

Religious Education as a Safe Learning Space for Mental Health Support: A Multiple Case Study on Pedagogical Dimensions and Practices in Junior High Schools

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Abstract

Adolescent mental health is an urgent concern in junior high schools, yet the role of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) in supporting it remains underexamined. Existing studies emphasize instructional effectiveness, leaving everyday classroom dynamics-teacher-student relationships, atmosphere, and lived learning experiences largely unexplored. This study examined how PAI classes function as psychologically safe spaces and which mental health dimensions emerge most consistently in practice. A qualitative multiple-case study was conducted in three public junior high schools in Bandung, Indonesia (SMPN 4, 14, and 43), drawing on 17 classroom observations and interviews with 13 participants (five PAI teachers, three guidance counselors, and five students). Data were analyzed through an interactive model using hybrid coding that combined a priori categories with emergent subthemes. The analytic framework integrated an indigenous Islamic taxonomy with Keyes' Mental Health Continuum across spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological dimensions. Spiritual and emotional dimensions were most consistently present, whereas the psychological dimension appeared least often and required intensive, individualized engagement. Cross-case analysis revealed a core tension: a programmatic emphasis on spirituality coexisted with low internalization of values, exposing a gap between ritual and lived practice. Safe learning environments emerged where teacher innovation, school religious culture, and Sundanese-Islamic values converged, while peer dynamics and limited instructional time formed structural barriers beyond individual pedagogy. The findings reposition PAI as a pedagogical site for adolescent mental health support and call for school-level interventions targeting structural conditions rather than teacher initiative alone.

Keywords: Islamic religious education; adolescent mental health; safe learning environment; psychological well-being

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Introduction

At the Junior High School (SMP) level, students enter adolescence, a period marked by rapid physical and psychological changes. These changes often confuse and affect their emotional state.¹ Attention to students' mental health is a critical need in education: mental health is not only related to an individual's emotional state but also affects learning ability, social relationships, character development, and students' overall quality of life.

Research data support this urgency. The Indonesia-National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) shows that 34.9% of adolescents aged 10–17 experienced symptoms of mental disorders in the past 12 months without meeting the full diagnostic criteria, while 5.5% were diagnosed with a mental disorder.² The WHO reports that 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10–19 years experiences a mental disorder, with the most common forms being anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders.³ Academic pressure, social relationships, and family issues affect students' psychological well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, decreased concentration and academic performance, as well as the emergence of various health and social problems.⁴ Conversely, individuals with good mental health tend to feel safe and happy, engage in self-reflection, and exercise positive self-control.⁵ Mental health support, therefore, is a crucial component in fostering students' holistic development. Historically, one of the most influential figures in defining positive mental health was Jahoda,⁶ who defined it through six criteria: a positive attitude toward oneself, personal growth and self-actualization, personality integration, autonomy, an accurate perception of reality, and mastery of one's environment.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has great potential to play a role in fostering students' mental health. PAI not only imparts religious knowledge but also instills faith,

¹ Endah Tri Wisudahningsih, M Havid Aminudin, and Ivan Ramadhani, "Tahapan Perkembangan Remaja: Perspektif Psikologis Dan Implikasi Pendidikan," *IHSAN : Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 4 (2025): 1204–22, <https://doi.org/10.61104/ihsan.v3i4.2448>.

² Amirah Ellyza Wahdi, Siswanto Agus Wilopo, and Holly Elizabeth Erskine, "The Prevalence of Adolescent Mental Disorders in Indonesia: An Analysis of Indonesia - National Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS)," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 72, no. 3 (2023): S70, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2022.11.143>.

³ WHO, "Kesehatan Mental Remaja" (WHO: World Health Organization, 2025), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>.

⁴ Hans S M Salakory, Febby S Matulesy, and Rachel I Tauran, "Upaya Promotif Dalam Mengatasi Masalah Kesehatan Mental Pada Siswa SMA Negeri 26 Maluku Tengah," *JURNAL ALTIFANI: Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 4, no. 6 (2024): 487–96, <https://doi.org/10.59395/altifani.v4i6.574>.

⁵ Abdul Hamid, "Agama Dan Kesehatan Mental Dalam Perspektif Psikologi Agama," *Jurnal Kesehatan Tadulako* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.22487/htj.v3i1.34>.

⁶ Marie Jahoda, *Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health* (Basic Books, 1958).

builds character, and helps students understand and manage their lives in accordance with Islamic teachings.⁷ Islamic values such as *patience, trust in God, gratitude*, emotional control, and self-reflection taught in PAI classes are relevant to students' mental health development.⁸ Islamic Education (PAI) plays a role in supporting students' mental health through religious values and character building.⁹

This study employs an integrative theoretical framework for mental health. Substantively, this framework is based on a taxonomy developed by Muhammad Audah and Kamal Ibrahim, drawing on Al-Ghazali's thought, that identifies four dimensions of mental health: spiritual, psychological, social, and biological.¹⁰ This framework is expanded by adding an emotional dimension derived from Keyes's *Mental Health Continuum* model.¹¹, which specifically distinguishes emotional well-being as a separate dimension that cannot be reduced to the psychological dimension. This study uses five dimensions of mental health: spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological as an analytical framework established from the outset to map the dimensions and pedagogical practices of Islamic Education (PAI) in fostering students' mental health in junior high school.

Previous research has shown that Islamic values contribute to students' mental health. Hermansyah et al. demonstrated that emphasizing Islamic values such as patience, empathy, and mutual respect, as well as integrating coping and stress management activities into the learning process, can support students' mental health.¹² The findings of Mufida et al. suggest that a dialogic and narrative approach in Islamic Education (PAI) instruction, coupled with the PAI teacher's role, helps create a safe, inclusive learning

⁷ Sulistianingsih Sulistianingsih and et al., "Pengaruh Agama Terhadap Kesehatan Mental," *Edunity: Kajian Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan* 1, no. 1 (2022): 18–23, <https://doi.org/10.57096/edunity.v1i01.4>.

