

The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Empowering Students' Mental Health in the Post-Covid-19 Era

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ABSTRACT

Motivated by the profound global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector, specifically in elementary schools, a multitude of new policies have been implemented to address the challenges presented by online learning. Consequently, students often experience fatigue and a waning sense of enthusiasm, necessitating further adaptations amidst the ongoing pandemic. This research endeavors to investigate the efforts undertaken by Islamic education teachers to safeguard the mental health of students during this unprecedented era. The study primarily focuses on the perspectives of Islamic education teachers in elementary schools within the Cilacap district. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and examination of relevant documentation. The researchers employed various analytical techniques, including data reduction, data presentation, and verification of data conclusions, to scrutinize the research findings. The study underscores that Islamic education teachers possess a profound understanding of the vital importance of nurturing students' mental health. They assume a critical role in fostering well-being amidst the pandemic's trials and aftermath. These roles encompass acting as role models, providing constructive guidance, implementing engaging teaching methodologies, fostering effective communication between teachers and students' guardians, promoting positive habits, offering motivational praise, and employing disciplinary measures when necessary. The study concludes with recommendations for the government, educational authorities, and Islamic education teachers to integrate these aforementioned roles into their strategies, particularly at the elementary school level, to safeguard and promote students' mental health.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has persisted for over two years, with recent occurrences of several cases. Its impact on students, particularly those in elementary schools, has been predominantly negative (Steinmayr et al., 2022). Online learning has deprived students of the opportunity to interact with their peers, resulting in behavioral changes as they are compelled to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. However, as of early September 2021, face-to-face learning has gradually been reintroduced in various regions deemed safe, including several elementary schools in the Cilacap district. Consequently, students are once again required to adjust to in-person instruction after two years of remote learning. Such circumstances significantly affect the emotional and psychological well-being of students, leading to decreased concentration, increased irritability, heightened fatigue, and diminished enthusiasm for learning. If not promptly addressed, this situation can impede students' growth and emotional well-being. The successful implementation of face-to-face learning policies necessitates robust support from the school environment, families, and the students themselves (Adiyono, 2021).

The maintenance of mental health within the school environment is a top priority for all members of the educational institution. It is essential to have religious education teachers who possess a deep sense of dedication and awareness. These teachers bear the responsibility of nurturing the students' mindset, ensuring they remain in a positive state. As students progress through their educational journey, they accumulate various experiences that shape their personality through what they hear, see, and the behaviors they observe. The process of molding their character is intricately intertwined with activities that promote mental development.

The elementary school serves as the foundation for shaping students' character and mindset, representing their first opportunity for personal development outside the realm of parental education. Within the context of elementary education, the cultivation of religious consciousness in students also holds paramount importance. The effectiveness of an Islamic Education teacher in fostering students' mindsets greatly hinges upon their ability to serve as a positive role model. By embodying virtuous qualities, these teachers can instill a favorable attitude towards religion in students, equipping them with the adaptability needed to thrive in new environments and enabling them to navigate the various challenges commonly encountered during the early stages of development. Through their experiences in elementary school, students have the potential to cultivate a resilient mindset that will serve them well into the future (Pratama & Alamsyah, 2022).

In Indonesia, numerous public figures have begun emphasizing the significance of prioritizing students' mental well-being, gradually raising awareness that mental health is just as crucial as physical health. Students with a sound mindset are more likely to adapt easily and remain highly engaged, recognizing that a robust physical condition goes hand in hand with a healthy mental state. Mental health holds the utmost importance for individuals across the board (Grover et al., 2020).

