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ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING AND DATING BEHAVIOR: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SYMBOLIC STRATIFICATION AT SMP "PEONY PUTIH"

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and religious behavior, particularly during early adolescence. However, the reality within schools reveals a gap between the ideal objectives of PAI instruction and students' actual social practices, one of which is dating behavior. This study aims to analyze the implementation of PAI instruction, the forms and tendencies of students' dating behavior, and the factors that contribute to the normalization of dating as a common practice at SMP "Peony Putih". The research employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving ten students from grades VII–IX (five who were dating and five who were not), one guidance and counseling teacher, and one PAI teacher, selected purposively. The findings indicate that PAI instruction is conducted in an orderly and structurally effective manner at the cognitive level; however, it has not fully succeeded in internalizing values within the affective and behavioral domains. Dating behavior is not merely understood as a personal relationship but as a social practice that constructs recognition and symbolic stratification within student interactions. The normalization of dating is influenced by peer norms, intergenerational imitation, social symbols, and implicit institutional tolerance. The study further reveals the presence of social stratification among students based on dating status, where those who are dating tend to gain higher social recognition within school interactions. Moreover, the dating culture at SMP "Peony Putih" is found to be strong and collective in nature, limiting the capacity of Islamic Religious Education messages to counterbalance its influence on students' social behavior.
Keywords: *Learning, Islamic Religious Education, Behavior, Dating.*

Abstrak

Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) memiliki peran strategis dalam membentuk karakter dan perilaku religius siswa, khususnya pada masa remaja awal. Namun, realitas di sekolah menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan antara idealitas pembelajaran PAI dan praktik sosial siswa, salah satunya perilaku berpacaran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pelaksanaan pembelajaran PAI, bentuk dan kecenderungan perilaku berpacaran siswa, serta faktor yang menyebabkan pacaran menjadi praktik umum di SMP "Peony Putih". Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi terhadap sepuluh siswa kelas VII–IX (lima berpacaran dan lima tidak berpacaran), satu guru BK, serta satu guru PAI, yang dipilih secara purposive. *Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran PAI berjalan dengan tertib dan efektif secara struktural dan kognitif, namun belum sepenuhnya berhasil menginternalisasikan nilai pada ranah afektif dan perilaku. Perilaku berpacaran tidak hanya dipahami sebagai relasi personal, melainkan sebagai praktik sosial yang membentuk pengakuan dan stratifikasi simbolik dalam pergaulan siswa. Normalisasi pacaran dipengaruhi oleh norma teman sebaya, peniruan antarangkatan, simbol pergaulan, serta toleransi implisit sekolah. Temuan penelitian mengungkap adanya stratifikasi sosial*

antarsiswa yang dibentuk melalui status berpacaran, di mana siswa yang berpacaran cenderung memperoleh pengakuan sosial lebih tinggi dalam pergaulan sekolah. Selain itu, arus budaya pacaran di SMP "Peony Putih" terbukti cukup kuat dan bersifat kolektif, sehingga pesan-pesan pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam belum mampu menghalau kuatnya arus budaya pacaran tersebut dalam membentuk perilaku sosial siswa.
Kata Kunci: *Pembelajaran, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Perilaku, Pacaran.*

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education is an integral part of the national education system and functions to nurture individuals so that they have faith, piety, and noble character.[1] In junior high schools, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in building students' character by instilling various Islamic values integrated into the curriculum and learning activities.[2] Islamic Religious Education serves not only as a means of conveying religious knowledge cognitively but also as an instrument of comprehensive moral, spiritual, and social formation. This is in line with the main function of education, namely to shape personality and attitudes grounded in religious values and to equip students with life skills relevant to the challenges of the times.

Legally, the position of PAI in the national education system also has a strong basis, particularly Article 12, paragraph (1), point a of Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that every student has the right to receive religious education in accordance with his or her religion, taught by educators of the same religion. This provision shows that PAI has both pedagogical and legal legitimacy as an instrument for shaping students' character. However, this legitimacy does not automatically guarantee that the religious values taught are truly internalized in students' behavior.

In its implementation, PAI learning is designed not only to provide a theoretical understanding of Islamic teachings but also to encourage the application of these values in everyday life.[3] Core subjects such as *fiqh*, *aqidah*, *akhlaq*, and the history of Islamic culture are understood not merely as learning content but as media for instilling applicable Islamic ethics and

1 Husni Hamim Ahmad et al., "Pengertian, Landasan, Tujuan Dan Kedudukan PAI Dalam Sistem Pendidikan Nasional," *Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah* 4 (2022): 214–25, https://doi.org/10.17467/jdi.v4i2.899.

2 Siti Rohmaniah et al., "Strategi Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka Untuk Pembentukan Karakter," *Jurnal Taujih* 7 (2025): 72–85.

3 Dahlawi Fath Jumadi et al., *Pengaruh Pendidikan Agama Islam Terhadap Moral-Moral Remaja*, (Bogor), 2025.

morality.[4] Therefore, the success of PAI learning cannot be measured only by the implementation of learning, administrative completeness, or students' cognitive achievement, but also by the extent to which the values taught are internalized in their attitudes and behavior. This issue is important amid adolescent life, which is caught up in cultural change, social media, and increasingly complex peer relations. In this context, one social phenomenon now widespread among junior high school adolescents is dating behavior.