⁸ Khairunnisa Khairunnisa, Risma Dhia Rohadatul Aisy, and Sheila Hariry, "Pengaruh Keimanan Terhadap Ketahanan Mental Di Kalangan Remaja," *Jurnal Ilmiah Penelitian Mahasiswa* 3, no. 4 (2025): 749–58, <https://doi.org/10.61722/jipm.v3i4.1182>.

⁹ Muhamad Akip, Muhammad Yunus, and Sujarwo Sujarwo, "Keterkaitan Antara Pendidikan Agama Islam Dengan Pemahaman Konsep Kesehatan Mental Siswa," *Edification Journal: Pendidikan Agama Islam* 7, no. 2 (2025): 255–64, <https://doi.org/10.37092/ej.v7i2.997>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Shodiq Masrur and Azka Salsabila, "Peran Agama Dalam Kesehatan Mental Perspektif AlQuran Pada Kisah Maryam Binti Imran," *Islamika : Jurnal Keislaman Dan Ilmu Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (2021): 38–56, <https://ejournal.stitpn.ac.id/index.php/islamika/article/view/951>.

¹¹ Corey L M Keyes, "The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 43, no. 2 (2002): 207–22.

¹² Yus Hermansyah and et al., "Pendidikan Islam Dan Kesehatan Mental: Strategi Pengajaran Yang Berfokus Pada Kesejahteraan Psikologis Siswa," *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Sosial Humaniora* 8, no. 2 (2023): 195–200, <https://www.jurnal-lp2m.umnaw.ac.id/index.php/JP2SH/article/view/3439>.

environment that supports students' mental health.¹³ Rahmawati emphasizes that Qur'anic principles such as *tawakkal*, *ṣabr*, *dhikr*, *qana'ah*, *fitriah*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *ukhuwah*, and *istiqamah* enhance students' psychological resilience, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, spiritual well-being, and academic achievement, while reducing anxiety, depression, and stress.¹⁴ These studies generally emphasize the application of specific approaches or values, so they have not yet extensively examined how daily Islamic Education (PAI) learning practices can serve as a space for fostering students' mental health in schools.

The relationship between education and students' mental health has become a serious focus of academic research. Greenberg et al. demonstrate that schools play a strategic role in developing students' social-emotional competencies through the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach, which contributes to reductions in behavioral problems and improvements in mental well-being.¹⁵ Rassool asserts that Islamic psychotherapy possesses unique therapeutic potential because it integrates spirituality, religion, psychology, and cultural awareness into a single framework.¹⁶ Sahin views education as a holistic, embodied, and reflective process that facilitates human development and the transformation of the human condition in its psychological, spiritual, cognitive, moral, and emotional dimensions.¹⁷ These *three* studies provide a strong conceptual foundation. Still, none have specifically examined how the Islamic Education (PAI) subject in Indonesian *junior* high schools functions as a safe learning space for fostering mental health through the integrated dimensions of the spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological.

Previous literature tends to treat the contribution of Islamic Education (PAI) to mental health as the result of applying a single value or method. It rarely analyzes the *five*

¹³ Arizzatul Aulia Mufida, Moch. Charis Hidayat, and Ika Puspitasari, "Upaya Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Penanganan Kasus Verbal Harassment Untuk Menjaga Kesehatan Mental Siswa," *Al-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 1 (2025): 120–32, <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v10i1.2592>.

¹⁴ Roro Kurnia Nofita Rahmawati, "Pendekatan Qur'ani Dalam Menjaga Kesehatan Mental Siswa," *COGNITIVE: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran* 3, no. 1 (2025): 12–28, <https://doi.org/10.61743/cg.v3i1.101>.

¹⁵ Mark T Greenberg and et al., "Enhancing School-Based Prevention and Youth Development Through Coordinated Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning," *American Psychologist* 58, no. 6/7 (2003): 466–74, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.6-7.466>.

¹⁶ G Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Counselling and Psychotherapy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003453413>.

¹⁷ Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018): 335.

dimensions of mental health as an interconnected whole. Methodologically, existing studies are generally based on a single location and thus fail to capture variations in practices across school contexts. This study addresses *both* gaps by examining daily PAI instruction as a safe space for mental health promotion through an analysis of mental health dimensions and pedagogical practices across three junior high schools. This study posits that mental health promotion in PAI is shaped not only by instructional content but also by pedagogical relationships, classroom atmosphere, learning experiences, and teacher–student interactions in daily instruction.

In this study, a psychologically safe learning environment is defined as one conducive to students’ mental health development. This concept combines two frameworks: *first*, the concept of a “safe space,” which refers to an environment where individuals feel emotionally safe to express themselves without fear of judgment;¹⁸ *Second*, the concept of a “learning environment” in Vygotsky’s sociocultural tradition emphasizes the role of pedagogical interaction and collaboration between teachers and students in supporting individual development.¹⁹ Operationally, a safe learning environment encompasses four observable parameters: (1) a warm, empathetic classroom atmosphere free from psychological pressure; (2) supportive and teacher–student pedagogical relationships based on trust; (3) learning practices that integrate Islamic values with students’ emotional and psychological experiences; and (4) social interactions among students that foster a sense of acceptance and appreciation. These four parameters were the focus of observation in multiple case studies conducted at three junior high schools.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the dimensions of mental health fostered through Islamic Education (PAI) instruction, as well as teaching practices that support the development of students’ mental health in junior high school. Two research questions were formulated: (1) What mental health dimensions are fostered through PAI instruction in junior high schools, as viewed from an integrative framework encompassing spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological dimensions? (2)

¹⁸ Amy Edmondson, “Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1999): 350–83, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>.

¹⁹ Karim Shabani, Mohamad Khatib, and Saman Ebadi, “Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development: Instructional Implications and Teachers’ Professional Development,” *English Language Teaching* 3, no. 4 (2010): 237–48, <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v3n4p237>.