Although the Covid-19 pandemic continues to unfold, there is positive news regarding a decline in reported cases. Schools have initiated the implementation of face-to-face learning as a new solution and challenge for both students and teachers. Prior to this shift, elementary school students had to adapt to learning amidst the pandemic's constraints. Now, students are required to adhere to health protocols and resume a bustling routine of school activities, a significant departure from the previous online learning format. Researchers conducted research revealing various difficulties encountered by students in six elementary schools within the Cilacap district as they adjusted to this new learning environment during the ongoing pandemic. For elementary school students, adaptation to a novel setting is far from effortless. Many students are unprepared to fully participate in learning activities, exhibiting signs of boredom, irritability, difficulty concentrating, challenges with social interaction, and even a lack of enthusiasm towards the learning process. The primary objective of this study centers on investigating the mental health of elementary school students.

Numerous studies have been conducted pertaining to the mental health of students within educational institutions. A comprehensive study was conducted to explore mental health challenges faced by students, particularly high school students, during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the development of practical solutions to address these issues (Thakur, 2020). Additional studies center around examining the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, primarily attributed to the various limitations imposed on human mobility. The study delves into a discussion of the detrimental effects on students' mental health and subsequently proposes a range of measures that should be considered to alleviate these consequences. These include devising strategies to combat feelings of isolation, fostering social connections despite physical distancing measures, and intervening in cases of violence involving children or their families. It is crucial to recognize that certain segments of society may face barriers in reporting such incidents, thereby emphasizing the significance of proactive intervention. Another study aimed to assess the efficacy of the quarantine program from the perspective of young individuals during the COVID-19 period (Tang et al., 2021), and another study examined the mental well-being of students upon their return to school following the pandemic, highlighting the importance of schools implementing a comprehensive approach that addresses the heightened stress levels experienced by students. The study recommended schools adopt targeted strategies tailored to individual student needs, ensuring a universal response to effectively support their mental health (Schwartz et al., 2021).

Building upon prior research as outlined earlier, this study differentiates itself by specifically exploring the role of Islamic religious education teachers in fostering students' mental health within elementary schools amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted in multiple elementary schools located in the Cilacap district.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed, specifically utilizing the case study method to investigate the perspectives of Islamic education teachers within elementary schools situated in the Cilacap district. The case study method proves instrumental in comprehending intricate phenomena within specific contexts, encompassing several distinct stages such as establishing a foundation, pre-field entry, data collection in the field, and reporting (Rashid et al., 2019). The findings of this research manifest in the form of descriptive data comprising written narratives derived from in-depth interviews. The primary objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the roles undertaken by Islamic education teachers in elementary schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic within the Cilacap district.

The data collection methods employed in this research encompassed several approaches. Firstly, environmental observations were conducted at elementary schools within the Cilacap district, focusing on the learning process of Islamic education amidst the pandemic. These observations served as an initial means of data collection. Secondly, in-depth interviews were conducted, enabling researchers to gather valuable insights regarding the roles fulfilled by Islamic education teachers in fostering students' mindset during the COVID-19 pandemic in elementary schools within the Cilacap district. These interviews also shed light on the factors that either support or hinder the teachers' mental development activities within the realm of Islamic education. Finally, documentation data, comprising photographs of coaching activities, interview sessions, and the school environment, were included as additional sources of research data.

Data analysis techniques encompass various methods, such as data reduction, which involves gathering information derived from in-depth interviews, documentation, and observation. Subsequently, these data are classified based on their subject matter. Another technique is the presentation of data, where the researcher organizes the information according to themes and discussions, enabling readers to comprehend it more effortlessly. The third technique involves verification or drawing conclusions, wherein the presented data are examined. Lastly, the researcher offers conclusions based on the outcomes of the study (Li et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Roles of Elementary School Islamic Education Teachers in Fostering Students' Mental Health

Islamic religious education teachers hold their unique perspectives on mental health based on their individual analyses. With their comprehension of mental well-being, these teachers can readily identify suitable activities to promote students' mental health within the school setting. As stated by Mrs. ST, a PAI teacher:

The mental health of students refers to their ability to accept and navigate life's challenges. However, assessing mental health solely based on student behavior may not always provide a comprehensive picture, as some students in higher grades become adept at concealing their true emotions. For instance, certain students may appear sociable and enthusiastic within the school environment while exhibiting quiet and despondent tendencies in other settings, such as at home. Consequently, silence and a smile should not be mistaken as indicators of happiness or well-being. Assessing students' mental health often necessitates prolonged observations, a task best undertaken by professionals like psychologists. As a teacher, my role is limited to observing students' progress within the school context. If students are able to actively engage in lessons and demonstrate concentration, I perceive this as an indication of their mental preparedness and well-being.