This issue is relevant in the context of early adolescence, the phase experienced by junior high school students, namely the transition from childhood to adulthood,[5] which is marked by biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes.[6] In this phase, adolescents begin to build more mature interactions with the opposite sex.[7] In this situation, dating is often understood as a relationship between two individuals formed through interaction and shared activities,[8] as well as a process of getting to know each other's character, strengths, and weaknesses.[9] Dating among early adolescents is related not only to the need for affection but also serves as a space for adolescents to position themselves among their peers. Relationships with the opposite sex can serve as a means of trying out ways of presenting oneself, testing self-confidence, and building connections with one's social circle. Dating is therefore not only a phenomenon of individual development but also a social practice influenced by friendship, social media, and the changing control of religious values in adolescent life.

In the Islamic view, relations between men and women are directed toward a legitimate relationship through marriage,[10] so dating is positioned as a religiously problematic practice.[11] However, in the lives of school adolescents, dating appears not only as a violation of prevailing norms but also as part of the dynamics of student relations. Closeness with the opposite sex is often related to the need to feel present and visible in one's circle of friends, so dating can become one of the ways adolescents build their self-image and position themselves within peer relations.

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[4] Amanda Trianita et al., "Analisis Karakteristik Materi Fikih Di Berbagai Jenjang Pendidikan Pada Kurikulum Merdeka," *Student Research Journal* 2 (2024): 162–74, https://doi.org/10.55606/srjyappi.v2i6.1635.

[5] Melyana Safitri, "Pengaruh Masa Transisi Remaja Menuju Pendewasaan Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Serta Bagaimana Mengatasinya," *Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Sosial* 30, no. 1 (2021): 21–26, https://doi.org/10.17509/jpis.v30i1.29495.

[6] Tati Nurhayati, *Perkembangan Perilaku Psikososial Pada Masa Pubertas*, 2016.

[7] Khamim Zarkasih Putro, "Memahami Ciri Dan Tugas Perkembangan Masa Remaja," *Aplikasia: Jurnal Aplikasi Ilmu-Ilmu Agama* 17, no. 1 (2017): 25–32.

[8] Mary Kay DeGenova and F. Philip Rice, *Intimate Relationship, Marriage and Family* (McGraw Hill, 2005).

[9] Ekasari Fatma Mia et al., "Pengalaman Pacaran Terhadap Remaja Awal," *Wahana Inovasi: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Masyarakat UISU* 8, no. 1 (2019).

[10] Halim Setiawan, "Pernikahan Usia Dini Menurut Pandangan Hukum Islam," *Borneo: Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 59–74.

[11] Ayu Puspita Sari et al., "Pemahaman Terhadap Larangan Mendekati Zina (QS. Al-Isra' Ayat 32) Pada Mahasiswa PAI Yang Berpacaran Di UIN Fatmawati Soekarno Bengkulu," *Ghaitsa: Islamic Education Journal* 3 (2022).

Dating among students at SMP "Peony Putih" reflects patterns of adolescent relations that cannot be separated from social pressure in the peer environment. Based on initial observation, about 40% of students admitted to being in a dating relationship, mostly with peers in the same grade and a small number with older students. The forms of interaction also vary, from communication through social media and going out together to meetings in public areas around the school, although some students still try to avoid excessive physical contact. This condition suggests that having a boyfriend or girlfriend has shifted in function: it is no longer merely a matter of feelings but has become a kind of status marker in adolescent relations. Differences in attitudes and behavior between students who date and those who do not are also quite evident. Students in romantic relationships tend to be more confident and active in social interaction, whereas students who do not date often feel socially left behind, appear quieter, and are at times insecure among their peers. Interestingly, the picture tends to be reversed in academic terms: students who do not date tend to maintain better focus on learning because they are not absorbed by the emotional dynamics of romantic relationships, and many of them are able to maintain consistent achievement in class. This shows that dating at school has complex and uneven implications for each student, both socially and academically, so the phenomenon needs to be understood more deeply through a relevant theoretical framework.

Erik Erikson calls adolescence the stage of *identity vs. role confusion*, in which individuals actively form a self-image through the various social roles they try out, including romantic relationships.[12] When the school implicitly allows or even tolerates this practice, adolescents find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is socially acceptable and what is normatively justified.

In line with this, Elizabeth B. Hurlock describes puberty as a turbulent period, both physically and emotionally. Attraction to the opposite sex that emerges in this phase is natural, but precisely for that reason it is prone to developing beyond the limits justified by religion and society, especially when there is no adequate guidance.[13] The two perspectives complement each other: Erikson emphasizes the drive to form a social identity as underlying dating behavior, while Hurlock explains the biological and emotional changes of puberty as conditions that reinforce this tendency. Both lead to the same conclusion: dating behavior at secondary school age is not merely a matter of moral choice but also a product of development that has not yet fully matured. Therefore, what is needed is education that not only teaches prohibitions but also helps adolescents understand themselves and internalize Islamic values as part of their identity.

[12] Ratu Fajrina Julieta, *Perkembangan Kepribadian Manusia Sejak Kecil Hingga Dewasa Menurut Pandangan Erik Erikson*, 2022.

[13] Elizabeth B. Hurlock, *Psikologi Perkembangan: Suatu Pendekatan Sepanjang Rentang Kehidupan*, trans. Istiwidayanti and Soedjarwo (Jakarta: Erlangga, 1980).

