



Bridging the Gap: Perceived Behavioral Control and Social Norms as Mediators Between Islamic Education and Prayer Practice

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) aims to translate religious knowledge into consistent practice, with prayer (salat) as a key outcome. However, a significant value-action gap often persists. This study investigated the mechanisms through which PAI learning influences Dhuhr prayer performance among Grade VII students at SMP Negeri 4 Rengat, Indonesia. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, framing the analysis through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Quantitative data from all 52 students revealed that while the direct effect of PAI learning on prayer was weak, a model incorporating TPB constructs was highly significant, explaining 51.2% of the variance. Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), followed by Subjective Norms. Attitude was not a significant unique predictor. Qualitative interviews and observations with a sub-sample clarified that PBC was undermined by practical barriers like lack of confidence in prayer movements and social distractions, while norms operated through peer influence. The findings demonstrate that the PAI-prayer relationship is not direct but is critically mediated by students' perceived control and social environment. This necessitates a pedagogical shift beyond knowledge delivery towards interventions that build practical competency, scaffold habit formation, and cultivate supportive peer networks to bridge the gap between religious learning and lived practice.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is a comprehensive pedagogical project aimed at holistically cultivating human potential across spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social dimensions, with the ultimate purpose of nurturing servitude to Allah

(SWT) (Sardar & Henzell, 2017; Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2025; Khan et al., 2021). In Indonesia, this vision is institutionalized through Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti, henceforth PAI-BP), a compulsory element of the national

curriculum designed to foster robust faith, piety (taqwa), and noble character (akhlak karimah) (Ulum & Asy'arie, 2024). The efficacy of PAI is therefore paramount, as it is entrusted with providing the cognitive, affective, and behavioral foundations necessary for religious consciousness and consistent practice (amal salih) (Rusydiyah et al., 2025; Haidir et al., 2023).

Central to this endeavor is the ritual prayer (salat), which the Qur'an establishes as a fundamental pillar of faith: "And establish prayer, pay zakat, and bow with those who bow" (Qur'an 2:43). Theologically and pedagogically, salat functions as both the cornerstone of religion (imad al-deen) and a critical barometer of a Muslim's devotional life (Suryapermana & Syafuri, 2020). Consequently, students' consistent adherence to salat represents a tangible, behavioral indicator of the success of PAI in translating its holistic aims into embodied practice.

However, a persistent challenge lies in bridging the gap between religious knowledge and its behavioral enactment, a phenomenon well-documented in social psychology as the "value-action gap" (Blake, 1999). Preliminary evidence of this disconnect was observed at SMP Negeri 4 Rengat (August 7–14, 2024), where data revealed significant inconsistencies in students' performance of the Dhuhr prayer. While 60% of students prayed in congregation routinely, 25% attended only irregularly, often contingent on teacher supervision, and 15% did not perform the prayer at all. Reported reasons included a lack of

habitual practice, motivational deficits, and a failure to prioritize the obligation. Qualitative observations further noted errors in the execution of prayer movements among some students, suggesting issues that extend beyond motivation to potential instructional shortcomings.

This case exemplifies a critical theoretical and pedagogical problem: for a substantial portion (40%) of the student body, the PAI curriculum has not yet fully achieved the deep internalization required for consistent devotional practice. This raises urgent questions about the mechanisms through which PAI learning influences behavioral outcomes. Merely documenting a correlation is insufficient; a deeper investigation is needed to understand the cognitive, social, and control beliefs that mediate this relationship. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) provides a robust framework for this, positing that behavior is guided by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Yet, its application within a religious-devotional context like salat, where divine command and internalized faith (iman) are paramount, requires critical examination.

Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate the relationship between PAI and Character Education learning and the performance of the Dhuhr prayer among Grade VII students at SMP Negeri 4 Rengat. It moves beyond a simple correlational analysis to utilize a mixed-methods approach that probes the mediating factors between instruction and practice. The research is guided by the following questions: (1) To what extent

does participation in PAI and Character Education learning predict the consistency of Dhuhr prayer performance among students? (2) How do students' attitudes, perceived social norms, and sense of behavioral control (key constructs of the TPB) influence the translation of PAI learning into prayer practice? (3) What pedagogical insights can be gleaned to better align PAI instruction with the goal of fostering genuine, self-sustaining religious observance?

METHOD

Research Design and Rationale

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Islamic Religious and Character Education (PAI) learning and the performance of the Dhuhr prayer.

The quantitative phase utilized an ex-post facto correlational design to identify and measure the strength of associations between the learning experience and behavioral outcomes in a naturalistic setting. However, moving beyond a simple correlation, this phase was explicitly framed by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to dissect the mediating factors between instruction and practice.