How do PAI teachers' pedagogical practices contribute to creating a safe learning environment for fostering students' mental health in junior high schools? This study is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions to the development of PAI instruction that is not only oriented toward academic and religious aspects but also serves as a space for the holistic development of students' mental health.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a safe space for fostering students' mental health in junior high school. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe the reality of the learning process naturally through direct engagement with the research subjects and situations. The research focuses on analyzing the dimensions of mental health fostered through PAI, as well as teachers' pedagogical practices in creating a learning environment that supports students' psychological well-being.

This study employs a *multiple* case study design. Referring to Yin's framework, "²⁰ This design was chosen because this study examines the same phenomenon, namely Islamic Education (PAI), as a safe learning space for mental health promotion across three different school contexts, thereby enabling cross-case analysis to identify consistent patterns as well as distinctive variations. Replication logic was used to strengthen the transferability of the findings, not to generalize statistically.

The researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. As a Muslim pursuing studies in Islamic Religious Education, the researcher has a personal and academic connection to the research subject. This position has the potential to introduce interpretive bias, namely, the belief that Islamic Religious Education contributes positively to students' mental health. To maintain analytical credibility, the researcher actively employed data source triangulation, peer debriefing with the supervisor, and member checking with participants. Additional instruments, such as observation guidelines and interview guidelines, were used to support this process.

Data collection was conducted using two main techniques: observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Observations were conducted directly during Islamic Education (PAI) learning activities to examine teaching strategies, teacher-student

²⁰ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018).

interactions, classroom atmosphere, and forms of mental health support that emerged during the learning process. The observation guidelines focused on four aspects: (1) classroom atmosphere and the psychological climate of learning; (2) pedagogical interactions between teachers and students; (3) PAI teachers' learning strategies and methods; and (4) students' emotional responses and engagement. Interviews were conducted with PAI teachers, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, and students to explore their experiences, perspectives, and learning practices related to mental health support. The interview guidelines for PAI teachers and Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers focused on: (1) teachers' understanding of and approach to students' mental health; (2) PAI materials or activities that incorporate spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological dimensions; (3) pedagogical strategies to support these *five* dimensions; (4) synergy between PAI teachers and BK teachers; and (5) challenges and support in creating a safe learning environment. The interview guidelines for students focus on: (1) their PAI learning experiences and their impact on students' emotional and psychological well-being; and (2) students' perceptions of the classroom atmosphere and their relationships with PAI teachers.

The study was conducted at SMPN 4 Bandung, SMPN 14 Bandung, and SMPN 43 Bandung. The *three* schools were selected purposefully using Yin's replication logic: all three share the same phenomenon, Islamic Education (PAI), as a space for mental health support, but differ in how they institutionalize religious and psychosocial support. SMPN 43 Bandung has a structured program that integrates PAI and counseling; SMPN 4 Bandung fosters a culture of "(religious life) through daily worship practices; while SMPN 14 Bandung emphasizes pedagogical innovations tailored to individual teachers' needs. These institutional variations allow for both literal replication (patterns that recur across schools) and theoretical replication (variations that contextual differences can explain), thereby strengthening the transferability of the findings.

Data collection took place from November 2025 to May 2026 and was conducted alternately at each school, in accordance with the Islamic Education (PAI) class schedule. During that period, the researcher conducted 17 PAI classroom observation sessions: 5 sessions at SMPN 4 Bandung (1 session with the *first* PAI teacher and 4 sessions with *the second* PAI teacher); 3 sessions at SMPN 14 Bandung; and 9 sessions at SMPN 43 Bandung (6 sessions with *the first* PAI teacher and 3 sessions with *the second* PAI

teacher). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, totaling 13 individuals: 5 PAI teachers, 3 guidance counselors, and 5 students. Each PAI teacher was represented by one student who was observed and interviewed, based on the student's direct relevance to the research focus and ability to provide in-depth information. Details of the participants per school are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of Research Participants by School and Role

School	Islamic Education Teacher	Counselor	Student	Total
Bandung Public Junior High School No. 4	2	1	2	5
Bandung Public Junior High School No. 14	1	1	1	3
Bandung Public Junior High School No. 43	2	1	2	5
Total	5	3	5	13

Data analysis using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña involves three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and concluding/verification. Coding is conducted in two stages. *First*, descriptive coding to identify relevant data units from interview transcripts and field observation notes.²¹ *Second*, thematic coding to group descriptive codes into more abstract themes. The coding scheme was hybrid: main categories were established a priori based on a five-dimensional mental health framework, while subthemes and specific indicators were allowed to emerge from the data. After conducting within-case analyses at each school, the researchers performed a cross-case analysis to identify consistent patterns and distinctive variations. Relationships between themes were constructed based on recurring patterns across all data sources and confirmed through triangulation.

The validity and credibility of the data were tested using Lincoln and Guba's criteria for trustworthiness,²² operationalized through source and method triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was conducted by comparing observational data and interview data to ensure the consistency of the findings. Member checking was conducted by asking participants to verify the interview results and the researcher's initial interpretations; participants confirmed the accuracy of the overall substance of the findings, with some adjustments to terminology so that the researcher's interpretations aligned with the terms deemed more appropriate by the participants. This clarification

²¹ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Washington: SAGE Publications, 2014).

²² Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (sage, 1985).

process strengthens the accuracy of the representation of the findings and prevents misunderstandings. The confirmability of the findings is reinforced by situating the research results in dialogue with relevant literature and prior studies.

Regarding research ethics, permission was obtained from the school before data collection began. All participants received an explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and benefits before giving their consent to participate. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequences. Participant confidentiality was maintained through anonymization: participants' names were replaced with codes when reporting results. Since some participants were students (minors), explanations and consent forms were provided in age-appropriate language and with the school's knowledge.