Dating behavior among junior high school students is an increasingly important issue to study, given that adolescence is a transitional period marked by various psychological, social, and emotional changes. Several studies have therefore discussed the relationship between dating, religiosity, and PAI learning, but with varying focus and scope. A study at MTsN 1 Palembang showed that Islamic Religious Education serves as the foundation for building students' religious character in preventing deviant behavior, including dating, truancy, and smoking. This role is realized through the habituation of worship, Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), religious activities, and cooperation among PAI teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, parents, and the school. However, the study did not describe learning strategies responsive to the social dynamics of today's adolescents, nor did it present data specifically showing the effectiveness of PAI in dealing with dating behavior.[14] Meanwhile, a study at MAN 1 Manado found that dating can lower students' academic achievement and religiosity. However, it did not explicitly link these findings to the PAI learning process as a school subject, so the relationship between classroom learning practices and changes in student behavior could not be explained.[15] A study at SMA Negeri 3 Selong explained that dating can affect students' learning outcomes, especially in Islamic Religious Education and Character (*Budi Pekerti*). Dating can lower students' learning outcomes in this subject through reduced focus, motivation, and study time, which affects academic achievement. Nevertheless, the study also found that interest, ability, and environment remain more dominant factors in determining learning outcomes, so the relationship between dating and PAI learning is not a single, direct one.[16]

These three studies basically view dating within the frame of religiosity, morality, and academic achievement. Such a focus is important, but it also shows a limitation: dating tends to be understood as moral deviance, so it has not been analyzed as a social practice embedded in adolescents' daily lives. In addition, these studies have not fully explained why dating behavior persists, even in schools that have formally implemented PAI learning in an orderly manner. Yet, in peer relations, dating can bring social recognition within one's circle of friends. This aspect appears to have received little attention, especially at the junior high school level.

Observations at SMP "Peony Putih" show that PAI learning has taken place under relatively ideal conditions. This is evident from the implementation of the lesson schedule, the consistent attendance of competent teachers, high student attendance, and the orderly conduct of

[14] Ana Marlia, *Pentingnya Pendidikan Agama Islam Sebagai Fondasi Anak Didik Di Sekolah: Studi Kasus Siswa Yang Suka Bolos Sekolah, Merokok Dan Pacaran Di MTSN 1 Palembang*, 2023.

[15] Mohammad S. Rahman et al., "Perubahan Perilaku Religiusitas Akibat Pacaran Bagi Peserta Didik Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Model 1 Manado," *Journal of Islamic Education: The Teacher of Civilization*, 2020.

[16] Suriyani, *Pengaruh Berpacaran Terhadap Hasil Belajar PAI Dan Budi Pekerti Siswa Di SMA Negeri 3 Selong*, 2023.

daily and semester tests. However, amid these well-organized learning conditions, dating behavior remains widespread and is accepted as part of the students' peer culture. This indicates a gap between the formal implementation of PAI learning and the reality of student behavior at the level of practice.

Based on this research gap and phenomenon, this study interprets the dating behavior of junior high school students not as a personal relationship or individual moral deviance but as a social practice that forms symbolic stratification in student relations. Dating is understood as a form of social recognition capital that can affect students' positions in the structure of peer relations, even though PAI learning has been structurally well implemented. This phenomenon prompted the researchers to conduct a more in-depth study of the relationship between PAI learning and dating behavior among junior high school students. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is PAI learning implemented at SMP "Peony Putih"? (2) What are the forms and tendencies of dating behavior among students? (3) Why has dating behavior become a common tendency among students at SMP "Peony Putih"?

To understand students' dating behavior more comprehensively, the researchers examined the levels of this behavior, from mild forms to behavior considered worrying. The researchers also explored the factors influencing dating behavior at school, such as peer influence and a peer culture long rooted among students. By examining all these indicators, this study is expected to provide a complete picture of the two phenomena, PAI learning and students' dating behavior at SMP "Peony Putih", and to formulate learning strategies that are more contextual, responsive, and adaptive to the social realities students face.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to understand students' experiences of dating behavior and PAI learning at SMP "Peony Putih". It adopted descriptive phenomenology based on the thought of Edmund Husserl, which aims to understand students' *lived experience* in interpreting interactions with the opposite sex and the influence of PAI values on their social lives. This approach was chosen because it can explore the meaning of the experiences of students, both those who date and those who do not, in interpreting interactions with the opposite sex and the PAI learning process at school. In the research process, the authors applied the principle of *epoché* or *bracketing*, that is, suspending the researchers' personal assumptions so that students' experiences could be understood as they lived them. Through this approach, the study also sought to reveal *intentionality*, namely students' awareness of the social experiences they undergo, and to find the *essence of experience* related to dating in student relations at school. The research also focused on changes in the experience of students who

previously had no desire to date but, after entering this school environment, felt an urge or desire to do so.

The research was conducted in stages from June 16 to December 19, 2025, allowing the researchers to engage in field *immersion* to understand the dynamics of social interaction among students in greater depth. Research subjects were identified through initial interviews with students in grades VII, VIII, and IX to distinguish those who were dating from those who were not. Informants were selected by *purposive sampling*, that is, the deliberate selection of subjects based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives.[17] On this basis, 10 students were selected as informants, consisting of five students who were dating and five who were not, together with one PAI teacher and one guidance and counseling teacher, who also served as research informants.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine the forms of social interaction among students, including individual and group behaviors and actions occurring in the school environment. The study also attended to students' communication, both face-to-face and through social media, and observation covered the situations that formed and the use of symbols in their social interactions. Interviews were conducted with students and the PAI teacher to explore experiences, perceptions, and the influence of dating behavior on the learning process. Documentation in the form of attendance records, grades, and learning activity archives was used as supplementary data. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, by comparing information from students who were dating, students who were not, the PAI teacher, and the guidance and counseling teacher, and by combining the results of observation, interviews, and documentation to ensure the accuracy of the information. The data were then analyzed using the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises four main components: data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification.[18] Condensation was carried out from the outset to filter and focus relevant information; the data were then presented as thematic narratives so that patterns and relationships among findings could be identified more easily. Initial conclusions were drawn and verified by comparing data sources to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings. This approach supports an in-depth, comprehensive, and continuous analytical process.

