



## Nature-Based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through the Pondok Salam Qur'an Program in Shaping Students' Religious Character

<sup>1\*</sup>Bilqis Nafilah Febrianti, <sup>2</sup>Agus Fakhruddin, <sup>3</sup>Usup Romli

<sup>1\*,2,3</sup> Indonesia University of Education

\* Corresponding E-mail: [bilqisnafilah.04@upi.edu](mailto:bilqisnafilah.04@upi.edu)

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategy of nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through the Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) program in shaping students' religious character at Sekolah Alam Bogor. PAI learning faces challenges in the era of globalization and digitalization, particularly the dominance of cognitively oriented, rote-memorization approaches that are less effective in internalizing religious values. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews involving PAI teachers, students, PSQ mentors, and parents. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that nature-based PAI learning through the PSQ program provides contextual learning experiences that support the formation of students' religious character through worship habituation, Qur'anic activities, and interaction with the environment. Despite challenges such as managing open-space classes and digital distractions, this strategy remains effective in strengthening students' spiritual appreciation and sustaining religious habits.

**Keywords:** Islamic Religious Education (PAI), nature-based learning, religious character, PSQ

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## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in shaping the quality of human resources in a holistic manner, encompassing intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Amid the currents of globalization and the rapid development of digital technology, the world of education faces serious challenges, including the weakening of moral values, the decline of social concern, and the diminishing religious commitment of students (Silaban et al., 2025). This phenomenon indicates that the success of education cannot be measured solely by academic achievement, but also by the ability of educational institutions to instill character values and spirituality in a sustainable manner. (Abidin et al., 2025). In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupies a strategic position as a medium for the formation of moral character and the strengthening of students' spiritual values (Pratiwi et al., 2014).

Ideally, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) should not merely emphasize the cognitive mastery of religious subject matter, but also encourage the internalization of Islamic values in attitudes and everyday behavior. The expected religious character encompasses steadfast faith, consistency in worship, noble conduct in social interactions, as well as concern for the environment and others as a manifestation of

the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation) (Muhammad et al., 2024). Nevertheless, various studies indicate that the practice of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools remains dominated by a cognitive approach oriented toward memorization and the achievement of curriculum targets, while the affective dimension and the habituation of religious practices have not yet been optimized (Sa et al., 2025). This condition has led to a gap between students' religious understanding and its implementation in everyday life.

This gap necessitates innovative strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) that are more contextual and meaningful. One approach considered relevant is nature-based learning, namely an instructional model that utilizes the surrounding environment as an authentic and contextual source of learning. (Januardi, 2025). Direct interaction with nature provides learning experiences that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, thereby fostering more meaningful and reflective learning (Aulina et al., 2025). From an Islamic perspective, nature-based learning is in harmony with the principle of *tawhid*, which emphasizes the balance of relationships between human beings, nature, and Allah Swt. In this view, nature is understood as *ayat kauniyah* signs of God in the created universe rich with educational and spiritual values (Yusri et al., 2023).

The implementation of nature-based learning has, among others, been applied at Sekolah Alam Bogor through the Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) Program. This program emphasizes the strengthening of Qur'anic values through the habituation of worship, recitation (*tilawah*), memorization (*tahfiz*), reflection (*tadabbur*), and the internalization of the Qur'an in students' daily lives. The integration of nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and PSQ is expected to comprehensively shape students' religious character through spiritual experiences, the habituation of religious behavior, and social interactions that naturally occur within the environment. Nevertheless, empirical studies that specifically examine the integration of nature-based learning with structured Qur'anic education programs remain relatively limited.

Previous studies have shown that nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) contributes positively to the enhancement of students' spiritual awareness, empathy, and social concern (Ningsi & Somantri, 2021). Other studies affirm that the experiential learning approach in Islamic education is capable of deepening the internalization of students' faith (*aqidah*) and moral character (*akhlaq*) (Hamid, 2024). However, most of these studies still examine nature-based learning in a partial manner, whether limited to instructional design, outdoor activities, or general outcomes of religious attitudes, without providing a thorough elaboration of the mechanisms of religious character formation and the role of structured Qur'anic programs as the core of the learning strategy.

