Implementation of Peace Education in Islamic Schools in the Deep South of Thailand: A Case Study of Selected Schools Pattani and Songkhla Provinces

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Abstract

Objective: The research aims to investigate factors influencing implementation of peace education in two Islamic schools in Pattani and one in Songkhla province, and to propose strategies for improving its effectiveness in conflict-affected regions.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative approach, collecting data from 28 purposefully selected key informants—including administrators, scholars, teachers, and students—via in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify key patterns and challenges regarding the implementation of peace education in Islamic schools.

Research findings: The findings highlight the importance of integrating peace education into Islamic schools to foster holistic development through conflict resolution, social justice, and cultural diversity. Effective implementation requires an interdisciplinary curriculum that connects school practices with community involvement. Furthermore, establishing a sustainable culture of peace relies on supportive educational policies and active collaboration between teachers and parents.

Contribution: This research demonstrates the positive impact of peace education on enhancing student cooperation, reducing violence, and lowering dropout rates. It further identifies integration challenges and proposes strategies to align educational initiatives with community frameworks and policy efforts for broader implementation.

Keywords: Peace Education, Islamic Schools, Thailand Deep South, Conflict Resolution, Community Engagement.

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Introduction

The implementation of peace education in Deep South of Thailand is crucial for fostering a culture of nonviolence, empathy, and understanding in a region historically affected by conflict. The Deep South of Thailand, comprising provinces Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has experienced decades of political, religious, and cultural tensions (Uddin & Sarntisart, 2023). These tensions have often resulted in violence, with local communities, particularly Muslim populations, feeling disenfranchised by national policies. Islamic schools, which are central to community life in these provinces, are uniquely positioned to address these issues by integrating peace education into their curricula (Yusal et al., 2023). This paper investigates the methods employed by two Islamic schools in Pattani and one in Songkhla to implement peace education. It evaluates the success of these approaches on students and their wider impact on the local community.

The Characteristics of Pattani and Songkhla Provinces

Pattani and Songkhla, located in Deep South of Thailand, are distinct for their rich cultural heritage, geographic diversity, and socio-political significance (Azizah & Raya, 2021). Pattani, with its predominantly Malay-Muslim population, is deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and history, often reflecting a unique blend of local customs and religious practices. Songkhla, in contrast, showcases a more diverse demographic with a mix of Buddhist and Muslim communities, serving as a cultural and economic hub for the region (Chachavalpongpun, 2023). Both provinces share a history marked by resilience amidst socio-political challenges, playing crucial roles in peacebuilding and fostering coexistence in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

Historical and socio-political overview of Deep South of Thailand

The conflict in Deep South of Thailand has its roots in the early 20th-century annexation of the region by the Thai state, which led to the marginalization of the predominantly Malay-Muslim population (Boonpunth & Saheem, 2022). Historically, the region had been part of the Patani Sultanate, an independent Malay-Muslim polity with distinct cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions. Following its incorporation into Thailand, the government implemented policies aimed at assimilation, including the imposition of the Thai language, centralized administration, and restrictions on Islamic education and cultural practices (Tique, 2023). These measures, coupled with economic neglect and political exclusion, fueled grievances among the local population. By the mid-20th century, separatist movements advocating for self-determination and greater cultural recognition emerged.

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Initially peaceful, these movements faced suppression by Thai authorities, leading to cycles of resistance, state retaliation, and insurgency. Over the decades, the conflict has evolved, involving multiple actors, including separatist groups, security forces, and paramilitary organizations, with violence escalating significantly in the early 2000s (Oancea et al., 2021).

Peace Education in Islamic Societies

Peace education within the Islamic dimension integrates Islamic values to promote peace, tolerance, and conflict resolution in Muslim societies (Atsani & Hadisaputra, 2024). Countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, and Malaysia have implemented such programs, emphasizing principles such as justice, forgiveness, and unity. In Indonesia, peace education fosters dialogue and cooperation through Islamic teachings, while in Pakistan, it addresses sectarian violence and promotes social cohesion. Malaysia's Islamic schools emphasize respect for diversity and reconciliation (Arphattananon, 2018).These examples demonstrate how peace education can build harmonious societies by aligning with Islamic values.

