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### PAI TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL DEMOCRACY AT STATE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL 3 PADANGSIDIMPUAN

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#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the views of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers regarding the implementation of educational democracy at SMK 3 Padangsidimpuan. Democracy in education is seen as important to create a fair and inclusive learning environment, as well as providing equal opportunities for all students. This study uses a qualitative approach with an in-depth interview method with several experienced PAI teachers at the school. The data obtained were analyzed thematically to understand the perceptions of PAI teachers regarding the implementation of democratic principles in learning activities, both in terms of teaching materials, interactions with students, and learning methods used. The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which the principles of educational democracy are implemented in PAI learning at SMK 3 Padangsidimpuan, as well as to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in implementing these principles in the classroom. The results of the study indicate that PAI teachers at this school are generally aware of the importance of democracy in education, although its implementation is still limited to certain aspects such as providing freedom of opinion to students and respecting differences of opinion. The obstacles faced include the lack of facilities and support in implementing educational democracy comprehensively. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of more democratic education, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education, as well as being a reflection material for teachers and schools in building a more participatory and inclusive learning approach.

#### INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of human resources, including in the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Rois, 2019). In Indonesia, Islamic education not only aims to convey religious knowledge, but also to develop the moral and social character of students. One concept that is now increasingly important in the world of education is educational democracy, which prioritizes the principles of justice, participation, freedom of speech, and respect for differences in the learning process. The application of democracy in education is considered essential to create

a fair, inclusive learning environment and provide equal opportunities for all students to develop. (Ahmad Catur Susilo & Triono Ali Mustofa, 2024)

Socially, Indonesian society is increasingly aware that education should not only focus on mastering knowledge, but also on character building and social awareness. At SMK 3 Padangsidempuan, educational democracy is expected to support learning by considering students' rights and freedoms. Islamic education in this school plays an important role in instilling religious and social values that are relevant to everyday life (Atoillah & Ferianto, 2023). However, the implementation of democracy in education often faces challenges, such as differences of opinion, acceptance of diversity, and limited facilities.

Various studies show that educational democracy is increasingly becoming a concern in many countries, including Indonesia, along with the increasing awareness of the importance of education that provides space for each individual to actively participate. (Roup, 2020) Several studies show that in Islamic education, the implementation of democratic principles is often hampered by authoritarian habits in more traditional education systems. Even so, in recent years there have been efforts to integrate democratic principles into Islamic Religious Education teaching, by emphasizing respect for differences, freedom of expression, and a more inclusive understanding of religion. (DAULAY, 2017)

This study aims to explore the views of Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan regarding the implementation of educational democracy in the learning process. The main focus of this study is to understand how Islamic Religious Education teachers implement democratic principles in teaching materials, learning methods, and interactions with students, as well as to identify the challenges faced in implementing educational democracy in the classroom. The application of democracy in education, especially in Islamic education, not only provides opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills, but also helps them understand social and religious values more deeply. In this case, Islamic education at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan is expected to be an example in implementing a more inclusive and participatory educational democracy. However, the challenge faced by Islamic Religious Education teachers is how to combine religious teachings that are often normative with the need for freedom and student participation in the teaching and learning process. (Cintya et al., 2023) Previous studies have focused more on the theory or history of Islamic education without examining in depth how teachers view implementing educational democracy in the classroom. This study is different because it has a more practical approach, namely examining the direct application of democratic principles in Islamic education and how teachers face challenges in the process, especially at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan. This study also highlights how religious education can be a tool to foster a democratic culture among students.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to explore in depth the views of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers regarding the implementation of educational democracy at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan. Descriptive research aims to describe the experiences and views of teachers in the context of teaching related to educational democracy. Participants in this study were PAI teachers who teach at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan. The number of participants involved

in this study was 4 PAI teachers who had more than 3 years of teaching experience at the school. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling, namely the selection of participants based on criteria that are relevant to the objectives of the study, namely having a deep understanding of the principles of educational democracy and its application in teaching PAI. (Charismana et al., 2022)

The research procedure begins with planning and preparation, such as determining the research topic, selecting informants, and compiling interview instruments. Furthermore, data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with PAI teachers which were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on the conditions. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that gave participants the freedom to explain their views on educational democracy. Interviews were conducted in several sessions with a duration of 45-60 minutes to obtain more detailed information. In addition to interviews, participatory observation was also conducted to directly observe the application of democratic principles in interactions between teachers and students.