In contrast to previous studies, this research positions nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integrated with the Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) Program as a unified and comprehensive learning strategy. The focus of the study is directed toward how this strategy is systematically implemented through Qur'an memorization, verse reflection (*tadabbur*), habituation of worship, role modeling, and spiritual guidance within an open natural setting as mechanisms for the formation of students' religious character. Accordingly, PSQ is not placed as a supporting activity, but rather as the core driver of PAI learning that continuously shapes students' religious experiences. The integration between the nature-based school approach and

Qur'anic education offers a holistic model of PAI learning and provides conceptual and empirical novelty compared to previous studies on nature-based learning (Akbar & Latipah, 2025).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986), which emphasizes that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and social interaction within the reciprocal relationship among personal factors, behavior, and environment (reciprocal determinism) (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). The concepts of modeling and self-efficacy in this theory are relevant for explaining the formation of students' religious behavior through the observation of worship practices, Qur'anic habituation, as well as the exemplary conduct of teachers, mentors, and peers in PSQ activities. (Wulandari et al., 2025). The natural environment and Qur'anic activities function as a learning context that strengthens students' self-confidence and fosters the continuous internalization of religious values. Based on this description, the present study aims to analyze and describe the strategy of nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through the Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) Program in shaping students' religious character at Sekolah Alam Bogor. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of contextual PAI learning studies as well as practical implications for educators in designing PAI learning strategies that are more integrative, contextual, and meaningful.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strategies in shaping students' religious character through the PSQ Program. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to explore meanings, experiences, and learning processes that naturally occur within specific social contexts (Wiraguna et al., 2024). The case study design was employed to obtain a comprehensive picture of the practice of nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Sekolah Alam Bogor as the research site during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The selection of this location was based on the school's characteristics, which consistently integrate the natural environment as a learning resource and feature the PSQ program as a flagship initiative oriented toward strengthening students' religious values.

The research subjects were determined through purposive sampling, namely the selection of informants based on their direct involvement and relevance to the implementation of the PSQ Program (Jailani et al., 2022). The subjects included two Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, two students, one PSQ mentor, and one parent. Although the number of informants in this study was relatively limited, it was considered adequate since each informant represented information rich cases with direct and profound experiences related to the planning, implementation, and impact of nature-based PAI learning. The adequacy of the number of informants was established based on the principle of data saturation, that is, when the data obtained had shown recurring patterns and no significant new information emerged from further data collection. To maintain the confidentiality of informants' identities, each research subject was assigned a specific code: GPAI01 and GPAI02 for PAI teachers, S01 and S02 for students, PPSQ01 for the PSQ mentor, and OT01 for the parent.

**Table 1. Source Identity Codes**

No	Source	Code
1.	Source 1	GPAI01
2.	Source 2	GPAI02
3.	Source 3	PPSQ01
4.	Source 4	S01
5.	Source 5	S02
6.	Source 6	OT01

The research procedure was carried out through three main stages preparation, implementation, and data analysis in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative case study research (Ilhami et al., 2024). The preparation stage included a preliminary study, the development of interview and observation guidelines, and the administration of research permits. The implementation stage was conducted through direct data collection in the field, where the researcher was actively involved as the primary research instrument in observing the learning process and students' religious activities within the PSQ Program. The researcher's position in this study was that of a non-interventionist participant observer, meaning that the researcher engaged in observing activities without being involved in instructional decision-making. To minimize potential subjective bias, the researcher consciously practiced reflexivity by distinguishing between empirical data and personal interpretation during the analysis process.

The research data consisted of verbal and non-verbal information obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation study (Jumahir; et al., 2025). In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' understanding, experiences, and perspectives regarding the implementation of nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the mechanisms of religious character formation among students. Observations were carried out to examine students' religious behavior, such as consistency in worship, Qur'anic practices, reflective attitudes, as well as social and ecological interactions within the context of nature-based learning. Documentation study was employed to review supporting materials, including PSQ program modules or worksheets, instructional tools, activity records, and school religious archives. These three data collection techniques were integrated through methodological and source triangulation.

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through source and technique triangulation, as well as the application of member checking, namely reconfirming the findings and data interpretations with the relevant informants. In addition, the researcher systematically developed an audit trail to document the entire process of data collection and analysis, thereby ensuring the transparency and credibility of the findings.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). In the data reduction stage, the researcher conducted initial coding of interview and observation data by identifying meaning units related to learning strategies and students' religious behavior. These codes were then categorized into major themes, such as worship habituation, spiritual reflection, social concern, and ecological awareness. The selection of these themes was based on the conceptual framework of religious

character in Islamic Religious Education, which emphasizes not only ritual aspects (*hablumminallah*), but also moral-social dimensions and responsibility toward nature as part of the human mandate of stewardship (*hablumminannas* and *hablumminal 'alam*) (Silvia et al., 2025). In the context of religious character education, students' religiosity is understood as the integration of worship practices, spiritual awareness, social concern, and ecological ethics, reflecting the internalization of tauhid values in real life (Sabtina & Mahariah, 2025). Accordingly, these four themes represent a holistic religious dimension: relationship with God, fellow human beings, and the environment.

