



## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*In modern usage, the word "adolescence" or adolescence comes from the Latin word "adolescere", which means "to grow up" or "to grow into adulthood". The broader meaning of this term includes mental, emotional, social, and physical maturity. Piaget supports this idea by stating that "adolescence is an age at which individuals become integrated into adult society, an age at which they do not feel that they are below the level of older people but feel the same, or at least equal to older people". In simple terms, religion is belief. Based on the KBBI, belief can be interpreted as a control system for believing in and worshiping spiritual beings as well as rules relating to human life and the environment. Human relationships with God and each other are regulated by a system of beliefs and customs known as religion. Based on the research findings above regarding problems and solutions to increase youth participation in religious activities, there are many challenges faced by teenagers today in participating in religious activities in their surrounding environment. Therefore, researchers can conclude that to overcome this problem, material providers must deliver material in a way that is more innovative and relevant to teenagers' daily lives. Apart from that, schools and the community must help by providing supportive facilities. It is hoped that collaboration between mosques, schools and communities can create a positive environment that encourages teenagers to participate in religious activities.*

**Keywords:** Teenager, Religious, Challenge, Participation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Religious awareness in educational environments is a crucial factor in shaping students' moral and ethical values. However, the lack of religious consciousness in educational settings can lead to a disconnect between religious education and its practical application in daily life. Many students perceive religious teachings as irrelevant to contemporary social issues, making it difficult for them to integrate religious values into their real-world

experiences. Consequently, religious values are inconsistently applied, rendering religious education ineffective in character development. The absence of contextual guidance and creative teaching approaches exacerbates this situation.

Several studies and theses indicate discrepancies between religious life practices in everyday settings and the religious teachings provided in schools. According to a study published in the *Journal of Islamic Education* by Jatmikowati and Setiawan (2022: 649), "only 65% of students feel they receive inadequate religious guidance in school." Additionally, Maunah (2015: 93) found that only 35% of students possess a high level of religious awareness. Research findings further indicate that character education in schools is often assessed based on character value evaluation, covering aspects of knowledge, awareness, and implementation steps. The *Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, authored by Imanuddin (2010: 71), revealed that "69.3% of students have moderate religious awareness, 15.8% have low awareness, and only 14.9% demonstrate high religious awareness." Moreover, the study highlights that while 44.2% of students have strong religious beliefs, only 16% exhibit awareness in practicing religious rituals.

An analysis of the above data suggests that religious education in schools has not been fully effective in fostering students' religious awareness and practices. Jatmikowati and Setiawan (2022: 649) emphasize that most students feel they do not receive sufficient religious guidance, leading to a limited understanding and experience of religious values. Furthermore, evidence suggests that religious teachings in schools are primarily theoretical. This is reinforced by data from Maunah (2015: 93) and Imanuddin (2010: 71), indicating that students fall within the moderate to low religious awareness categories. These findings highlight the need for improvements in religious education methodologies, focusing on the internalization of religious values through practical applications, habituation, and exemplary role models.

As a student at SMA Negeri 1 Tapa during the 2021–2022 academic year, I personally experienced the gap between religious education provided in school and its implementation in daily life. The curriculum predominantly emphasizes memorization, with minimal opportunities for discussion on the real-world application of religious teachings. Consequently, students struggle to contextualize religious teachings in contemporary social settings. However, when interactive learning methods such as case studies and group discussions were introduced, students became more engaged and capable of connecting religious teachings with social issues, such as intolerance. This suggests that innovative and contextualized teaching approaches are more effective in fostering religious understanding and application.

Given the critical role of adolescence in shaping personal and social identity, it is essential to examine how religious education can be adapted to better engage students. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage characterized by cognitive, emotional, and social maturation (Ali & Asrori, 2011: 10). Erikson (1968: 12) identifies this stage as "Identity vs. Role Confusion," wherein adolescents explore their sense of self and societal roles. The effectiveness of religious education in this phase significantly impacts students' long-term moral and social development. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of religious education in fostering students' religious awareness and to propose pedagogical improvements that can bridge the gap between theoretical teachings and practical application.