Results

Dimensions of Mental Health in Islamic Education (PAI) Learning in Junior High School

At the junior high school level, which coincides with the adolescent developmental phase, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) serves not only to convey religious material but also as a means of character building, emotional strengthening, and supporting students' mental development. Findings across schools indicate that the five dimensions spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological do not exist in isolation but dynamically support one another: the practice of worship strengthens the spiritual dimension, which in turn impacts emotional stability; psychological security built through teacher–student relationships creates space for social development; and an accurate understanding of biological processes reduces anxiety while simultaneously strengthening students' psychological self-confidence.

The most dominant spiritual dimension is fostered through Islamic Education (PAI). Religious practices such as congregational prayer, Duha prayer, reciting the Qur'an, dhikr, communal prayer, and religious reflection are considered capable of fostering inner peace, gratitude, patience, and self-control among students.

A PAI teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung (LUM) emphasized the importance of the affective and spiritual aspects:

“The outcome of PAI isn't just about cognitive intelligence; rather, I emphasize the affective and spiritual aspects. I always stress to the students I teach that it doesn't matter how high your grades are if they aren't accompanied by good character and

diligent worship.” (Interview with LUM, PAI Teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung, April 9, 2026)

A PAI teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung (IP) emphasized that the spiritual dimension involves the internalization of values, not merely rituals:

“The most important thing is the heart. *Idza shalihat* if the heart is pure, then *shalihat jasadu kulluh* the entire body will be pure. The mind resides within the heart. In Islamic studies, mental health is of great importance. How can Islamic education purify the human heart, make it pure, and free it from all spiritual ailments?” (Interview with IP, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung, March 9, 2026)

For students, the most memorable spiritual experiences are collective and contextual. A student at SMPN 14 Bandung (R) said:

“What left the deepest impression was when, during a Scouting activity, we went camping at school and recited the Quran together from Maghrib until Isha. And that really left a mark; while we were seeking rewards together, we were also creating shared moments.” (Interview with R, Student at SMPN 14 Bandung, April 2, 2026)

The emotional dimension is also heavily nurtured. In a safe, non-coercive learning environment, teachers help students recognize, manage, and express their emotions in healthy ways through activities such as self-reflection, muhasabah, educational games, icebreakers, and inspirational stories.

The PAI teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung (LUM) designed a “throwing trash” activity as a safe medium for emotional expression:

“By throwing away the trash, they admitted their mistakes. The papers weren’t signed or initialed, so I wouldn’t know who wrote them. It was enough to make them feel better. Some wrote long messages; they poured out their hearts.” (Interview with LUM, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung, April 9, 2026)

The Islamic Education teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung (SSM) internalizes the emotional dimension through narratives of Islamic history:

“I weave this into almost every lesson. When talking about Nasiruddin Humayun, who once ran away but didn’t give up, I ask the kids, “Have you ever felt like a failure?” Yes. Have you ever felt disappointed? Yes. Is it okay to cry? Yes. Is it okay for boys to cry? Yes. Sometimes there’s this stereotype that boys aren’t allowed to cry, aren’t allowed to be weak basically, boys have to be strong. That’s what I try to emphasize: boys and girls are the same, we’re all people. It’s okay to cry, it’s okay to get angry, and it’s okay to feel disappointed. But I give them some guidance, don’t let it last too long.” (SSM Interview, PAI Teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung, February 27, 2026)

The impact is evident in the testimony of a student at SMPN 43 Bandung (SSP):

“I used to have pretty unstable emotional control. But after studying PABP or PAI in junior high school, I’ve been able to control my emotions better; I’m more stable and calmer in my daily life.” (Interview with SSP, Student at SMPN 43 Bandung, April 22, 2026)

Psychological guidance is fostered through a supportive learning environment, helping students feel accepted and more open. A PAI teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung (LUM) views knowing students’ names as a form of psychological recognition:

“I’m the kind of person who easily remembers students’ names, because knowing their names is a form of deep appreciation and respect for them. When I call them by name, they feel happy because it shows that their teacher is paying attention to them and knows who they are.” (Interview with LUM, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung, April 9, 2026)

A PAI teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung (IP) applies an anti-labeling approach when dividing students into study groups to protect their psychological well-being:

“Students should not be grouped solely based on low grades. That is too discriminatory and will ultimately become a justification or a negative label. It will negatively impact the students’ mental health.” (Interview with IP, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung, March 9, 2026)

Teachers acknowledge that the psychological dimension is the most difficult to cultivate because students’ mental states are often not immediately apparent and require more in-depth attention.

The social dimension is fostered through PAI materials and activities that incorporate the values of tolerance, empathy, compassion, cooperation, and mutual respect. Students at SMPN 43 Bandung (SSP) have experienced the benefits of group activities:

“We were divided into groups and constantly shared information and also received information from our classmates. That helped me socialize better and also understand the lessons.” (Interview with SSP, Student at SMPN 43 Bandung, April 22, 2026)

These values are instilled through group discussions, peer tutoring, presentations, collaborative projects, and the practice of ethical behavior in daily school life.

Islamic Education (PAI) also fosters the biological dimension. Within the integrative framework of this study, the biological dimension does not refer to neurophysiological conditions in the medical-clinical sense as defined by the WHO, but rather to the Islamic understanding of the body as a trust (*amanah*), which encompasses awareness of physical changes, maintaining bodily purity (*thaharah*), and understanding physical boundaries in social interactions. Thus, the biological dimension in PAI is

understood as education about the body grounded in Islamic values, which helps students healthily accept their physical development without feeling inferior or confused.

A PAI teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung (LUM) described the integration of biological content with psychological considerations:

“Puberty is not just a transitional period, but a time when, in terms of religion, we are responsible for all our sins and all our religious obligations.” (LUM Interview, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 14 Bandung, April 9, 2026)

An Islamic Education teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung (SSM) added a psychological dimension to biological guidance by addressing the issue of stigma:

“There are parents who ask for help in explaining things to their son, so he doesn’t feel inferior, so he continues to believe that these biological changes are bound to happen, it’s just a matter of timing.” (Interview with SSM, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung, February 27, 2026)

This kind of guidance helps students accept the physical changes they are experiencing without feeling inferior or confused.