Academic Rationale for Selecting Islamic Schools in Pattani and Songkhla Provinces for peace education Study

The Islamic schools in Pattani and Songkhla Provinces were selected for this study as they represent the Deep South of Thailand, a region with a complex history of conflict and educational disruption. The schools were chosen to offer a variety of perspectives on implementing peace education in regions affected by socio-political tensions. Pattani schools are particularly significant due to the ongoing challenges in the region, while the inclusion of a school from Songkhla facilitates comparative analysis between provinces with differing levels of conflict. This selection supports a deeper exploration of the challenges, strategies, and solutions for integrating peace education in conflict-prone areas, offering valuable insights into its effectiveness.

Overview of these Selected Islamic schools

The researcher selected these Islamic schools—Azizstan Foundation School (AFS), Islamic Sciences Demonstration School (IDS), and Kanlayanachonrangsan Foundation School Ban Nuea Mosque (KFS)—due to their representation of diverse educational settings within the Deep South of Thailand, offering insights into the implementation of peace education in conflict-prone areas. These schools were chosen for their distinct approaches and their potential to provide valuable data on integrating peacebuilding practices in Islamic educational contexts.

The Context of the Conflict

Understanding historical and socio-political context of conflict in Deep South of Thailand is essential to grasp the necessity of implementing peace education in the region.

The Deep South of Thailand has long been a region marked by ethnic and religious tensions between the Malay Muslim majority and the Thai Buddhist state (Payo & Askandar, 2024).The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the 1909 Anglo-Siam Treaty, which annexed the Malay sultanates into modern Thailand. The government's assimilation policies, which disregarded local languages and customs, coupled with economic marginalization, have fueled feelings of alienation. The ongoing insurgency, primarily led by groups seeking greater autonomy, has further exacerbated tensions (Hadini et al., 2023). Given this backdrop, the integration of peace education becomes not only a tool for promoting peace but also a means of addressing deep rooted grievances.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework focuses on promoting understanding, tolerance, and conflict resolution through educational practices. The theoretical underpinnings of peace education are rooted in Galtung's concept of peace, which distinguishes between negative peace, defined as the absence of direct violence, and positive peace which involves presence of justice, equality, social harmony (Pherali, 2023). The framework incorporates constructivist learning, critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural awareness, influenced by Paulo Freire's pedagogy. It also integrates human rights, global citizenship, and conflict resolution education. In Islamic schools, the framework aligns with Islamic values of peace, justice, and reconciliation, aiming to cultivate sustainable peace and enhance social cohesion (Mcinerney & Archer, 2023).

Research Objectives

The research aims to investigate factors influencing implementation of peace education in two Islamic schools in Pattani and one in Songkhla province, and to propose strategies for improving its effectiveness in conflict-affected regions.

Methodology

This qualitative study explored implementation of peace education in two Islamic schools Pattani-Islamic Demonstration School and Azizstan Foundation School, and one in Songkhla -Kanlayanachonrangsan Foundation School. Conducted over 20 (twenty) days in Pattani and 10 (ten) days in Songkhla provinces, this research involved in-depth interviews with 28 (twenty-eight) participants (19 males and 9 females), including teachers and principals,

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to explore the challenges and successes of Peace Education initiatives. Methodologies included interviews, classrooms observations, and document analysis, with informed consent secured from all informants. The study aimed to assess how peace education fosters social cohesion, tolerance, and non-violence among students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds while involving stakeholders, such as community leaders and parents, in the evaluation process.

The gender distribution reflects the composition of teaching staff in these institutions, where male teachers are more common due to cultural and religious traditions. Informants were deliberately selected based on their teaching experience, requiring a minimum of four years in the field, along with expertise in Islamic studies and peacebuilding.

With their specialized knowledge in both religious and pedagogical fields, participants provided crucial insights into the implementation of Peace Education. The primary data collection method involved in-depth interviews, enabling participants to share their experiences, challenges, and perspectives on peace education. This theoretical framework shaped the development of research tools and guided the subsequent analysis of the collected data.