The indicators of religious character in this study were identified through consistently emerging behavioral patterns, including the consistency of worship practices, the habit of reading the Qur'an, reflective attitudes toward *ayat kauniyah*, as well as social and environmental responsibility. The selection of these indicators refers to the concept of religiosity as observable behavior arising from the internalization of faith values and spiritual habituation (Abubakar & Hanafi, 2019). From the perspective of Islamic education, religious indicators are not measured merely by religious knowledge, but by worship practices, ethical interactions with others, and awareness of the signs of God's greatness in nature (Q.S. Ali Imran: 190-191) which are reflected in reflective behavior and ecological concern. Thus, the indicators used are aligned with the dimensions of belief, practice, religious experience, and the moral consequences of students' religiosity. The process of drawing conclusions was carried out by tracing the interconnections between these themes and the mechanisms of religious character formation through nature-based PAI learning strategies in the PSQ Program.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Nature-Based PAI Learning Strategy through PSQ

The nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategy implemented through the Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) Program demonstrates a consistent pattern in providing contextual learning experiences. Teachers position students as the primary subjects of learning rather than mere recipients of knowledge. This is evident from students' active involvement in activities that integrate Islamic values with environmental realities. Teachers reported that learning which relies solely on lectures often leads to boredom, thus requiring a combination of more interactive methods (GPAI01).

In practice, teachers apply an experiential learning approach. The learning process begins with students' direct experiences before being directed toward the interpretation of religious concepts. For example, the topic of *halal* and *haram* is connected to the identification of products in the surrounding environment by involving relevant institutions. In this way, the concept of *sharia* does not remain at an abstract level but is understood through everyday experiences. During a religious expedition to Mount Kencana, teachers utilized the conditions of the journey as a learning experience to teach the topics of *taharah* and *rukhsah* through direct practice, such as performing *tayammum* using soil and conducting *shalat jamak* (GPAI01). This pattern illustrates the interconnectedness between religious texts, students' empirical experiences, and religious reflection.



**Figure 2. Learning Activities through the Experiential Learning Approach**

Furthermore, the visual documentation illustrates students' engagement in interactive nature-based activities, such as educational games and direct simulations of religious practices, including funeral rites. These activities strengthen the connection between instructional content and students' real-life experiences, thereby making learning more meaningful. Teachers emphasized that this strategy enables students not only to understand Islamic teachings but also to experience them in their daily lives.

### **Utilization of the Natural Environment in PSQ**

The natural environment is utilized as a learning space that provides authentic religious experiences. Teachers and mentors guide students to observe natural phenomena and then connect them with Qur'anic verses through reflective dialogue. The practice of tayammum using mountain soil serves as an example of contextual learning that fosters curiosity while deepening students' understanding of worship regulations (GPAI01). In addition, religious activities such as congregational prayer (salat jama'ah), Qur'an recitation (tilawah), memorization, remembrance (dhikr), and reflection are conducted in open natural settings. Permaculture gardening activities are also employed as opportunities for learning Islamic values.



**Figure 3. Gardening Activities**

The visual documentation highlights students' involvement in gardening activities as a medium of spiritual reflection. Direct learning from nature, such as gardening connected to ayat kauniyah, has proven effective in supporting the learning process. Nature emerges as a learning resource capable of touching and awakening students' spiritual awareness (PPSQ01). This activity instills responsibility and

concern for the environment while linking religious practice with real-life experience. Family involvement through home visits further reinforces the consistency of learning. Parents reported that these activities helped them to better understand their children's learning process at school, thereby enabling the continuation of religious habituation at home (OT01). Thus, the utilization of the natural environment in PSQ functions not merely as a backdrop for activities, but as a medium of spiritual reflection that supports the formation of students' religious character.