Islamic Education (PAI) Classes as a Space for Mental Health Support

Islamic Education (PAI) is conducted as a safe space through practices that are humanistic, reflective, collaborative, and focused on psychological well-being. Teachers serve not merely as conveyors of material, but as mentors who foster students’ emotional, social, and spiritual development.

Observations of 17 learning sessions at the three schools confirmed the findings from the interviews. Psychological safety appeared to be established from the very beginning. In Class 9D at SMPN 4 Bandung (February 27, 2026), the teacher began the lesson by checking students’ fingernail hygiene, asking them to tidy up the classroom, taking attendance, and then reciting the basmalah together, a sequence that precisely mirrored the practice of “preparing” students as described in the interviews. At SMPN 43 Bandung, several teachers consistently began their lessons by asking about students’ emotional states, noting who might be feeling down or unmotivated, and then leading them in clapping or cheering chants (class observations in 8F and 7G, April 21 and May 13, 2026). This type of opening serves both to assess psychological readiness and to establish the classroom as an emotionally safe space.

The observed interaction patterns reflect a non-judgmental pedagogical relationship. When students gave the wrong answer, the teacher tended to acknowledge their effort first before correcting them, rather than immediately scolding them (class

observation in 8E at SMPN 4 Bandung, March 31, 2026). During a quiz in class 8F at SMPN 14 Bandung (April 23, 2026), students who could not answer were not scolded; the question was redirected to another student. Reprimands were also gentle: in Class 7G at SMPN 43 Bandung (May 13, 2026), upon finding a student asleep, the teacher approached him, asked about his sleep the previous night, and then asked him to wash his face, a response that preserved his self-esteem rather than humiliating him. Personal recognition, through repeatedly calling students by name, was a common practice throughout the school as a form of psychological affirmation, for example, when a teacher offered encouragement by saying “good” along with the student’s name (observation in Class 8A at SMPN 14 Bandung, April 10, 2026).

Teachers’ concern for students’ individual well-being is also evident. In Class 8C at SMPN 4 Bandung (April 29, 2026), a teacher approached a student who looked lethargic, asked how she was doing, and offered her a break. The spiritual and affective dimensions are integrated with psychological well-being: peer-led Quran recitation at SMPN 43 Bandung was accompanied by the teacher’s explanation that reading the Quran can soothe the heart, especially for students who are feeling sad (observation in Class 7E, April 22, 2026). Some sessions concluded with students engaging in muhasabah, closing their eyes, seeking forgiveness, and reflecting on their actions as the most devout moment of the session. Affective closeness was also evident in the spontaneous cheers at the end of the lesson as an expression of gratitude to the teacher (observation of Class 7G at SMPN 43 Bandung, May 13, 2026). The four parameters of a safe learning environment, a warm classroom atmosphere, supportive pedagogical relationships, the integration of Islamic values with emotional experiences, and accepting social interactions were not only described in interviews but were also directly observed in practice.

A PAI teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung (IP) explained the basic principle:

“I’m serious but relaxed, not tense, not too formal in my language, and always smiling. I see myself not so much as a teacher but more as a facilitator.” (Interview with IP, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung, March 9, 2026)

An Islamic Education teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung (SSM) described efforts to create a sense of psychological safety before class begins:

“I check their fingernails. I want to instill in the students that when it comes to learning, they must be prepared and clean. Once the check is finished, I invite them to take their seats. We start by reciting the basmalah, so they’re ready. Then I also

ask who is absent and why.” (Interview with SSM, Islamic Education Teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung, February 27, 2026)

Students at SMPN 4 Bandung (SDPM) confirmed the atmosphere that had been created:

“It’s not only comfortable but also fun. It’s more like we’re not being forced but are always encouraged to remember the material. Our PAI teacher really pays close attention to us, so if anyone gets sleepy, she’ll redirect their focus to something else so they can refocus later.” (SDPM Interview, SMPN 4 Bandung Student, March 30, 2026)

Warm, relaxed, and non-judgmental communication fosters a sense of closeness, making students feel safe to interact and express their feelings. Islamic Education (PAI) instruction employs a variety of active strategies: Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), group discussions, presentations, role-playing, peer tutoring, debates, and creative projects such as videos or short films. These activities help students understand the material while also developing their confidence in speaking, teamwork, and social skills.

Guidance is also provided through reflective activities that help students recognize and manage their emotions. Some teachers incorporate learning reflections, self-reflection (*muhasabah*), simple contemplation, breathing exercises, and even symbolic activities, such as throwing away trash, to express feelings and release emotional burdens, providing a sense of relief, calm, and psychological comfort.

Learning is also designed to be inclusive of diverse abilities through initial diagnostic assessments, peer tutoring, remedial instruction, task adjustments, and individual support for students experiencing learning difficulties. Efforts are made to create a pressure-free environment so that students do not feel afraid, insecure, or left behind. Assessment in Islamic Education is not limited to academic achievement but also encompasses the learning process, attitudes, and behavioral development.

Cross-Case Analysis: Patterns and Variations Across Schools

The cross-case analysis identified two consistent patterns and three distinctive variations. First, all three schools prioritized the spiritual and emotional dimensions as the most dominant areas fostered through PAI, consistent with the statements of PAI teachers at SMPN 14 (LUM), SMPN 4 (AFT), and SMPN 43 (S). Second, all three faced similar challenges regarding the psychological dimension, which was the most difficult because character change does not happen instantly, and PAI class time is limited.

Variations are evident in how guidance programs are institutionalized. SMPN 43 Bandung demonstrates the most systematic institutional integration through its weekly ESQ (Emotional Spiritual Quotient) and Character Building 43 programs, featuring structured collaboration between guidance counselors and Islamic Education teachers. SMPN 4 Bandung stands out for its daily congregational Zuhr prayer, which is supervised by all teachers, thereby creating a religious cultural ecosystem that extends beyond classroom learning. SMPN 14 Bandung stands out for individual teachers' pedagogical innovations, particularly the PAI teacher's "throwing trash" activity as a medium for emotional expression.