Fieldwork took place within the selected schools, allowing the researcher to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including teachers, principals, students, community leaders, parents, and religious figures. Before conducting interviews, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants and distributed formal letters explaining the study's objectives and procedures.

Interviews were conducted either in person or via email, depending on informants preferences and availability. The data collection process was designed providing a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of the research subject. Additionally, secondary data, including school records and curriculum documents, were examined to provide context and confirm the findings derived from interviews and observations. The insights gathered from interviews were further validated through classroom observations, document analysis, ensuring comprehensive and accurate understanding of the study's focus.

After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed and translated the recorded discussions into Standard English for analysis. The data were then coded to identify recurring themes and patterns, which were analyzed in relation to the study's research questions and theoretical framework. This multi-method approach provided deeper understanding of

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complexities of peace education implementation, shedding light on both the challenges and successes experienced by these schools.

Results and Discussion

Peace education in Islamic teachings promotes peace and social harmony, but the challenge is how to effectively implement it in Islamic schools?

Integration of peace education in Islamic Schools Curricula

According to a teacher from Azizstan Foundation School in Pattani, (personal communication, April 14, 2023),peace education faces significant local challenges due to cultural, political, and social factors, he asserted: *"Students actively participate in peace lessons during weekly Friday prayers at the mosque, engaging in role-playing and debates that broaden their understanding of conflict perspectives"*. Another teacher (personal communication, April 14, 2023) mentioned: *"Lessons incorporate Islamic teachings, emphasizing the value of Salaam (greeting), active listening exercises, and group discussions, which not only teach peace theoretically but also encourage its application in daily life"*.

A teacher from Kanlayanachonrangsan Foundation School in Songkhla (personal communication, April 17, 2023) emphasized that integrating peace concepts into Islamic studies makes them more relevant for students, explaining that "*By teaching how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) resolved conflicts, students are encouraged to adopt similar strategies.*"

A teacher pointed out: *"Studying Islamic history allows students to explore how the Prophet (PBUH) resolved conflicts through dialogue, patience, and justice"* (personal communication, April 17, 2023). Similarly, on April 20, 2023, another teacher from the Islamic Demonstration School at Prince of Songkhla University expressed, "*These lessons help us approach conflict with a different mindset, promoting amicable and peaceful communication rather than aggression*" (personal communication, April 20, 2023).

These examples highlight how active learning approaches enhance students' understanding of peace. Emphasizing Qur'anic teachings strengthens students' moral and ethical reasoning, helping them see peace as not merely an academic subject but as a core principle of Islamic life (Malik & Jumani, 2022).

Teachers' Training and Capacity Building

The effectiveness of peace education programs largely depends on teachers' ability to convey peace-related concepts. According to a teacher from the Islamic Demonstration School in Pattani, "*Trained teachers feel more confident in leading discussions on peace and conflict*

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resolution compared to their untrained counterparts" (personal communication, April 20, 2023).

In classrooms led by trained teachers, students demonstrated increased positive behaviors such as greater respect for teachers and improved cooperation. Teachers equipped with conflict resolution strategies, classroom management skills, and mediation techniques can model and teach peace principles more effectively (Talakua, 2023).

Trained teachers reported feeling well-prepared to create a safe and open classroom environment that encourages dialogue and perspective-sharing. These teaching methods help students internalize peace-building principles and apply them in real-life situations. In contrast, untrained teachers often struggle with sensitive peacebuilding issues due to a lack of familiarity with effective teaching techniques.

Challenges in Implementing Peace Education

Field research identified several challenges in implementing peace education effectively in Islamic schools, including exposure to violence, lack of resources, and political sensitivities.

Exposure to Violence

Many students in Deep South of Thailand face exposure violent incidents in their communities, resulting in trauma and heightened fear. Additionally, a teacher from Azizstan Foundation School in Pattani highlighted "*Many students arrive at school already affected by the trauma of bombings in their communities, making discussions on peace feel abstract when their everyday reality is rooted in conflict*" (personal communication, May 8, 2023).