The interview findings revealed that students' mental health is intricately linked to their everyday lives. It extends beyond the confines of the school environment, as poor mental health can significantly impact students' attitudes and responses within their broader surroundings. Identifying students with compromised mental well-being requires the expertise of a specialist, namely a psychologist. Mental health encompasses the ability of students to progress, mature, and adapt in accordance with their age. Students who actively engage in learning activities serve as exemplars of those possessing a healthy mentality.

Zakiah posited that mental health encompasses all aspects residing within the heart and mind, including attitudes and emotions, which subsequently manifest in behaviors such as responding to various challenges with feelings of disappointment, happiness, anxiety, fear, and more (Zakiah, 2004). The ongoing pandemic has significantly impacted the mental well-being of elementary school students in Cilacap district. Many students have exhibited changes in their character, emotions, and behavior as a result of distance learning. With the shift towards face-to-face instruction, teachers must once again seek out new, suitable approaches to support and guide these students with their unique characteristics. The following highlights the role that PAI teachers play in nurturing students' mental health amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Instilling positive habits

During the interview with Mr. HP, he emphasized his approach to nurturing the mentality of his students. He explained that he incorporates regular religious practices into their routine, such as reciting the *Asmaul Husna* (the Beautiful Names of Allah) and reciting *Sholawat* (prayers and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad) before the start of each class. Additionally, there is a weekly schedule for memorizing Juz 30 (the 30th part) of the Quran, with each class having a specific memorization target to achieve. Mr. HP also mentioned the importance of a clean Friday and a healthy Saturday, recognizing the connection between physical well-being and mentality. By instilling positive habits, the aim is for students to internalize and apply these practices in their daily lives. He emphasized that physical and religious aspects are closely

intertwined with students' mental health. By improving their Islamic character and engaging in these practices, students are likely to develop good mental well-being.

Drawing from the insights gleaned from interviews with Mr. HP, it is crucial for PAI teachers to cultivate not only religious habits but also instill practices centered around cleanliness and exercise. These habits contribute to the holistic development of students, encompassing their mental, psychological, and physical well-being. Engaging in positive habituation proves to be an effective means of shaping students' mentality and character. By consistently practicing these positive habits, students internalize them to the point where they become second nature, eliminating the need for deliberate planning. Regular implementation of such habituation fosters a positive mindset and character, equipping students with the adaptability necessary to thrive in any environment.

The mental is the driving force behind our actions, which we refer to as our attitude. Within an individual, the prevailing attitude is also known as their character. Consequently, the process of developing a positive mentality is deeply intertwined with our actions, thoughts, and emotions. Our actions shape our character, our responses mold our mentality, and our thoughts shape our vision. To cultivate favorable responses, it is crucial to consistently engage in virtuous activities that foster habits reflecting a positive mentality (Amilda, 2017).

2. Providing Exemplary Education

PAI teachers play an integral role in serving as exemplary figures, or *swat khansamah*, for their students. Even during this challenging pandemic period, PAI teachers continue to demonstrate disciplined behavior, a friendly demeanor, and a warm smile, all of which have a positive and influential impact on their students' energy. As mentioned by Mrs. MA, being disciplined, approachable, maintaining a cheerful disposition, and effectively managing emotions towards students are essential qualities. Consequently, in the face-to-face learning setting amidst the pandemic, students are able to engage in their activities joyfully. Given the rapid adjustments required, it is crucial for teachers to exemplify high levels of enthusiasm and inspire their students accordingly.