[17] M. Sofatur Rizky Nuralim and Yani Aguspriyani, "Teknik Pengambilan Sampel Purposive Dalam Mengatasi Kepercayaan Masyarakat Pada Bank Syariah Indonesia," *Neraca Manajemen, Ekonomi* 3, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.8734/mnmae.v1i2.359.

[18] Matthew B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Sage, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Learning at SMP "Peony Putih"

SMP "Peony Putih" is a junior high school under an Islamic educational institution, founded in 2010. The school's vision is to excel in achievement, to be skilled and independent, and to have noble character. This vision is realized through academic strengthening, skills development, and the internalization of Islamic values in all educational activities. In the academic year in which this study was conducted, the school had 169 students in grades VII, VIII, and IX. The school has also expelled students for violating rules related to peer relations, because those students engaged in dating relationships that exceeded the limits of school regulations and prevailing norms, resulting in personal situations that required special handling. This shows that Islamic Religious Education plays an important role as the subject that forms the basis for building students' character and religious attitudes.

Learning is essentially an integral part of the educational process. It can be defined as a process, way, and act of making human beings, as living creatures, learn.[19] In education, learning is understood as planned interaction among educators, students, and learning resources in a learning environment that is designed, implemented, and evaluated systematically so that learning objectives can be achieved effectively and efficiently.[20] Accordingly, PAI learning is oriented not only toward delivering religious material but also toward the internalization of Islamic values, which are expected to be reflected in students' attitudes and behavior.[21]

The implementation of PAI learning at SMP "Peony Putih" shows a relatively well-organized process, both in planning and in implementation. This is worth discussing because in educational practice it is often assumed that well-run religious learning will correspond directly to the formation of students' religious behavior. However, in early adolescence, the process of value internalization does not always proceed linearly. PAI learning therefore cannot be understood merely from the implementation of teaching and learning activities in the classroom but also from the extent to which the religious values taught can be applied in students' daily lives. To examine this, the first step is to review the curriculum that underlies the implementation of learning at the school.

In terms of curriculum, the school implements the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum), with time allocation adjusted by grade level. PAI is allocated 3 lesson hours per week for grades VII, VIII, and IX. This allocation reflects an adjustment of the learning load and

19 Sudirman et al., *Proses Belajar Dan Pembelajaran* (Media Sains Indonesia, 2023).

20 Saringatun Mudrika et al., *Perencanaan Pembelajaran Di Sekolah: Teori Dan Implementasi* (Pradina Pustaka, 2021).

21 Dzulfikar Akbar Romadlon et al., "Developing Progressive Islamic Aqidah Teaching Materials for Middle School Students," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 5, no. 3 (2023): 681–98, https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v5i3.3335.

depth of material to the students' level of development. Conceptually, the Independent Curriculum directs learning to focus on students' core competencies, material relevant to their lives, and character building through meaningful learning activities.[22] At SMP "Peony Putih", implementation does not stop at the formal structure, because the school adds a religious strengthening policy through the BTQ (*Baca Tulis Al-Qur'an*, Qur'an reading and writing) program, with 2 lesson hours per week held on days other than the PAI schedule. The addition of BTQ can be understood as the school's effort to improve students' ability to read the Qur'an while helping them better understand and apply religious values in daily life.[23] This shows that, structurally, the school not only provides religious learning as a core subject but also seeks to strengthen students' religious habituation through additional programs.

Besides the curriculum, the strength of PAI implementation is also evident in the character and role of the educators involved. Based on the researchers' observation, PAI is taught by two female teachers with bachelor's degrees in the relevant field. They differ in teaching experience: the senior PAI teacher has about 15 years of experience and the junior PAI teacher about four years. This difference affects how the teachers deliver lessons and uphold values and rules in the classroom. The senior teacher tends to be firmer and more willing to admonish student behavior considered inconsistent with religious norms and school rules, so her moral guidance function is more explicit. Meanwhile, the junior teacher relies more on polite and persuasive communication, engaging students through dialogue and discussion. This pattern is consistent with the view that teaching experience can affect teachers' confidence in enforcing norms and correcting behavior.[24] PAI guidance is also evident in teaching about the limits of interaction with the opposite sex and in direct reprimands to students found alone together in pairs. This shows that PAI implementation is oriented not only toward delivering material but also toward guiding student behavior. However, these efforts do not automatically guarantee the internalization of values in daily behavior.

In terms of implementation, PAI learning at SMP "Peony Putih" is disciplined and consistent. The PAI teachers are recorded as always present during lessons, and student attendance is relatively high. Students find the lessons fairly interesting because the methods used are varied and contextual. A learning method can be defined as a way of implementing a prepared

22 Ryanjani Lila Anggraita et al., "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Di Sekolah Dasar: Kajian Literatur," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9, no. 3 (2024), https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v9i03.16731.

23 Halimatuzzakiya Afnaz and Zaini Dahlan, "Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Religius Siswa Melalui Pembiasaan Dalam Baca Tulis Al-Qur'an," 3, no. 2 (2024): 194–98, https://doi.org/10.59342/jgt.v3i2.