This exposure to violence significantly impacts students' emotional well-being, hindering their ability to engage with abstract peace concepts.

Lack of Resources

Peace education in Islamic schools faces resource shortages, including inadequate funding, materials, and class time, which hinder student engagement and the implementation of comprehensive peace education strategies.

A teacher from the Islamic Demonstration School in Pattani indicated, "*The lack of resources has impeded the development of meaningful lessons and interactive activities such as role-playing and group discussions, which are vital for teaching conflict resolution and peacebuilding*" (personal communication, May 16, 2023).

Political Sensitivities

In a politically sensitive region, discussions around peace can have political implications. An administrator from Azizstan Foundation School expressed concerns about the potential political repercussions of certain peace-related topics. He stressed the importance of sensitivity in framing such discussions to avoid misinterpretation, cautioning that "*Discussions on peace must be handled carefully to avoid being seen as political criticism*" (personal communication, May 19, 2023).

This underscores the delicate nature of implementing peace curricula in a region affected by ongoing conflict and political sensitivities. The fear of peace discussions being perceived as politically charged creates a challenge for schools attempting to teach values of non-violence, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Impact on Students and the Community

Despite the difficulties, peace education has positively influenced students. Teachers observed that students are more willing to resolve conflicts peacefully and actively engage in initiatives such as volunteer projects and anti-bullying campaigns. A teacher from the Islamic Demonstration School in Pattani, "*These programs have helped students manage disagreements by thinking before reacting*" (personal communication, April 20, 2023). This change is evident not only in students' behavior at school but also in their interactions at home.

Parental involvement has been essential in reinforcing peace education, leading to fewer disciplinary cases and greater support for non-violent conflict resolution at home. A parent from the Islamic Demonstration School in Pattani shared, "*At home, I now encourage my children to resolve sibling disputes through dialogue rather than punishment*" (personal communication, April 20, 2023).This illustrates how peace education is fostering positive behavioral changes not only within the school environment but also within the family unit. According to a teacher from the Islamic Demonstration School in Pattani, "*These programs have helped students manage disagreements by thinking before reacting*" (personal communication, April 20, 2023). The impact of these initiatives is evident not only in students' interactions within the school but also in their behavior outside the classroom. This suggests that key lessons in empathy, communication, and conflict resolution are being effectively internalized and applied in everyday life.

Limitations

The researcher encountered several limitations, such as difficulties in data collection, language barriers, security issues, and restricted access to schools. Both teachers and students grapple with trauma, fear, and instability, while a lack of resources and inadequate training

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hinder effective learning. Moreover, the scarcity of research on integrating Islamic teachings into peace education and the limited exploration of its long-term effects underscore the need for further study. Therefore, this research should be considered as an initial step rather than a definitive conclusion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although implementation of peace education in selected Islamic schools in Deep South of Thailand is still in its early phases, it shows great potential for fostering a more peaceful and tolerant society. However, overcoming existing challenges is essential to ensure its long-term success. The study concludes that peace education in Islamic schools in Pattani and Songkhla provinces has shown positive impacts on promoting nonviolence, empathy, and critical thinking among students. However, to fully maximize its benefits, there is a need for more extensive teacher training, a standardized curriculum, and stronger support from both government and international organizations.

Moreover, it is vital to address the political and cultural sensitivities surrounding the region's conflict in order to create a conducive environment for Peace Education to flourish. The success of peace education in these Islamic schools could serve a model for other conflict-affected regions in Thailand and elsewhere.

Islamic schools in Deep South of Thailand face significant challenges, yet the integration of Peace Education offers a hopeful path toward fostering nonviolence and reconciliation. The experiences in two schools in Pattani and one in Songkhla highlight both the opportunities and obstacles of using education for peacebuilding in conflict zones. However, the success depends on ongoing support for teacher training, curriculum enhancement, and community involvement. Policymakers should consider expanding peace education to more Islamic schools and incorporating it into national education policy. Despite challenges such as cultural resistance and limited resources, these Islamic schools are crucial in promoting values like dialogue, critical thinking, and conflict resolution, contributing to long-term peace in the region.

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