The interview with Mrs. MA revealed her approach to coaching students by serving as a positive role model. By displaying desirable behaviors, such as maintaining a cheerful demeanor and practicing discipline, teachers aim to provide students with examples of appropriate conduct during the ongoing pandemic. Adapting to the challenges of remote learning and managing emotions when interacting with students are not simple tasks. However, by creating a positive and conducive environment, teachers strive to help students comprehend and adjust to their surroundings. Consequently, this approach fosters students who are receptive, easily guided, and possess strong mental fortitude.

Being exemplary in coaching is a pragmatic and effective approach to nurturing students' mental, moral, and social development. From the students' perspective, Islamic religious education teachers serve as admirable role models, and students readily imitate their teachers' actions. As a result, these role models wield significant influence over the mental growth of their students. Having teacher figures who can serve as direct examples enables participants to

navigate the adjustments required in their learning journey during this pandemic with greater ease.

3. Offering Motivational Encouragement Through Praise

Amidst this pandemic, it is crucial for teachers to consistently uphold the mental well-being of students, as demonstrated by Mr. RF, an Islamic religious education teacher at an elementary school in the Cilacap district. He emphasizes the significance of providing motivation as an essential activity to cultivate calmness and mental resilience in students. While many students may experience negative emotions, they often struggle to express them. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to offer encouragement and understanding through motivation. When a student makes a mistake, the teacher provides explanations and guidance. Negative emotions like fear and sadness should be acknowledged by students, while the teacher praises even the smallest efforts made by students. Even when a student's performance does not meet expectations, the teacher should still offer praise for their accomplishments, ensuring that the student's mental state remains undisturbed and encouraging them to persevere with gratitude.

The interview results highlight the efforts made by PAI teachers to motivate their students and maintain their enthusiasm for learning. These teachers consistently offer understanding and support to students when they make mistakes, ensuring that students comprehend and learn from those mistakes. It is crucial for teachers to avoid exerting a negative influence on their students. Islamic Religious Education teachers are committed to preventing their students from feeling sadness, and they actively provide an appreciation for all their students' achievements, whether through praise or other means. This approach serves to boost students' self-confidence and cultivate a spirit of courage within them.

Praise holds remarkable influence as a potent and positive force, readily embraced by individuals. It has the capacity to generate motivation in learning, cultivate students' mentality, and enhance their self-confidence (Setiadi et al., 2020).

4. Providing Valuable Advice

Providing advice is a crucial responsibility undertaken by elementary school PAI teachers. In an interview with Mr. WI, he emphasized the significance of advice in fostering an understanding of students' emotions. For instance, when students display a lack of interest in listening during lessons, the teacher imparts knowledge regarding the positive and negative consequences associated with such feelings. Moreover, the teacher consistently radiates positive energy, creating an uplifting atmosphere that resonates with the students.

Based on the interviews with Mr. WI, it is evident that many students have encountered difficulties adapting to face-to-face learning amidst the pandemic. This transition has been accompanied by behavioral changes, an increase in the usage of inappropriate language, and a tendency to follow trends. Recognizing the adverse implications these behaviors can have on students' future personalities and mental well-being, it is imperative to address this issue.

Consequently, teachers must continue to offer guidance after each lesson and maintain a vigilant supervisory role. By doing so, students can develop an understanding of the positive behaviors they should apply in their activities while comprehending the impact of each behavior.

Providing advice in a thoughtful manner yields positive effects on students, as they feel valued when adults effectively convey their insights. Particularly in the current pandemic, it is crucial to safeguard students' mental well-being, and one way to achieve this is through offering kind and constructive advice. Individual approaches, such as giving guidance and providing explanations to address specific issues, contribute to the development of students' mental faculties (Sirin, 2017).

Providing students with advice is an effective means of cultivating strong faith and moral values and assisting them in managing their emotions and social interactions with others. The advice holds significant power in raising awareness and guiding students to adhere to the righteous path aligned with Islamic religious principles.