### **Challenges of Implementation in the Digital Era**

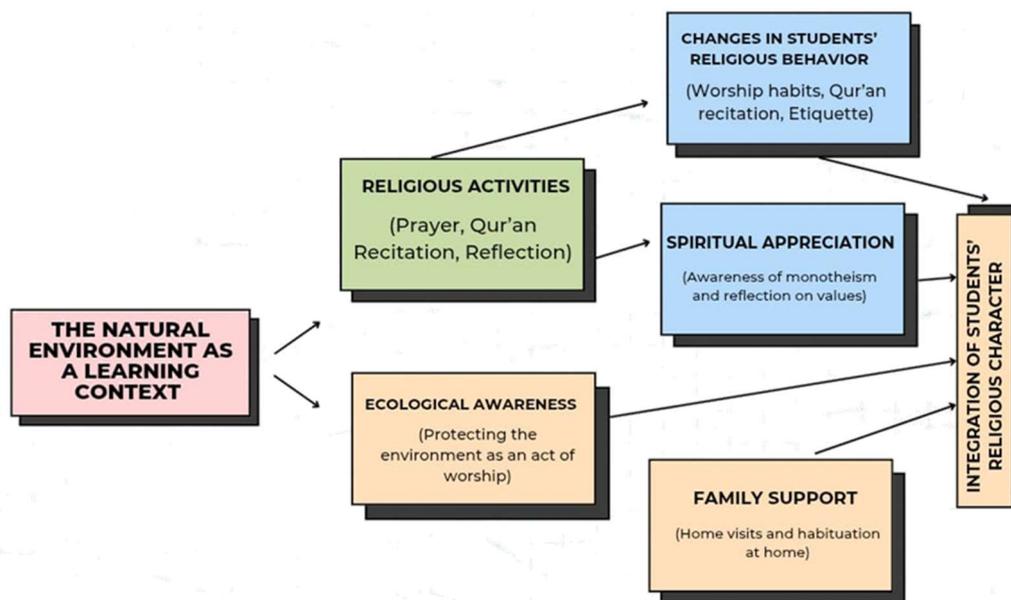
The findings indicate that nature-based learning faces complex challenges in the digital era. Teachers reported that outdoor learning requires higher pedagogical skills since students tend to be physically active and easily distracted (GPAI01). This condition demands that teachers assume dual roles as facilitators and regulators of the learning rhythm. The characteristics of the digital generation also present particular challenges. Teachers and PSQ mentors observed that some students require rapid and varied stimuli, making them less patient in engaging with deep reflective processes (GPAI02 and PPSQ01). The use of gadgets often becomes a source of distraction, diverting students' attention from *tadabbur* of nature and religious reflection (PPSQ01).

In addition, weather conditions and limited facilities also affect the smooth implementation of learning. Teachers emphasized the importance of written reflection, group discussions, and reinforcement of materials to ensure that students' empirical experiences are connected to religious values. Thus, the challenges of implementing PSQ are multidimensional, encompassing student management, the characteristics of the digital generation, technological distractions, and natural conditions that are not always supportive.

### **Impact of the PSQ Program on Students' Religious Character**

The PSQ Program has had a tangible impact on the comprehensive formation of students' religious character. Behavioral changes were evident in the discipline of worship, the habit of reading the Qur'an, and the awareness of maintaining proper etiquette in social interactions. One student reported that after participating in the program, Qur'an recitation (*tilawah*), which had previously been rarely practiced, became part of their daily routine (S01). Teachers also observed that students' worship habits increased consistently and were no longer dependent on external instructions (GPAI02).

Beyond ritual aspects, students demonstrated growth in spiritual appreciation. They began to interpret Islamic teachings more personally, particularly in their awareness of *tauhid* and reflection on Islamic values. Religious activities conducted in natural settings, such as *qiyamul lail* and *tadabbur* of *ayat kauniyah*, encouraged students to internalize religious values through direct experience. The PSQ mentor noted that students started to view environmental concern as part of religious practice rather than merely a physical activity (PPSQ01). The program's impact also extended to socio-ecological dimensions. Through *permaculture* gardening and nature-based worship simulations, students learned to cultivate responsibility for the environment as a form of worship. Parents reported that after participating in PSQ, their children exhibited more consistent religious behavior at home, such as performing prayers on time and maintaining proper etiquette without reminders (OT01).



**Figure 4. Diagram of the Impact on Students' Religious Character**

This diagram illustrates the relationship between the natural environment as a learning context, religious activities, spiritual appreciation, ecological concern, family support, and changes in students' religious behavior, culminating in the integration of a holistic religious character.

## Discussion

### Nature-Based PAI Learning Strategy through PSQ

The Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) Program presents a learning pattern that emphasizes students' active engagement through an experiential approach. This model demonstrates that religious learning does not only take place in the classroom but also through direct interaction with the surrounding environment. Mahbubi & Sa'diyah, (2024) affirm that contextual, experience-based learning can reduce student fatigue and enhance the connection between abstract concepts and everyday realities. (Rahmawati; et al., 2025) likewise show that empirical experiences serve as an important bridge in the internalization of religious values. Sri Ratna Wulan, (2025) even positions PSQ as the core of holistic learning strategies rather than a mere complement.