Local Cultural Context in PAI Pedagogical Practices

The research was conducted in Bandung, West Java, within the context of Sundanese culture and its distinctive Islamic pedagogical traditions. The findings reveal several traces of Sundanese–Islamic values that influence the implementation of Islamic Education (PAI), although these are not always explicitly recognized by the informants. First, the 3S principle (smile, greeting, and greeting others) applied by the PAI teacher at SMPN 43 (S) reflects "*someah hade ka semah*" (being kind to others) as a pedagogical strategy to foster psychological safety. Second, the flexible use of the Sundanese language in explaining course material by the PAI teacher (IP) at SMPN 43 is not merely a communication strategy but a form of respect for students' cultural identity that reinforces their sense of safety and belonging. Third, the values of *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh* (mutual love, mutual enrichment, and mutual guidance) are reflected in the peer tutoring practices at these three schools.

The Strengths and Challenges of Islamic Education in Fostering Students' Mental Health

Field findings identified four key supporting factors. First, a humanistic and affective approach: the close teacher–student relationship makes students feel comfortable, safe, and valued, so they are more open, willing to express their opinions, and receptive to guidance. Second, a sustained religious culture at school through regular practices such as congregational prayer, ESQ, Quran memorization, charitable giving, and reflective activities that strengthen both spirituality and character. Third, varied and enjoyable learning practices such as discussions, creative projects, educational games, presentations, and peer tutoring can boost students' self-confidence, social skills, and

engagement. Fourth, collaboration among Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, homeroom teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators is supported by programs such as character education, student progress evaluation forums, and a bullying reporting system.

Discussion

These findings were further interpreted through dialogue with existing theories and previous research, covering the five dimensions of mental health, learning practices as safe spaces, cross-case patterns, local cultural contexts, and supporting factors.

Dimensions of Mental Health in PAI Learning

The holistic interconnection of the five dimensions is consistent with the views of Muhammad Audah and Kamal Ibrahim, who argue that, from an Islamic perspective, mental health is holistic and cannot be reduced to a single dimension.²³ Langgulong's thought also integrates Western psychology and Islamic values, so that an understanding of mental health cannot be separated from the spiritual dimension.²⁴

The emphasis on spiritual development through religious practices, in line with Islamic mindfulness rooted in muraqabah, zikir, and awareness of God's presence, has the potential to serve as a complementary therapy for mental health issues.²⁵ Qur'an recitation therapy is also effective in fostering inner peace, alleviating negative emotions, and instilling discipline in students through reciting verses before class.²⁶

Developing the emotional dimension through inspirational stories and reflective activities aligns with findings that storytelling about prophets and Islamic figures fosters empathy, self-control, and intrinsic motivation. In contrast, reflective learning through journaling, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions develops self-awareness and self-management.²⁷

²³ Masrur and Salsabila, "Peran Agama Dalam Kesehatan Mental Perspektif AlQuran Pada Kisah Maryam Binti Imran."

²⁴ Holida Munasti, Kamil Gulo, and Azizah Hanum, "Educational Thought of Hasan Langgulong," *Edu-Riligia: Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam Dan Keagamaan* 8, no. 4 (2024): 455–73, <https://doi.org/10.47006/er.v8i4.20878>.

²⁵ Safinatun Naja, "Mindfulness Islami Alternatif Untuk Terapi Modern," *Nihayah Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2025): 123–41, <https://doi.org/10.65802/nihayah.v1i2.12>.

²⁶ Diah Ayuni and Muhamad Rifa'i Subhi, "Pengabdian Masyarakat: Mengelola Emosi Dan Terapi Membaca Al-Qur'an Untuk Meningkatkan Kualitas Diri Pada Siswa MI 01 Walisongo Paesan," *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Bangsa* 3, no. 3 (2025): 909–14, <https://doi.org/10.59837/jpmba.v3i3.2331>.

²⁷ Ridwan Hermawan and et al., "Dimensi Kecerdasan Emosional Siswa Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam: Tinjauan Teori Goleman Dan Salovey," *Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 2, no. 3 (2025): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.61132/hikmah.v2i3.1250>.

Teachers' acknowledgment that the psychological dimension is the most difficult to foster aligns with research indicating that the success of Islamic Education (PAI) is influenced by the psychological safety of a supportive, dialogic, and mutually respectful teacher–student relationship, which encourages participation, the courage to express opinions, and openness in learning.²⁸

In the social dimension, interactive, contextual, and Islamic-values-based approaches are effective in developing students' empathy, tolerance, communication skills, cooperation, and social responsibility.²⁹ Islamic Education teachers play a crucial role in shaping social skills through leading by example, instilling Islamic values, and contextual learning supported by value-based discussions, religious social projects, and shared reflection.³⁰

Guidance on biological aspects is important because adolescents' understanding of and attitudes toward the physical changes of puberty influence their acceptance of their bodily development; therefore, educational support tailored to their developmental needs is required.³¹

Religious Education (PAI) Classes as a Safe Space

The practice of building close, warm, and nonjudgmental relationships aligns with Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, which emphasizes empathy, positive acceptance, and warmth in teacher–student relationships to create a humanistic classroom climate that supports reflection on religious experiences,³² as well as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which emphasizes the fulfillment of the need for security and the need for esteem.³³ Student-centered humanistic learning strategies, with the teacher as a facilitator, a warm

²⁸ Achmad Qusyairi Mahfudi and et al., "Keteladanan Guru PAI Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Keamanan Psikologis Siswa Dalam Pembelajaran," *ALMUSTOFA: Journal of Islamic Studies and Research* 2, no. 2 (2025): 529–43, <https://ejournal.bamala.org/index.php/almustofa/article/view/641>.