Data collection was conducted using in-depth interview techniques. Interviews used a semi-structured guide, which contained open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide detailed and in-depth answers regarding their views on educational democracy (Anak, 2008). Interviews were conducted in several sessions with a duration of 45-60 minutes so that the discussion process was more detailed. In addition to interviews, participatory observation was also conducted to assess how Islamic Religious Education teachers apply democratic principles in interactions with students in the classroom. Data collected from interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis process includes:

1. Initial data collection: recording and transcribing the results of interviews and observations.
2. Categorization: identifying the main themes that emerge in the data and grouping relevant information, such as the application of democratic principles in teaching, challenges faced, and solutions found by teachers.
3. Thematic arrangement: arranging the main themes found in the data to provide a clear picture of teachers' views on educational democracy.
4. Data interpretation: analyzing the findings to understand the implementation of educational democracy in teaching Islamic Religious Education at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan and the challenges faced in its practice. (Nana & Elin, 2018)

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on interviews and observations conducted with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan, several important findings related to the implementation of educational democracy in learning at the school were revealed (Huda, 2021). The results of this study are divided into several main themes that include the views of PAI teachers on educational democracy, the challenges faced, and the solutions applied in teaching practices.

The majority of PAI teachers at SMK Negeri 3 Padangsidempuan have a fairly good understanding of the concept of educational democracy. They view educational democracy not only as a political system that exists in the country, but also as a way of managing the education process that pays attention to the rights and freedoms of

students. Educational democracy for them means giving students the freedom to speak, express opinions, and participate in decisions related to their academic lives. Several PAI teachers stated that educational democracy also includes the principle of fairness in providing learning opportunities, as well as recognition of individual differences in the classroom. They believe that every student has the right to get the same opportunity to access knowledge without discrimination. Democracy, according to PAI teachers, also means an open dialogue between teachers and students in the learning process.

However, there are also some teachers who understand educational democracy in a simpler context, such as students' freedom to choose class leaders or their role in school organizations. This shows that there are variations in understanding what educational democracy is. Some teachers do not fully understand democracy as a broader system that involves all aspects of school life, such as managerial policies and social relations between individuals.

### 1. Teachers' Understanding of Educational Democracy

The majority of PAI teachers at SMK 3 Padangsidimpuan showed sufficient understanding of the principles of educational democracy. They realized that educational democracy involves more than just freedom of speech, but also gives students the right to be actively involved in learning, expressing opinions, and discussing (Islam, 2012). For example, teachers often invite students to dialogue about social and religious issues that are relevant to their lives, so that students are given space to speak and respect differences of opinion.

In practice, the implementation of educational democracy at SMK Negeri 3 Padangsidimpuan has been carried out in several ways. One of them is giving students the freedom to choose class leaders and organize extracurricular activities democratically. In addition, in several subjects, including Islamic Religious Education, students are given the opportunity to speak and discuss topics related to social and religious life, such as human rights, social justice, and ethics in democracy.

Some Islamic Religious Education teachers also involve students in determining learning materials, where they can provide input on topics they want to learn more about. This gives students a sense of ownership of the learning process and increases their active participation. In this context, educational democracy is not only reflected in major policies, but also in daily interactions between teachers and students.

However, despite several efforts to implement democracy, several problems still arise in its implementation. One of the problems faced is the limited time available to hold activities that involve students in decision-making. In addition, there is still an imbalance in student participation, because most important decisions in schools are determined more by school management or teachers, without involving students in the process.