24 Engelina Salainti and Alan Hubert Frederick Sanger, "Teachers' Strictness and Its Impact on Learning Outcomes," 6, no. 2 (2024): 309–19.

lesson plan in real activities so that learning objectives can be achieved optimally.[25] Teaching methods help determine the success or failure of a learning process and are an integral part of an instructional system. Therefore, the choice of methods in PAI learning must receive serious attention from religious educators, since this subject is oriented not only toward mastery of material but also toward shaping students' religious attitudes and behavior.

The implementation of these methods can be seen, for example, in the topic of ablution (*wuḍū'*), in which the teacher uses supervised hands-on practice, so that students not only understand the concept theoretically but also master the procedure of worship correctly. Meanwhile, for Qur'an and Hadith topics, the teacher applies *Problem-Based Learning* (PBL) by raising issues currently prevalent at school, such as bullying. Through this approach, students are directed to identify problems, formulate solutions based on the values of the Qur'an and hadith, and produce learning products such as digital posters. Problem-based learning can increase students' active participation while fostering moral awareness.[26] Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these methods in shaping students' moral awareness still depends on how the teacher manages discussion and value reflection, so that learning is not merely normative but can engage with the social realities students face.

Learning is supported by fairly adequate facilities and infrastructure. Teachers use LCD projectors and laptops as learning media, while classrooms are equipped with air conditioning and fans for comfort. Learning media play an important role in supporting teaching and learning, because learning media are anything that can be used to convey messages or learning materials so as to stimulate students' attention, interest, thoughts, and feelings in learning activities to achieve particular learning objectives.[27] Such a conducive physical environment helps students maintain concentration and minimizes distraction during learning. Several studies confirm that a comfortable learning space contributes to student engagement, although its role is more that of a supporting factor than a primary determinant of successful value internalization.[28] Good facilities increase the likelihood that learning runs smoothly, but they do not automatically ensure that religious values are translated into student behavior. This makes clear that the main problem in this study lies not in a lack of facilities or weak technical implementation of learning, but in the

[25] Nur Hafzhiyah Hasibuan et al., "Optimalisasi Pembelajaran Melalui Pendekatan, Strategi, Metode Dan Teknik Pembelajaran," *Counselia: Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (2024): 202–13.

[26] Suhirman et al., "Problem-Based Learning with Character Emphasis and Naturalist Intelligence: Examining Students' Critical Thinking and Curiosity," *International Journal of Instruction* 14, no. 2 (2021): 217–32.

[27] Syamsiani, "Transformasi Media Pembelajaran Sebagai Penyalur Pesan," *Cendekia: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Bahasa Dan Pendidikan* 2, no. 3 (2022).

[28] Elizabeth Simbolon et al., "Analisis Dampak Lingkungan Kelas Terhadap Konsentrasi Belajar Siswa," *Irsyaduna: Jurnal Studi Kemahasiswaan* 5, no. 1 (2025): 116–28.

limited transformative power of learning when confronted with the social reality that students construct outside the classroom.

In terms of learning attitudes and academic achievement, students respond relatively positively to PAI learning. This is evident in their seriousness in following lessons, their orderliness in completing assignments, and the regular conduct of daily and semester tests. The average PAI score is around 80, which generally reflects mastery of material in the cognitive domain. The implementation of PAI learning at SMP "Peony Putih" can thus be considered good administratively, pedagogically, and academically. However, these achievements do not fully correspond to students' behavior in daily life. Although the teachers have taught the limits of interaction with the opposite sex and provided direct guidance, indications of interaction that exceeds norms are still found. This shows a gap between the success of PAI learning in the cognitive domain and the internalization of values in the affective and behavioral domains.

Forms and Tendencies of Dating Behavior among Students at SMP "Peony Putih"

Human beings are social creatures who need others to interact, communicate, and cooperate. Because individuals cannot live entirely alone, social relations are a basic need that supports emotional and psychological well-being.[29] This need for closeness and more personal relationships then appears in various forms, one of which is a relationship with the opposite sex. DeGenova and Rice define dating as a relationship in which two people meet and engage in activities together to get to know each other, focusing on a process of exploration and mutual understanding before taking more serious steps. In early adolescence, such relationships are generally not yet oriented toward long-term commitment but toward getting to know each other and obtaining emotional support. Hurlock emphasizes that dating in adolescence is often related to the need for affection and the drive for social acceptance, so the dynamics of the relationship can be influenced by emotional maturity and self-control that are still developing.

Adolescent dating is understood not only as a relationship status but is manifested in a range of behaviors. At a mild level, dating is usually shown through more intense attention to one's partner, such as chatting more often and waiting for each other after school, while physical contact is still avoided because of shyness, school norms, or social control from the surrounding environment. However, when the relationship becomes more intense and supervision weakens, behavior can shift to more serious forms, such as seeking secluded places to be alone together, using dark or empty classrooms, or even openly displaying physical closeness. Dating behavior can thus be influenced by the intensity of the relationship, self-control, and the social situation, so

[29] Arman Hanafi and Muhammad Yasin, "Upaya Memperkuat Hubungan Sosial Dalam Kehidupan Bermasyarakat," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan & Sosial* 1 (2023): 51–62.

the line between what is acceptable and what is excessive often becomes blurred for students who are still emotionally unstable.