The findings of this study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on religious education by offering empirical insights into the challenges faced by students in internalizing religious values. Additionally, it will provide recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance the delivery of religious education, ensuring its relevance in contemporary social contexts. By integrating interactive and contextual teaching methods, religious education can be transformed into a more engaging and meaningful experience for students, ultimately fostering a stronger connection between religious teachings and real-life applications

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, as defined by Sidiq, Denzin, and Lincoln (2019), who state that qualitative research utilizes a naturalistic approach to interpret social phenomena. The research focuses on understanding human experiences through methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. An interpretive approach is adopted to emphasize the significance of natural settings in comprehending social realities. The inductive nature of this descriptive method allows for a deeper understanding of social interactions and contextual factors influencing the phenomenon under investigation. The study was conducted in two locations: Buntulia Selatan Village and Marisa Village, Pohuwato Regency, chosen for their varying levels of religious activity. The research was carried out from December 12 to December 18, 2024.

Primary data were obtained directly through observations and interviews with individuals engaged in religious activities, without intermediaries. These data include personal opinions, direct observations of religious events, and field examination results. The research subjects include Ramdani Kai, a 17-year-old adolescent with minimal participation in religious activities, and Rahmat Bouty, a 30-year-old individual actively involved in religious practices. The primary research objective is to explore the factors influencing youth participation in religious activities, including challenges, motivations, and roles within the community. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument, ensuring objectivity and data reliability through systematic analysis, participant rapport, and thorough field observations to derive meaningful insights

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges in Participating in Religious Activities

Rahmat Bouty stated, "Although I really want to participate, sometimes I feel lazy or lack motivation." Meanwhile, Ramdani Kai expressed, "I find religious activities sometimes uninteresting and repetitive. There is nothing new." Based on these responses, Rahmat Bouty's difficulty in participating in religious activities often stems from a lack of motivation, which may be due to unclear goals and negative influences from the social environment. In contrast, Ramdani Kai's disinterest is due to the monotonous nature of the activities. The role of parents and teachers is crucial in providing support and creating an environment that fosters religious values to overcome these challenges.

According to the interviews, Rahmat Bouty mentioned, "Friends have a significant influence. If they participate, I become more enthusiastic about joining," whereas Ramdani

Kai noted, "My friends tend to be indifferent to these activities, so I also feel less motivated." These findings indicate that peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping the level of youth participation in religious activities. Depending on their engagement, peers can either be a source of motivation or a deterrent. To enhance youth involvement, it is essential to create a positive and supportive social environment where everyone feels valued and encouraged to participate.

### **Reasons for Participation**

Rahmat Bouty responded, "I participate due to self-motivation. I feel it is important to deepen my faith and gain new experiences." Conversely, Ramdani Kai stated, "Sometimes I join because of encouragement from parents or teachers rather than personal interest. They expect me to be active." These responses highlight that individual motivation plays a key role in determining youth engagement in various activities. Those who rely on external encouragement may feel less committed, while those with intrinsic motivation are more likely to be actively involved.

Previous experiences significantly impact a young person's decision to engage in future activities. Rahmat Bouty noted, "A positive experience in previous activities greatly influences my desire to participate again. I feel happy and inspired," whereas Ramdani Kai stated, "Past experiences were not very memorable, so I am less interested in joining again." Unremarkable experiences can reduce interest and enthusiasm, whereas positive experiences can increase motivation and engagement.

### **Role of Youth Mosque Organizations**

Rahmat Bouty stated, "Mosque youth organizations can enhance participation by organizing interactive and enjoyable activities." Meanwhile, Ramdani Kai emphasized, "Organizations need to be more creative in attracting youth interest. Activities should align more with our interests." These responses suggest that the types of activities organized by mosques and their relevance to youth interests significantly influence youth engagement. By adopting innovative and interactive approaches, mosque organizations can substantially increase youth participation. Collaboration between youth and administrators is essential in fostering a positive community environment.

Both Rahmat Bouty and Ramdani Kai agreed that "Activities such as camping, creative workshops, and informal discussions can attract youth interest." This highlights the importance of organizing engaging and beneficial activities to enhance youth involvement in mosque organizations. Such activities not only strengthen social bonds among members but also contribute to character building and positive societal values.