5. Building Strong Communication with Parents and Working Well with Other Teachers

After experiencing about two years of online learning, parents of students have come to understand that the role of an educator is no easy task. Thus, fostering strong collaboration between teachers, parents/guardians, and students themselves becomes crucial. As Mr. HP emphasized, establishing a good relationship with parents and maintaining constant communication regarding any learning obstacles, behavioral issues at home, and daily activities is vital. Regular conversations between teachers and parents/guardians serve as an example. For instance, in the case of a sixth-grade student who developed a habit of playing games on their cell phones until late at night due to living with their grandmother, their lack of enthusiasm and sleepiness during school became apparent. By engaging in discussions with the student's guardians and the student themselves, we were able to find solutions that improved their learning experience. It has been proven that open communication, coordination, and discussions with parents/guardians are effective in bringing about positive changes in students.

Based on the research conducted with Mr. HP, it is evident that fostering open communication and coordination between parents/guardians, students, and schools can have a significant impact on students, schools, and the community as a whole. Teachers play a crucial role in identifying and addressing problems while ensuring that any solutions are in line with the agreement reached with the student's guardian. Openness allows for finding appropriate solutions that align with the individual development of each student. Considering the findings from the interviews and the aforementioned theory, it is clear that maintaining effective communication among school members is of utmost importance. When teachers and guardians share a common goal of nurturing students with a strong foundation, good communication becomes the catalyst for generating effective solutions. In cases where students prove challenging to guide, teachers and guardians must maintain open lines of

communication, enabling them to work collaboratively toward resolving issues and implementing solutions that cater to the specific needs of the students.

Numerous communication dynamics contribute significantly to the prevalence of mental disorders among students. Employing ineffective communication techniques in education can actually foster the development of mental disorders in students. Conversely, if education is conducted using effective communication strategies right from the foundation, students will find it easier to comprehend and cultivate a stable character and mindset (Angelica & Siahaan, 2021).

6. Creating Engaging and Captivating Learning Experiences

The presence of a pandemic necessitates a revitalization of the learning process, wherein teachers must adapt to technological advancements and utilize them to enhance classroom dynamics, ensuring continuous progress. Through the ingenuity and awareness of teachers who grasp the importance of growth, learning remains diverse and avoids monotony. As aptly mentioned by Mrs. SH,

One essential aspect of my work with students in grades 5-6 is sharing inspiring stories of remarkable individuals. By doing so, I aim to instill self-assurance in students and foster a sustained enthusiasm for learning. For younger students, I find it beneficial to utilize fairy tales and exemplary stories of prophets to nurture their faith and cultivate positive character traits. Additionally, considering the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic, I strive to minimize the assignment load on students. Recognizing that they may already be overwhelmed with assignments from other teachers, some of whom might not possess a thorough grasp of the material themselves, I ensure that all enrichment activities are conducted within the classroom setting.

Based on the findings from the aforementioned interviews, it is evident that teachers should actively seek out innovative strategies to enhance students' enthusiasm for learning. PAI teachers effectively fulfill their role by delivering education aligned with students' interests. Considering the significant amount of time students dedicate to watching videos, teachers can harness this preference to positively influence students' mindsets and engagement. By incorporating video-based instructional materials and sharing inspirational stories, teachers create an environment where students feel less burdened during coaching and learning sessions. This approach has proven highly effective in fostering positive character development and nurturing the mental well-being of elementary school students in the Cilacap district.

By tailoring the learning process to align with students' interests and staying abreast of current trends, education can become an enjoyable experience. This approach ensures that students remain engaged and are less likely to succumb to boredom. Engaging and captivating teaching methodologies help alleviate mental and physical fatigue during the learning process

(Mulyati, 2019). Furthermore, an intriguing teaching and learning environment has a direct impact on student's academic achievements (Sutarto et al., 2020).