This phenomenon is also evident in the lives of students at SMP "Peony Putih". Based on observation, students' dating behavior occurs both outside and inside the school environment. Some students maintain relationships outside school hours, especially during holidays, meeting their partners near their homes. However, some students also take advantage of gaps in the school environment to date, such as during breaks or when classrooms are empty because most students are in the canteen. In terms of participants, dating occurs mostly among peers, especially among students in grades VIII and IX, although some students date older students. Dating interactions take place not only in person but also through social media. One student was known to call his or her partner "sayang" (darling) in an online conversation, which was then posted as a screenshot to an Instagram story. In addition, more serious dating behavior was also found, such as the interaction of a grade IX couple in class during free time, in which the male student lay with his head in the female student's lap. Some couples also use certain symbols in their relationships, such as matching couple key chains, which function as markers of relationship status and social identity.

The tendency to date among students at SMP "Peony Putih" is closely related to external factors, especially peer group influence and a peer culture that forms unwritten norms. One field finding shows a dating relationship influenced by social judgment: a grade IX female student dated a classmate because she was perceived as having certain attractions, such as an attractive appearance and good academic achievement, while her partner was not particularly outstanding academically. This pattern indicates that adolescent dating is not driven solely by emotional closeness or rational considerations but by social perception, reputation, and the need for recognition from one's circle of friends. Dating can thus be understood as a social practice produced by the logic of social acceptance in peer groups. Romantic relationships are interpreted not only as personal emotional relationships but also as a means of forming identity and social position in school relations. Dating status is often perceived as a symbol of maturity and existence, thereby conferring a certain social legitimacy on the students involved. As a result, the meaning of dating shifts from a personal relationship to a symbolic practice with social value in the dynamics of student relations.

The pursuit of social recognition among students at SMP "Peony Putih" shows differences in position within the structure of peer relations. Field findings show that dating behavior does not stand as a merely personal experience but is integrated into a layered structure of peer relations, producing differences in the level of recognition and social position among students. This condition can be understood through the concept of social stratification. According

to Soerjono Soekanto, social stratification is the differentiation of members of society into hierarchical layers, each with an unequal position in the social structure.[30] These differences in position are not always based on economic factors but may also stem from prestige, honor, and social recognition that develop in everyday interaction. Soekanto emphasizes that social stratification is universal and always found in social life, both in society at large and in smaller social groups, including the school environment. In this study, social stratification is understood as symbolic stratification that is informal and contextual, not as the rigid structural stratification found in society in general. In the context of student relations, social stratification is formed through social judgment and recognition among individuals, such as the level of popularity, involvement in friendship groups, and the status attached to certain behaviors. This stratification consists of several hierarchical layers that are dynamic and interrelated.

Based on field findings, this layered structure can be identified in several social layers of students that show differences in the position and meaning of dating behavior in school relations. **The first layer** is occupied by students who are dating and also belong to a clique (*geng*). In this layer, dating is interpreted not only as a personal emotional relationship but also as social capital that strengthens the individual's position in the structure of peer relations. A grade IX female student said that since she started dating she felt better known at school: "Yes, sis, I'm better known now, because my boyfriend is friendly, so a lot of people know I'm his girlfriend." This statement shows that she gained wider social recognition after entering a romantic relationship with a student who already had a strong social network, even though she had previously had an attractive appearance and adequate academic standing. This indicates that romantic relationships serve as a mechanism of social validation and a symbolic strategy for enhancing one's existence, in line with Soekanto's view of prestige as a source of differentiation in social position. At the same time, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the choice to enter such a relationship also reflects a *habitus* formed through the internalization of the school's social structure, in which closeness to popular students is regarded as valuable. The male partner's social capital, in the form of a wide network of friends and closeness to teachers and school staff, is converted into symbolic capital in the form of fame and recognition, which in turn strengthens the female partner's social position in school relations.

The second layer is occupied by students who are dating but do not belong to a clique. This group interprets dating more simply as a personal relationship without any orientation toward strengthening group status. A grade IX male student stated that for him dating is just "liking each other" and does not need to be shown off to others. Nevertheless, dating status still has psychological effects in the form of self-confidence and enthusiasm for school. However, the

[30] Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar* (Raja Grafindo Persada, 2012).

absence of clique affiliation means that the social recognition obtained is limited and does not grow significantly in the dynamics of school relations.

The third layer is occupied by students who are not dating but belong to a clique. In this structure, social recognition is obtained not through romantic relationships but through affiliation with a popular group. A female student said that she had become known because of her closeness to popular friends: "Yes, sis, because my friends are pretty famous, I'm also fairly well known because I hang out with them." The social identity of students in this layer is formed through group solidarity and the intensity of togetherness, showing that cliques function as an alternative source of symbolic status for students who do not date.

The fourth layer is occupied by students who neither date nor belong to a clique. This group tends to be outside the center of school social dynamics. Some students consciously choose this position for reasons of religious values and academic focus. One female student stated, "From religion lessons I know that dating is not recommended, so I try to keep myself in check." The consequences of this choice are low popularity and certain social labels, such as being considered *kurang gaul* (not socially savvy). Nevertheless, this stance reflects value-based resistance to the dominant norms of student peer culture. Overall, this division of social layers shows that dating behavior at SMP "Peony Putih" is related not only to affective relationships but also functions as a mechanism for forming social status. Dating, clique membership, and the level of social recognition form a hierarchical system that influences how students understand themselves and position themselves in the school's social environment.