²⁹ Jamaluddin Hanapi and et al., "Pengembangan Keterampilan Sosial Siswa Melalui Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Sekolah Menengah," *Sulawesi Tenggara Educational Journal* 5, no. 1 (2025): 376–84, <https://doi.org/10.54297/seduj.v5i1.1121>.

³⁰ Didin Sirojudin, Siti Sholihatin Ulumiyah, and Mohammad Dendy Mustofa, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Mengembangkan Keterampilan Sosial Siswa Di MTs Al-Ihsan Kalijaring," *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidik Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2025): 97–111, <https://doi.org/10.56916/jipi.v4i1.2051>.

³¹ Ade Rahayu Prihartini and Maesaroh Maesaroh, "Hubungan Antara Tingkat Pengetahuan Dan Sikap Remaja Awal Terhadap Perubahan Fisik Masa Pubertas Pada Murid Kelas VIII Di SMP N 1 Plumbon Kabupaten Cirebon," *Jurnal Menara Medika* 2, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

³² Carl R Rogers and H J Freiberg, "Freedom to Learn," *Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill*, 1970.

³³ Abraham Maslow and K J Lewis, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," *Salenger Incorporated* 14, no. 17 (1987): 987–90.

classroom atmosphere, and spiritual practices, have been shown to enhance students' self-awareness, understanding of worship, empathy, and noble character.³⁴

The active learning strategies observed in the field are supported by findings that Project-Based Learning makes Islamic Education (PAI) interactive and collaborative and enhances students' understanding of Islamic values, learning outcomes, critical thinking skills, and creativity. Through inquiry, collaboration, application of concepts, and self-assessment, students are encouraged to engage in deeper learning and actively seek solutions.³⁵

Teachers' reflective activities align with findings that reflective learning in Islamic Education enhances spiritual intelligence, as evidenced by self-awareness, prayer skills, decision-making based on religious values, and social empathy.³⁶

Inclusive learning with peer guidance and a relaxed atmosphere can boost students' motivation and self-confidence.³⁷ Thus, learner-centered strategies such as humanistic, differentiated, collaborative, project-based, and reflective approaches provide space for autonomy, meaningfulness, and social support, thereby fostering positive mental health while improving the quality of learning, classroom climate, and interpersonal relationships at school.³⁸

Findings across cases suggest that the success of PAI as a safe learning space depends not only on institutional programs but also on teachers' individual capacities. This variation confirms the relevance of a multiple-case study design, as differing patterns across schools would not be revealed through a single-site study.

³⁴ Ahmad Komarudin and et al., "Strategi Pembelajaran PAI Berbasis Psikologi Humanistik Untuk Mengembangkan Kecerdasan Spiritual Siswa," *IQRO: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 3 (2025): 1032–45, <https://doi.org/10.24256/iqro.v8i3.8533>.

³⁵ Ahyar Rasyidi, "Optimalisasi Pembelajaran PAI: Strategi Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek Untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Siswa Di Sekolah," *Universal Explorations In Research* 1, no. 1 (2024): 16–35, <https://barkah-ilmu-fiddunya.my.id/ojs/index.php/uer/article/view/64>.

³⁶ Yuli Savithri, Parianto Parianto, and Mustapa Mustapa, "Pengaruh Model Pembelajaran Reflektif Dalam Meningkatkan Kecerdasan Spiritual Siswa Pada Mata Pelajaran PAI Di SMP Alhikmah Medan," *JURNAL MUDABBIR: Journal Research and Education Studies* 5, no. 2 (2025): 786–92, <https://doi.org/10.56832/mudabbir.v5i2.1255>.

³⁷ Lutfi Almadani, Zainap Hartati, and Neela Afifah, "Implementasi Metode Tutor Sebaya Dalam Mengatasi Kesulitan Membaca Al-Qur'an Siswa Di SMKN 4 Palangka Raya," *Jayapangus Press Kamaya: Jurnal Ilmu Agama* 8, no. 4 (2025): 153–65, <https://doi.org/10.37329/kamaya.v8i4.4972>.

³⁸ Julinda Siregar and et al., "Strategi Pembelajaran Dan Kesehatan Mental Guru Dalam Lingkungan Pembelajaran Yang Positif," *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar (JIPDAS)* 5, no. 4 (2025): 4524–31, <https://doi.org/10.37081/jipdas.v5i4.4272>.

The local cultural context enriches our understanding of how indigenous values shape the implementation of PAI. Mental health support through PAI is not universal or generic; rather, it is influenced by the specific cultural context in which the practice takes place.

Strengths: Humanistic Approach, Religious Culture, and Institutional Collaboration

Implementing Islamic Education (PAI) as a safe space presents both supporting factors and challenges. Among the factors supporting a humanistic approach, religious culture, and institutional collaboration, the closeness of the teacher–student relationship emerged most consistently across all cases. The personal relationships teachers build encourage students to speak up, accept guidance, and engage actively. At the same time, an emotionally safe classroom environment reduces academic stress and reinforces a sense of being valued.³⁹ Within Vygotsky’s framework, this closeness serves as affective scaffolding that broadens *the zone of proximal development* not only cognitively but also emotionally and spiritually.

The school’s religious culture reinforces character development through structured routines. Congregational prayer, ESQ, Quran memorization, and charitable giving are not merely rituals; through consistent repetition, these programs shape character. Similar activities, such as muhadharah, tahfidz, and congregational Duha prayer, have been shown to foster self-confidence, calmness, and psychological well-being among students.⁴⁰ A coherent religious program, therefore, serves a dual function: spiritual and psychoprophylactic.

A variety of learning practices, such as discussions, creative projects, educational games, presentations, and peer tutoring, strengthen self-confidence and social skills. In contrast, active learning boosts motivation and the ability to manage academic stress.⁴¹ Collaboration among Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, homeroom teachers, and school

³⁹ Rifal Kurniawan Jaki and et al., “Pengaruh Filsafat Pendidikan Humanistik Terhadap Kesejahteraan Psikologis Dan Kepuasan Belajar Mahasiswa Di Universitas Bina Bangsa,” *JIMAD: Jurnal Ilmiah Mutiara Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (2025): 11–23, <https://doi.org/10.61404/jimad.v3i1.358>.