7. Implementing a System of Punishment and Rewards for Educational Purposes

The repercussions of the pandemic have posed challenges in maintaining students' discipline, necessitating teachers to implement a structured approach to restore discipline in their participation and facilitate the achievement of coaching objectives. Mr. MA, a PAI teacher, emphasized the significance of his role in addressing this issue, stating that,

Disciplinary measures, including appropriate forms of punishment, are implemented to ensure that students understand the consequences of their actions and are deterred from repeating them. These punishments take the form of constructive and educational activities. Additionally, a control card system is utilized, comprising a set of cards that document students' performance in daily obligatory prayers, almsgiving, and Duha prayer. These cards are distributed to students at the beginning of the month and returned at the end of the month, indicating their progress. Furthermore, rewards are introduced to incentivize students who consistently engage in their worship. This system encourages students to compete in performing virtuous deeds.

Based on the aforementioned interview findings, it is evident that the practice of administering punishment and providing rewards is employed by PAI teachers in elementary schools throughout the Cilacap district to foster mental stability. These teachers incorporate the concept of punishment and reward into their educational approach, enabling students to learn the importance of adhering to rules and living within their framework. Through the implementation of appropriate punishments, students develop a sense of responsibility towards their duties, while the bestowing of rewards serves to motivate and engage them in their tasks. It is crucial that punishments are agreed upon by the students themselves, ensuring that they are fully aware of the consequences when rules are violated and the tasks that need to be completed. By providing a firm educational foundation at the elementary level, students are better equipped to navigate future challenges and are prepared to face the outcomes, whether positive or negative, of their actions.

In the school environment, educators are entrusted with the crucial role of providing guidance to their students through coaching. The purpose of coaching is to shape students' mentality and character, enabling them to develop strength, resilience, and good morals. To achieve these objectives, teachers must implement a method of punishment and reward, thereby discouraging students from repeating negative behaviors while instilling positive values and fostering a genuine enthusiasm for learning, ultimately enhancing their intelligence (Novitasari, 2019).

Fundamentally, the practice of administering punishment serves as a means to modify actions, behaviors, thoughts, or speech that deviate from religious norms. However, it is essential for teachers to exercise caution when delivering punishments, ensuring they are implemented based on mutual agreement to avoid fostering feelings of resentment. Moreover,

there should be clear boundaries in the application of punishment (Rohman & Masturoh, 2018).

Factors that hinder mental development in elementary schools in Cilacap Regency

The following factors impede the mental development of students in elementary schools.

a) Readiness of Learners

The preparedness of students poses a significant obstacle to conducting mental health coaching activities for elementary school students. Students often lack readiness and face difficulties in maintaining discipline, as highlighted in an interview with Mr. HP, a teacher. Establishing a consistent routine proves challenging and time-consuming. Furthermore, discipline in behavior and attire serves as an indicator of students' enthusiasm for engaging in activities. The interview results demonstrate a notable decrease in students' readiness to participate in activities amidst the ongoing pandemic. Tasks that should ideally be completed within 30 minutes remain unfinished due to the students' struggle with preparation.

The pandemic has had detrimental effects on students, resulting in physical and psychological decline. Many students exhibit disinterest in studying, experience boredom, show laziness, and spend excessive time engaging with their mobile devices. The implementation of online learning policies has further exacerbated this issue, leading to students becoming addicted to gadget usage (Adawiyah et al., 2021). Student readiness plays a crucial role in attaining effective coaching outcomes, as those who possess good readiness are more receptive to coaching materials and are better equipped to engage with them.

b) Family Environment

The family is the environment that most influence the growth of elementary school students, A good environment will also produce good students, and if the environment is not supportive, it will also have a negative influence on elementary school-age students. The results of the interview with Mrs. WI as a PAI teacher at one of the Cilacap district elementary schools said.

The family plays a pivotal role in shaping the development of elementary school students. A nurturing family environment fosters positive growth and contributes to the formation of well-rounded students. Conversely, an unsupportive environment can have a detrimental impact on students of elementary school age. Mrs. WI, a PAI teacher at one of the elementary schools in the Cilacap district, shared her insights during an interview, underscoring the significance of the family in this regard.