The structure of social layers formed in student relations does not develop freely but exists within the institutional space of the school, which has its own norms, rules, and control mechanisms. Therefore, to understand the dynamics of dating behavior fully, it is important to examine how the school responds to and manages this social practice through the roles of teachers and the prevailing guidance system. The school's response to students' dating behavior shows a pattern of guidance and control carried out through the different roles of teachers in the school structure. Field findings show a relational distance between the senior PAI teacher and students, while the junior PAI teacher has closer interaction with students because of more frequent involvement in daily school activities, so students tend to be more open in sharing personal problems. One student said, "It's usually easier to talk to the younger teacher, because she's more relaxed and doesn't scold you right away." However, in the context of rule violations, particularly those related to dating, the senior PAI teacher occupies a more dominant controlling position because she has the formal authority to record violations and give corrective advice. In practice, the senior teacher reprimands students directly when she finds them dating at school, especially when it is done openly and is considered disruptive. If the behavior is repeated or exceeds the

limits of school regulations, control continues through the issuance of a warning letter (*Surat Peringatan*, SP) with a duty stamp and summoning parents for joint guidance. This pattern shows that the handling of dating behavior at SMP "Peony Putih" takes place through a graduated control mechanism that combines a persuasive relational approach with formal administrative authority according to the level of the violation.

Dating Behavior as a Common Tendency among Students at SMP "Peony Putih"

Learning at school is basically directed at shaping students' attitudes and behavior in harmony with moral and religious values, including in regulating relations with the opposite sex. However, in school life, students' behavior is determined not only by the normative understanding gained through formal learning but also by the social dynamics that develop in daily interaction. In early adolescence, peer influence, examples of behavior visible in the school environment, and mechanisms of social acceptance play an important role in shaping students' patterns of relations.[31] It is in this context that dating behavior needs to be understood as a social phenomenon that does not stand alone but is closely related to peer culture, social recognition, and the practices of tolerance that develop at school.

From the time they enter grade VII, new students are gradually exposed to a school climate of peer relations that has normalized dating, both through practices visible in students' daily lives and through unwritten norms that develop in peer groups. This climate shapes students' early perception that dating is a normal part of school peer culture, even before they have a critical understanding of the religious values and school rules that govern it. In this context, dating behavior does not emerge as an individual phenomenon but develops as a social pattern passed down across student cohorts through imitation of the behavior of older students, which is perceived as normal practice in school relations.

In this study, dating behavior is understood as a form of social relationship between adolescent boys and girls that involves emotional closeness and the recognition of a certain status in the social environment. Dating is an interpersonal relationship among adolescents characterized by attraction, emotional closeness, and the desire to be recognized by the social environment.[32] In the school context, dating relationships are not merely personal but are laden with social meaning because they relate to acceptance and an individual's position in the peer group.

The findings show that dating behavior at SMP "Peony Putih" does not appear as an isolated individual phenomenon but develops as a social pattern passed down across student cohorts. Students perceive dating as a practice that has long existed and recurs from one cohort to

[31] Gilang Ramadhan et al., "Dinamika Psikososial Dalam Perkembangan Remaja: Studi Kasus Pada Pengaruh Teman Sebaya," *Religi: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 1 (2025): 1–8.

[32] Andi Tiara Nurul Izzah Fathia and Erna Herawati, "Pengalaman Dan Makna Pacaran Pada Mahasiswa: Studi Fenomenologi," *Umbara Indonesian Journal of Anthropology* 8 (2023).

the next. This understanding is formed mainly through direct observation of the behavior of older students who display dating relationships at school. One respondent stated that dating "has been around for a long time, it's been passed down," and that younger students consider the behavior permissible because they are "imitating the older students." This finding is reinforced by students' experiences of seeing older students visit their partners' classrooms during breaks or display physical closeness in the school canteen, which are then interpreted as normal and acceptable behavior.

Analytically, this condition shows the workings of social imitation (*observational learning*), namely a process of behavioral learning that occurs when students observe the actions of others who are considered more influential or of higher social position, without having to experience the consequences of that behavior directly.[33] In the context of SMP "Peony Putih", older students function as role models because they are perceived as more experienced and as having symbolic authority in the school's social structure. When the dating behavior they display is repeatedly visible in daily school life, accepted by those around them, and not met with firm consequences, younger students interpret it as normal and worth imitating. This process explains how dating is learned not through formal instruction but through concrete examples in daily social interaction, so that it is reproduced repeatedly across cohorts.

This condition is also consistent with Cialdini's theory of social norms, particularly the concept of *descriptive norms*, namely the tendency of individuals to adjust their behavior to what appears common and dominant in their social environment.[34] In a situation where dating is frequently seen among many students, especially older ones, the behavior creates the perception that dating is a common and accepted practice, even though it contradicts the school's written rules. Descriptive norms formed through what is "often seen" then become more influential than *injunctive norms* in the form of prohibitions or formal advice, encouraging students to follow behavior considered ordinary among their peers. This mechanism explains why dating can persist and strengthen as an informal social tradition in the structure of school relations.

As this pattern strengthens, dating becomes increasingly normalized through the use of language and symbols in students' daily interactions. Terms of endearment, relationship-status posts on social media, and couple symbols function as symbolic practices that mark students' identity and social status. Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a medium that constructs a social reality in which dating appears normal, modern, and expected. From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality, such symbolic

33 Sisin Warini et al., "Teori Belajar Dalam Pembelajaran," *Anthor Education and Learning Journal* 2 (2023): 566–76.

34 Robert B. Cialdini, "Descriptive Social Norms as Underappreciated Sources of Social Control," *Psychometrika* 72 (2007): 263–68.

practices reinforce the legitimacy of dating as part of school adolescent culture while creating social expectations for students who are not yet dating.[35]

This normalization is further reinforced by mechanisms of appreciation and social recognition. The data show that students who date tend to be better known and receive more attention among their peers. Dating status is interpreted as a symbol of maturity, courage, and personal attractiveness, while students who do not date risk being labeled *kurang gaul* (not socially savvy). Sociologically, this phenomenon can be explained through Soekanto's concept of social stratification, in which dating functions as a form of symbolic capital that differentiates students' social positions. Dating is thus not only a personal relationship but also a means of gaining social existence, which encourages students to maintain their relationships in order to preserve their status in the peer group.