Rahmat Bouty and Ramdani Kai suggested, "Collaboration with schools can be facilitated through extracurricular programs or seminars involving students." These findings indicate that partnerships between mosque organizations and schools have great potential in increasing youth engagement. By offering attractive and relevant activities, mosques can encourage more students to participate. Effective promotion and addressing potential barriers are crucial in ensuring higher participation. Understanding youth interests and needs while creating a supportive environment can positively impact their personal and social development.

### **Challenges Encountered**

Rahmat Bouty mentioned, "Time is often an issue due to the heavy school workload and other commitments." Similarly, Ramdani Kai stated, "Extracurricular activities, private lessons, and hobbies make it difficult to attend religious events." These responses highlight that time constraints and competing commitments affect youth engagement in religious activities. Youth who actively participate tend to manage their time effectively and prioritize meaningful activities, while those less engaged often struggle with competing responsibilities.

Rahmat Bouty and Ramdani Kai both noted, "Social media is more appealing to me compared to rigid religious activities." This indicates that youth engagement in religious activities is heavily influenced by social media, often surpassing the appeal of traditional religious programs. While social media offers numerous benefits, if not properly managed, it can negatively impact moral values. Thus, religious institutions must adapt to technological advancements and create an environment that fosters positive youth engagement within their spiritual contexts.

### **Solutions to Enhance Participation**

Rahmat Bouty suggested, "New methods of delivering religious teachings should be introduced, such as utilizing digital media to make them more engaging." Ramdani Kai added, "Activities need to be more relevant to everyday youth life so they feel more connected." These findings indicate that the method of content delivery and its relevance to daily life significantly influence youth involvement in religious activities. Engaged youth recognize that activities need to be more relatable, while less-involved youth acknowledge the importance of digital innovation in making religious learning more appealing.

Ramdani Kai stated, "Community support is crucial, such as providing venues and facilities for youth activities," whereas Rahmat Bouty noted, "School support is vital, for example, by integrating religious values into the curriculum." These findings suggest that support from both schools and communities is essential for enhancing youth participation in religious activities. Incorporating religious values into the school curriculum can aid in character development, while community support through the provision of facilities and a conducive environment ensures that youth feel connected to these activities. A collaborative effort between schools and communities can significantly increase youth engagement in religious programs.

### **Discussion**

The findings from interviews with adolescents reveal several key challenges and potential solutions for enhancing youth participation in religious activities. One of the primary obstacles identified is a lack of motivation, often influenced by social environments and repetitive past experiences. Peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping engagement levels; supportive friends can encourage participation, whereas apathy among peers can diminish motivation. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation is found to be more effective in fostering sustained involvement compared to external encouragement from parents or teachers.

Interactive and contextually relevant activities, such as camping and creative workshops, are perceived as engaging and hold potential for increasing youth interest in

religious programs. However, competing commitments, including school assignments and extracurricular activities, frequently serve as barriers to participation. Additionally, the growing preference for social media over traditional religious activities presents another significant challenge.

To address these issues, religious institutions should adopt more innovative and relatable methods of delivering religious content that align with adolescents' daily lives. Schools and the broader community must also play a supportive role by providing adequate facilities and fostering an environment conducive to religious engagement. Collaboration between mosques, educational institutions, and community organizations is essential in creating a positive atmosphere that encourages youth to take an active role in religious activities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that contemporary adolescents face multiple challenges in actively participating in religious activities within their communities. Factors such as a lack of motivation, monotonous program structures, social influences, and competing academic or extracurricular commitments contribute to decreased engagement. Given these obstacles, it is essential to adopt innovative and contextually relevant approaches in delivering religious education to better align with the everyday experiences and interests of young people.

To enhance youth participation, educators and religious leaders must employ more engaging and interactive methods that resonate with adolescents. Furthermore, schools and local communities play a critical role in supporting these initiatives by providing adequate facilities and fostering an environment conducive to spiritual growth. A collaborative effort between mosques, educational institutions, and the broader community is imperative to creating a positive and sustainable framework that encourages active youth involvement in religious activities. By modernizing outreach strategies and ensuring inclusivity, it is possible to cultivate a generation that remains connected to their faith while navigating contemporary societal challenges.

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