⁴⁰ Ummu Habibah Rahmah and et al., “Pembinaan Kesehatan Mental Peserta Didik Melalui Kegiatan Keagamaan,” *Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy* 4, no. 3 (2022): 687–93, <https://doi.org/10.51214/bocp.v4i3.203>.

⁴¹ Anisa Masyitoh, Cindy Aulia Safmi, and Gusmaneli Gusmaneli, “Peran Guru Dalam Membangun Kepercayaan Diri Siswa Melalui Pembelajaran Aktif Di Kelas Dasar,” *JERD: Journal Educational Research and Development* 1, no. 2 (2024): 89–95, <http://jurnal.globalscients.com/index.php/jerd/article/view/58>.

counselors complements this support structure. A guidance counselor at SMPN 4 Bandung explained:

“The key factor is that all of this works because the teachers can collaborate... they share a common trait, which is caring for their students” (LNS, February 27, 2026)

A shared sense of care among educators, which serves as the operational foundation of the school’s mental health support system, does not arise spontaneously but results from a consciously cultivated institutional culture.⁴²

Structural Barriers: Time, Student Heterogeneity, and the Ritual-Internalization Gap

The barriers faced by PAI teachers are not a matter of individual motivation or competence. Time constraints force teachers to divide their attention between curricular material and affective guidance. At the same time, large class sizes make individual mentoring a significant challenge, a point commonly noted in the literature on school mental health.⁴³

The heterogeneity of the students adds to the pressure. Differences in family backgrounds, emotional states, and social patterns lead to varied responses to the teacher’s approach. A PAI teacher at SMPN 4 Bandung described the limitations:

“The main obstacle is definitely the students’ closed-off attitude; in the end, I can only ask questions, but they don’t answer” (AFT, February 23, 2026)

This gap indicates that fostering mental health through PAI requires a differentiated approach that goes beyond the capacity of a single teacher in a single session.

The peer environment is often overlooked in discussions about safe learning spaces. A student at SMPN 14 Bandung described it as follows:

“That discomfort arises when the classroom atmosphere isn’t supportive, some students are still chatting, and others aren’t respectful” (R, April 2, 2026)

The safety of the learning environment is not determined by teachers alone; social dynamics among students also shape it. Interventions that target only teacher competence will have a limited impact if classroom social norms are not also managed.

The most fundamental gap lies between ritualistic practices and the internalization of values. A PAI teacher at SMPN 43 Bandung stated:

⁴² Mufida, Hidayat, and Puspitasari, “Upaya Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Penanganan Kasus Verbal Harassment Untuk Menjaga Kesehatan Mental Siswa.”

⁴³ Abdul Basit and Azahra Hardi Cusinia, “Efek Pengabaian Kesehatan Mental Siswa Di SMA Negeri 2 Sungai Penuh: Tanggung Jawab Sistem Pendidikan Atau Keluarga?,” *JAIPTEKIN: Jurnal Aplikasi IPTEK Indonesia* 5, no. 3 (2021): 114–22, <https://doi.org/10.24036/4.351167>.

“The most difficult aspect is the spiritual dimension. Sometimes the students go through the motions of the rituals but are unable to apply them... The greatest challenge with the students isn’t at the cognitive level, but at the affective level” (IP, March 9, 2026)

This is the age-old dilemma in moral and religious education: the gap between knowing and being. Intensive religious programs do not guarantee the internalization of values, because internalization operates on a different level than ritual participation.

Conclusion

This study yields three conceptual contributions that go beyond simply confirming that Islamic Education (PAI) contributes to students’ mental health. These three contributions enrich the pedagogy of PAI and Islamic educational psychology by shifting the focus from “whether PAI contributes” to “how and under what conditions that contribution is formed.”

First, this study proposes and validates an integrative five-dimensional framework of mental health in the context of Islamic Education (PAI): spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and biological, which combines the indigenous Islamic taxonomy (Audah-Ibrahim-Al-Ghazali) with Keyes’s taxonomy. This framework demonstrates that the *five* dimensions are not independent of one another but rather dynamically support one another: spiritual strengthening through the practice of worship impacts emotional stability, while psychological security built through pedagogical relationships creates space for social development. This proposition goes beyond the dominant linear, dimension-by-dimension model found in previous Islamic education literature.

Second, this study introduces the concept of a psychologically safe learning environment as an analytical framework for understanding how Islamic Education (PAI) functions as a context for mental health support. Findings from multiple case studies at three junior high schools in Bandung indicate that a psychologically safe learning environment does not emerge automatically through institutional programs, but rather through a combination of individual teachers’ pedagogical innovations, a sustained school religious culture, and local cultural values. Consequently, the effectiveness of PAI in fostering mental health is determined more by the quality of pedagogical relationships than by the content of the curriculum alone.

Third, the cross-case analysis identified a tension not anticipated in the literature. The spiritual dimension most dominant in the program is, in fact, the most difficult to

internalize due to the gap between ritual and the lived experience of values. This finding challenges the common assumption that the intensity of religious practice is directly proportional to the depth of spiritual development and opens up a new research agenda on how to bridge that gap pedagogically.

Based on these *three* contributions, this study recommends: (1) the development of a psycho-spiritual competency rubric for PAI teachers that explicitly integrates the ability to read students' emotional states, design safe expressive activities, and manage the tension between cognitive demands and affective needs; (2) the institutionalization of structured collaboration between PAI teachers and guidance counselors rather than ad hoc collaboration such as the ESQ program, which has proven effective at SMPN 43 Bandung; and (3) follow-up research using a longitudinal mixed-methods approach to measure the extent to which safe PAI learning experiences impact measurable mental health indicators in the long term, moving beyond the momentary perceptions that constitute a limitation of this study.

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