### 2. Implementation of Democracy in Learning

The implementation of democratic principles in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMK 3 Padangsidimpuan is reflected in several aspects. Islamic Religious Education teachers apply methods that encourage interaction and discussion between teachers and students (Khuzaimah & Farid Pribadi, 2022). For example, in discussing religious material, teachers give students the opportunity to ask questions

and discuss their understanding. However, in some cases, the learning process still uses more traditional methods and tends to be one-way, especially for material that is considered more normative and requires stricter teaching.

### 3. Challenges in Implementing Educational Democracy

Islamic Religious Education teachers face a number of challenges in implementing educational democracy. One of the main challenges is the limited facilities that can support open discussions and the use of more participatory methods. Several teachers expressed that limited classroom space and learning media often prevented them from implementing more interactive and democratic teaching methods. In addition, another challenge faced was resistance from students and parents to approaches that were considered too free (Lichandra & Sobarna, 2022). Some students are still reluctant to speak openly, while parents are often concerned that this approach will damage the religious values they adhere to.

The biggest challenge faced by Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing educational democracy at SMK Negeri 3 Padangsidempuan is the lack of understanding and awareness of students about the importance of participation in democracy. Many students do not fully understand that democracy is not only about the right to speak, but also about responsibility in decision-making and respecting the opinions of others.

In addition, another challenge faced is the existence of an authoritarian culture that is still developing in some parts of the school. Some policies in schools are still top-down, where important decisions are made by the principal or administration without directly involving students. This has the potential to reduce the effectiveness of implementing educational democracy, because students feel they are not involved in decision-making that affects their lives.

Another challenge comes from the teachers themselves. Some teachers feel that implementing democracy in education can take more time and can disrupt the structured learning process. There is also a fear among some teachers that giving students too much freedom will lead to disorder in the classroom.

### 4. Solutions Implemented by Teachers

To overcome these challenges, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan developed several solutions. One of them is by changing the learning method to be more inclusive and providing space for students to speak more freely. Teachers also often implement small group discussions which are considered effective in providing opportunities for students to participate without feeling pressured. To address parents' concerns, teachers communicate more intensively to explain that the implementation of educational democracy does not reduce the quality of religious teaching, but rather enriches students' understanding of religious values in the context of social life. (Mujiati, 2020)

### 5. Impact of Educational Democracy on Student Character Development

Islamic Religious Education teachers also noted positive developments in student character as a result of the implementation of educational democracy. Students are more confident in expressing their opinions and are more open to differences of opinion in discussions (Ramadhani et al., 2020). Several students also reported that

they felt more appreciated because they were given the opportunity to speak and be active in the learning process.

## CONCLUSION

From the results of the study conducted at SMK 3 Padangsidempuan, it can be concluded that the implementation of educational democracy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning provides positive results even though there are still some challenges. PAI teachers at this school have a good understanding of the principles of educational democracy and strive to implement them by providing opportunities for students to actively participate, discuss, and express their opinions.

However, several challenges faced, such as limited facilities to support more interactive learning and resistance from students and parents to a more open approach, remain obstacles. Nevertheless, PAI teachers strive to overcome these obstacles by developing more inclusive teaching methods, such as small group discussions, and establishing closer communication with parents of students to explain the benefits of implementing democracy in education.

The implementation of educational democracy not only increases student involvement in learning, but also has an impact on the development of their character, such as increased self-confidence and a more open attitude towards differences of opinion. In the future, it is hoped that the implementation of democratic principles in religious education can continue to develop, creating a more just, participatory, and inclusive learning environment.

To improve educational democracy at SMK Negeri 3 Padangsidempuan, several solutions that can be implemented are:

1. More Structured Democracy Education: Schools need to develop a curriculum that emphasizes democracy education more. This education is not only taught in Islamic Religious Education subjects, but must also be made part of the general curriculum that educates students about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens.
2. Involving Students in Decision Making: Students must be more involved in the decision-making process related to school life. Through discussion forums, student elections, and other decision-making activities, students can learn to respect differences of opinion and work together to achieve common goals.
3. Training for Teachers: Schools need to provide training for teachers, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers, on how to implement democracy in learning and classroom management. Teachers need to be trained to become facilitators who can manage classroom dynamics effectively and fairly.

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