During online learning, students have become accustomed to holding cell phones, providing them with opportunities to engage in online gaming. This, in turn, hinders their ability to concentrate. Furthermore, within unsupportive environments, some parents fail to recognize or understand their children's negative habits. Excessive cellphone usage by students leads to increased consumption of videos, which often sets

poor examples by showcasing inappropriate language. Unfortunately, such behavior has become commonplace among students. Additionally, due to a lack of parental supervision, many families inadvertently permit the development of these negative habits in their children.

Based on the interview findings, it is evident that a family environment lacking attention and guidance can lead students toward negative habits and surroundings. The current circumstances pose significant challenges for elementary school students. In the absence of a supportive family structure that caters to the needs of students, they may seek attention through unfavorable means. The family holds a crucial role in nurturing and fostering the growth of students. It is within the family environment that religious knowledge is first imparted, making it the most influential factor in the maturation and development of students. Students thrive and progress when the family environment instills good religious values. Moreover, a harmonious balance between learning at home and at school is essential for their overall well-being.

Mental development in students heavily relies on the collaborative efforts of both the family and the school to foster a strong sense of integrity. The family, being the closest environment to students, holds a significant influence over their mental development (Pratama & Alamsyah, 2022).

c) Friendship Environment

Unhealthy friendships can have detrimental effects on one's character. During the elementary school years, students are still in the process of understanding their actions, and they rely on guidance from others to comprehend the consequences. The social environment, particularly friendships, plays a crucial role in the continuous development of students' mental well-being. When the friendship environment is negative, it hampers the effectiveness of coaching efforts.

According to Mrs. SH, during the interview, she highlighted the negative impact of an unhealthy friendship environment. She mentioned that some students strive to use respectful language and behave better, but their friends engage in conversations with inappropriate or impolite words, which leads other students to follow suit, resulting in the development of negative habits. Friends serve as a crucial source of emotional support and are involved in close relationships (Ragins & Ehrhardt, 2021; Yunanto, 2019). However, when the friendship environment becomes toxic, it can exert a detrimental influence on students during their formative years.

d) School environment

The pandemic has presented a new set of challenges for teachers, not just students. Teachers are expected to adapt at a faster pace than their students to ensure that the learning environment remains conducive. However, this adaptation process does not always proceed as planned. Many teachers were unprepared for the necessary adjustments in teaching and learning methods during this pandemic, resulting in hindrances to various activities, including

consistent mental development initiatives. Mrs. MA, during the interviews, shed light on the obstacles faced in promoting mental development, stating:

The school environment can sometimes be characterized by a lack of understanding between teachers and students, resulting in ineffective communication. This can lead to difficulties in conveying information to students, as well as discrepancies in answers provided by different teachers, even when faced with the same questions. Such inconsistencies can leave students feeling confused about which guidance to follow. However, it is worth noting that, thus far, students have managed to maintain a reasonable level of mental well-being, with fluctuations occurring but not to the extent of developing disorders that would disrupt the overall community environment.

The preparedness of teachers in schools to nurture students' mental well-being is often subject to mistakes as they grapple with new adjustments brought about by the pandemic. The transition to online learning has posed challenges, with educators lacking suitable systems and techniques tailored to the unique demands of remote education. Many teachers, particularly those in rural areas, face a lack of technological literacy, further exacerbating their readiness to teach effectively (Mamluah & Maulidi, 2021).

e) **Smartphone Influence**

The advancement of technology has emerged as a significant negative influence on elementary school students. In the realm of online learning, it is crucial for parents to supervise their children. However, many parents allow their children to use smartphones under the guise of studying online. Consequently, numerous students take advantage of this opportunity to continuously engage in online gaming activities. During an interview, Mr. AW expressed concerns about this trend, stating,

The presence of technology means that students are increasingly exposed to smartphones and spend a substantial amount of time playing games and similar activities, resulting in a significant decrease in their focus and overall enthusiasm for participating in various activities.

