service at Safinatun Najah Orphanage, Mijen



**Figure 2.** Teaching activities for 3 days at SMP 5 Semarang in the Ramadan Islamic Boarding School Event

## CONCLUSION

Students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at UIN Walisongo Semarang face significant challenges, particularly when comprehending more difficult content in higher education, because Islamic Religious Education is taught in public schools for an average of only two to three hours weekly. Many students who have graduated from public school struggle, particularly when studying religious texts and the Arabic language, which demands a deeper comprehension. This is because Islamic Religious Education is

typically taught in high schools and vocational institutions in a basic and comprehensive manner.

Students from Islamic boarding school educational backgrounds are better prepared to face the material because they already have a strong foundation in religious learning. Therefore, efforts are needed to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning in public schools, both through additional learning hours and more effective methods, as well as additional programs in universities to bridge the gap in student understanding so that the objectives of Islamic Religious Education learning can be achieved optimally.

Students majoring in Islamic Religious Education also actively contribute to community service through various activities that reflect the application of the knowledge they learn. Activities such as social services, teaching in areas with less access to religious education, and becoming teachers at the Qur'anic Education Center show their role in increasing access to religious education and instilling Islamic values in the community. In addition, their participation in social activities such as community service and fundraising reflects their concern for humanitarian issues. This experience benefits the community and trains Islamic Religious Education students to be patient, creative, and innovative educators and build high social sensitivity.

Optimizing Islamic Religious Education learning for students with a public school background requires an integrated approach that includes additional academic guidance, strengthening Arabic language skills, utilizing technology, and enriching religious programs. The challenges of gaps in spiritual understanding and lack of exposure to in-depth material commonly taught in Islamic boarding schools point to the need for innovation in learning methods. Providing guidebooks, additional classes, Ma'had programs, and regular religious study activities are important to gradually and systematically improve religious understanding. In addition, lecturers play a central role as facilitators who provide motivation, direction, and emotional Support, thus creating an inclusive learning atmosphere and supporting student confidence. Collaboration between students, lecturers, and educational institutions is key to meeting the needs of students from various academic backgrounds.

By integrating traditional methods and modern technology, Islamic Religious Education learning can be more relevant, interactive, and flexible. Additional Support, such as community strengthening through religious student activity units, Arabic language training, and kitab kuning learning, can help students from public schools achieve the same understanding as their peers from Islamic boarding schools. With this strategy, islamic religious education learning can improve the quality of religious experience and shape the character of religious, confident, and able to face the challenges of the modern world without leaving spiritual values. This is an important foundation for creating a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also noble.

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