Although dating has been normalized as a dominant social practice in student relations, field findings show that not all students are involved in it. The non-involvement of some students is influenced by several individual and structural factors. One prominent factor is the strong bulwark of family norms that instill religious values, moral control, and limits on interaction from an early age, giving students value resilience in facing the peer culture that develops at school. In addition, some students socially lack access to dating relationships, whether because they do not have the physical attractiveness considered ideal by student standards, lack outstanding academic or non-academic achievements, or have limited economic capital. This indirectly places these students outside the mainstream of dating culture, even though they remain within a school social environment that normalizes the practice.

On the other hand, the strengthening of dating culture is also influenced by school rules and the sanction mechanisms applied. Interviews with the guidance and counseling teacher show that dating is normatively categorized as a violation of school rules because the students are still pupils. Violations are handled through a graduated system of warning letters (SP) as a form of formal school control. At the first stage, students involved in dating receive a first-level warning (SP 1) in the form of a summons to the guidance and counseling office, a reprimand, and advice, accompanied by religious assignments such as memorizing a surah and writing out Surah Yāsīn. This stage is intended as initial guidance so that students recognize their mistake and stop dating without involving their parents. If the violation is repeated, the school issues a second-level warning (SP 2), marked by summoning parents and having the student sign a statement with a duty stamp, along with closer supervision of the student's behavior. A third-level warning (SP 3) applies if the student continues to violate the rules after the two previous stages, with the strictest

[35] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books, 1991).

sanction being expulsion from school. Although the sanction mechanism has been structured in clear stages, students' experiences show that dating continues, often secretly after a reprimand.

Analysis of this condition reveals a gap between formal and informal norms. Handling that at the early stages emphasizes persuasive guidance and is not always accompanied by directly felt social consequences leads students to interpret dating as a minor violation. In the perspective of Herbert Jacob's deterrence theory,[36] the effectiveness of behavioral control depends heavily on the certainty and consistency of sanctions, not merely on the severity of punishment. When sanctions are not perceived as certain, students' informal norms become more dominant. Research on school discipline in Indonesia also shows that inconsistent rule enforcement can reduce student compliance and encourage covert strategies of violation, thereby indirectly creating a space of social tolerance toward dating. This shows that behavioral control through formal school rules has not been fully able to match the strong influence of students' social norms, so the moral and religious values taught through PAI learning face structural challenges in being internalized into students' actual behavior.

In this context, the influence of PAI learning faces structural challenges. Although students understand the prohibition of dating cognitively, PAI values, which are normative and individual, are often overwhelmed by the collective current of peer culture. This is consistent with Hurlock's view that adolescents are in a phase of emotional development and identity seeking, making them more vulnerable to the influence of their social environment. Research in Indonesia also shows that peer conformity has a significant influence on adolescents' relational behavior, including dating.

Overall, dating behavior at SMP "Peony Putih" appears as a common tendency because it is passed down through intergenerational imitation among students, normalized through the language and symbols of peer relations, reinforced by social recognition, and sustained by implicit tolerance in the enforcement of school rules. These findings show that although PAI learning has been carried out structurally and cognitively as it should be, the normative messages it contains have not been able to counterbalance the strong current of dating culture that develops in student relations. Dating can therefore be understood as a structured social phenomenon with a collective influence that surpasses the internalization of religious values at the level of students' practice.

CONCLUSION

PAI learning at SMP "Peony Putih" is structurally and pedagogically well implemented, as shown by the orderliness of the learning process, the competence of the educators, the variety of methods, and students' academic achievement in the cognitive domain. However, the findings

36 Herbert Jacob, "Deterrent Effects of Formal Sanctions," *Law & Society* 2, no. 1 (1980).

show that these achievements have not fully resulted in the successful internalization of values in the affective and ethical domains. Field realities show that dating remains a common and accepted practice in student peer culture. Dating is interpreted not only as a personal relationship but functions as a social practice that shapes students' recognition and position in the structure of peer relations, creating a gap between the normative religious understanding taught through Islamic Religious Education and students' behavior at the level of everyday practice.

An important finding of this study is that the culture of dating at SMP "Peony Putih" is strong and collective, forming a dominant norm in student relations. Under these conditions, the value messages contained in PAI learning have not been able to counter the strong current of dating culture, even though students understand them cognitively. Peer norm pressure, mechanisms of imitation across cohorts, and the normalization of dating as a symbol of social prestige mean that PAI values, which are individual and normative, are often overwhelmed by the collective force of peer culture.

The factors that make dating behavior a common tendency among students are shaped by the strong influence of the social environment, especially collective peer norms and mechanisms of imitation across student cohorts. The normalization of dating is reinforced by symbolic practices, the use of peer language, and implicit tolerance in the enforcement of school rules, so that dating is perceived as a normal and prestigious practice. The novelty of this study lies in its interpretation of dating as a social practice that forms students' symbolic stratification, rather than merely as individual moral deviance.

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