Based on the findings of the aforementioned interview, it becomes apparent that the ongoing pandemic has forced students to become familiar with smartphones, consequently subjecting them to various influences. In the elementary schools of the Cilacap district, many parents lack an understanding of smartphones, leading them to perceive their children's engagement solely as online learning, oblivious to the fact that students are actually utilizing this opportunity to indulge in online gaming.

Smartphones exert both physical and psychological impacts on students' development. Psychologically, these impacts manifest as a disinterest in socializing with others, increased susceptibility to boredom, difficulties in concentration, impaired problem-solving abilities, compromised memory functions, and hindered right brain development (Hashanah, 2017).

Supporting Factors for Mental Development in Elementary Schools in Cilacap Regency

A. School Environment

A conducive school environment and teachers who comprehend their responsibilities in cultivating mentally healthy students play a pivotal role in fostering continuous mental development in elementary schools. Mr. HP emphasized the significance of a supportive school environment, stating that as a teacher, he cannot act alone without the approval and participation of other teachers and the principal.

The findings from the aforementioned interviews elucidate the crucial role of teamwork within schools in providing effective learning experiences for students, which greatly contributes to their holistic growth. Schools, as institutions, should be dedicated to implementing value-oriented efforts and learning systems encompassing character education and mental development. When the school environment demonstrates sensitivity towards students' mental well-being, it becomes easier to nurture their mental strength and maintain their overall well-being.

Furthermore, the school environment should prioritize mental coaching to help students effectively manage their emotions, resulting in the development of good emotional intelligence. This coaching should extend beyond religious education to encompass behavioral guidance, critical thinking skills, and character building. It is imperative for educators to possess strong emotional intelligence, as it enables the nurturing of students' souls within the school environment (Priatini et al., 2008).

A nurturing environment fosters positive outcomes. It is crucial for school personnel, including teachers and principals, to establish a welcoming and secure atmosphere for their students (Usman & Madudili, 2019). Through effective coordination among all members of the school community, students can develop and maintain good mental well-being.

B. Family Environment

The family environment plays a pivotal role in shaping a student's character, and a conducive home environment fosters discipline and active participation in activities. A supportive factor is the family's provision of resources, ensuring that students can attend school in a positive and healthy condition. Parents who prioritize their children's well-being take great care in transporting them to and from school. They also actively oversee their children's studies and create an environment where learning from mistakes is encouraged. Moreover, parents support and nurture their children's potential in positive ways.

Based on the findings of the interviews and supported by existing theories, it is evident that the family environment holds the greatest influence on students, as they spend a significant amount of time with their families. Families employ various approaches believed to facilitate their children's overall development. Their efforts are aimed at nurturing students with a prosperous and sound mental well-being. Furthermore, research indicates that the family is a key factor in students' success (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The role of elementary school Islamic education teachers in promoting students' mental well-being during the pandemic is crucial. They actively engage in shaping positive habits, serving as role models, motivating students through praise, providing valuable advice, establishing effective communication with students' guardians, facilitating engaging and interesting learning experiences, and implementing a system of rewards and punishments. It is important to recognize the inhibiting factors that impact mental development, such as students' readiness, the friendship environment, the school environment, and the family environment. Conversely, the school and family environments play a supportive role in fostering mental health. Through their consistent dedication, these teachers contribute to the overarching objective of nurturing mentally resilient students in the face of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, the active participation of Islamic education teachers in elementary schools is essential for fostering students' mental well-being during the pandemic. They navigate various factors that hinder mental development while leveraging supportive elements to achieve the desired outcome of cultivating mentally healthy students amidst the ongoing crisis caused by COVID-19. The findings of this study can be utilized by educators worldwide to enhance their pedagogy and promote students' mental health in an ever-changing world.

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