From a constructivist perspective, experiential learning underscores that knowledge is constructed through real life experiences (Tohari & Rahman, 2024). Activities such as worship simulations in open natural settings strengthen the interconnectedness between religious texts, students' empirical experiences, and spiritual reflection. However, the effectiveness of this strategy largely depends on teachers' ability to design meaningful activities. Effendy et al., (2023) emphasize that pedagogical and reflective competence is a key requirement to ensure that experiential learning does not remain limited to physical activities. Without careful planning, nature-based learning risks losing the religious meaning that should constitute its essence.

### Utilization of the Natural Environment in PSQ

The utilization of nature in PSQ demonstrates the integration of ritual worship and ecological awareness. Activities such as permaculture gardening, tadabbur of ayat kauniyah, and worship in open natural spaces strengthen the internalization of religious values, as emphasized by Mardatillah et al., (2025) and Sari et al., (2024). Haq & Fitriani, (2024) further note that family involvement expands the educational ecosystem, ensuring that religious habituation does not stop at school.

The theological foundation for utilizing nature as a medium of learning can be found in the Qur'an. Allah states in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:164:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاخْتِلافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of the night and the day, the ships that sail in the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah sends down from the sky of water, thereby reviving the earth after its death and dispersing therein every kind of creature, and the directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who reason."

This verse affirms that natural phenomena are signs of Allah's greatness that must be contemplated. Similarly, QS. Ali Imran (3) :190-191 adds that the creation of the heavens and the earth serves as a medium of tadabbur for those endowed with intellect. Thus, PSQ provides learning that is not only contextual but also possesses strong theological legitimacy. Nature becomes a spiritual laboratory that connects ayat qauliyah (Qur'anic texts) with ayat kauniyah (natural phenomena), enabling students not only to study religion theoretically but also to experience it through real-life practice (Mukmin et al., 2025).

### Challenges of Implementation in the Digital Era

The implementation of PSQ in the digital era faces significant challenges, with technological distractions emerging as a major factor that reduces students' focus (Aliyah et al., 2025). The characteristics of the digital generation, accustomed to rapid stimuli, often conflict with the process of deep reflection. From Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective on education, external factors such as technology, weather, and facilities are part of the system that influences the effectiveness of learning (Dharma, 2022).

Teachers are required to possess managerial and reflective competencies to effectively manage the dynamics of open classrooms (Nur et al., 2025). In addition, limited facilities and weather conditions, as noted by Fadhlullah et al., (2025) highlight the need for flexible strategies. Other studies, such as Rahmawati et al., (2025) indicate that nature-based learning in the digital era requires the wise integration of technology for example, using gadgets for reflective documentation rather than mere entertainment. Accordingly, PSQ demands that teachers act simultaneously as facilitators, managers, and reflective practitioners who are able to adapt strategies to contemporary conditions.

### **Impact of the PSQ Program on Students' Religious Character**

The PSQ Program makes a significant contribution to the formation of students' religious character. Behavioral changes are evident in the consistency of worship, the habit of reading the Qur'an, and the awareness of maintaining proper etiquette. This aligns with Bandura's theory of modeling and self-efficacy Riza & Pujosakti, (2024), in which repeated religious experiences strengthen students' self-confidence to independently practice religious observance. Beyond ritual aspects, PSQ enhances spiritual appreciation through tadabbur of ayat kauniyah and qiyamul lail. Socio-ecological impacts are also evident through permaculture gardening activities, which cultivate responsibility toward the environment as an integral part of worship (Rini et al., 2022). This study extends previous findings by affirming a more comprehensive Qur'anic integration. Accordingly, PSQ can be regarded as a nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning model that is relevant to the needs of contemporary Islamic education, while also supporting the sustainable development of students' religious character.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the nature-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategy through the Pondok Salam Qur'an (PSQ) Program is effective in shaping students' religious character in a contextual and meaningful way. The integration of direct experiences in the natural environment with worship habituation and Qur'anic activities enables students to internalize Islamic values holistically, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Experiential and reflective learning has been shown to foster consistency in worship, deepen spiritual appreciation, and sustain social and ecological concern both at school and within the family. Thus, PSQ can be positioned as a nature-based PAI learning model that is relevant to the needs of contemporary Islamic education.

Based on these findings, future development of nature-based PAI learning should consider variations in context and student characteristics to ensure more adaptive implementation. Further research should be directed toward comparative studies to assess the effectiveness of PSQ in relation to other PAI learning models, as well as longitudinal studies to understand its long term impact on the formation of students' religious character. In addition, the controlled integration of religious technology is important to examine, so that learning remains relevant in the digital era without diminishing the depth of spiritual reflection. With these more specific recommendations, subsequent studies are expected to strengthen the design of nature-based PAI learning while providing a more comprehensive understanding of its contribution to contemporary Islamic education.

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