The subsequent qualitative phase consisted of semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. This phase was designed to explain, elaborate on, and contextualize the quantitative findings, particularly exploring how attitudes may function as mediators between norms and behavioral outcomes,

as demonstrated in Islamic contexts (Bananuka et al., 2020). It specifically explored the nuanced reasons behind students' attitudes, the nature of social pressures, and the specific barriers to prayer performance, thereby providing depth and explanatory power to the statistical results (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Participants and Sampling

The research population comprised all 52 Grade VII students at SMP Negeri 4 Rengat during the 2024/2025 academic year. A saturated sampling technique was used for the quantitative phase, inviting all 52 students to participate, thereby ensuring comprehensive representation and avoiding sampling bias for the survey (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

For the qualitative phase, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select a sub-sample of 12-15 students from the initial pool. Selection was stratified based on the quantitative results to ensure representation from three key groups: 1) students with high PAI scores and high prayer consistency, 2) students with high PAI scores but low prayer consistency (exemplifying the value-action gap), and 3) students with low scores on both measures. This strategic selection enabled a rich, comparative understanding of the factors influencing different behavioral pathways.

Instruments and Data Collection

Quantitative Data were collected via a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of three sections:

1. Demographic Information: Grade level, gender, and prior Islamic educational background.

2. PAI Learning Experience Scale: Measured the independent variable using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). Items were adapted from existing educational engagement scales and tailored to the PAI context (e.g., "My PAI teacher makes the lessons relevant to my daily life," "I feel motivated to apply PAI lessons outside of school").
3. Dhuhr Prayer Behavior Scale (DPBS): This scale measured the dependent variable. It was developed based on the Theory of Planned Behavior constructs:
 - a. Behavioral Beliefs (Attitude): 5 items assessing cognitive and affective evaluations of prayer (e.g., "I believe performing Dhuhr prayer is beneficial for my day").
 - b. Normative Beliefs (Subjective Norms): 5 items assessing perceived social pressure (e.g., "My teachers expect me to perform Dhuhr prayer," "Most of my friends who are important to me perform Dhuhr prayer").
 - c. Control Beliefs (Perceived Behavioral Control): 5 items assessing perceived facilitators and barriers (e.g., "I find it easy to perform Dhuhr prayer on time even when I am busy," "I have the knowledge to perform the prayer movements correctly").
 - d. Behavioral Intention and Self-Reported Behavior: This sub-scale consisted of 5 items using a frequency scale (1=Never to 5=Always) to measure both

intention and actual performance (e.g., "I intend to perform the Dhuhr prayer every day," "I actually performed the Dhuhr prayer in congregation this past week"). Given the high correlation between behavioral intention and self-reported behavior found in the pilot phase ($r = .82$) and the cross-sectional nature of this study, these items were combined into a single composite "Prayer Behavior" score for a more parsimonious test of the overall model. This approach allows for a robust initial examination of the relationship between TPB constructs and behavioral outcomes.

Qualitative Data were gathered through two methods:

1. Semi-structured Interviews

A sub-sample of students ($n=12-15$) participated in interviews to explore their understanding of PAI lessons, personal motivations, social influences, and perceived challenges regarding prayer. Sample questions included: "Can you describe a PAI lesson that really stuck with you about prayer?" and "What makes it easy or difficult for you to pray Dhuhr on time at school?"

2. Non-Participant Observation

Structured observations were conducted during Dhuhr prayer time in the school mosque over a two-week period. An observation protocol was used to document actual prayer participation, congregation size, and the correctness of prayer movements,

providing an objective check on self-reported data.

Validity, Reliability, and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was piloted on a separate cohort of students. Construct validity was assessed using Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation (item-total correlation $\geq .30$), and reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq .70$ for all sub-scales) (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Content validity was established through review by two experts in Islamic education and one in research methodology.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. After descriptive statistics and assumption tests (normality, linearity, homoscedasticity), multiple linear regression was employed to test the predictive power of the TPB constructs (Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control) on prayer behavior, moving beyond a simple linear regression between PAI and prayer.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved transcribing interviews, generating initial codes, and searching for themes that explained the quantitative patterns, such as "reliance on external authority," "peer influence dynamics," or "procedural knowledge gaps."

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the school administration and the university's research ethics board. Written informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians, and assent was obtained from all student participants. Confidentiality was guaranteed, with all data anonymized and reported in

aggregate. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study and interprets them in the context of the theoretical framework and existing literature. It is divided into two main parts: (1) Presentation of Quantitative Results, and (2) An Integrated Discussion elucidating these findings through qualitative insights and theoretical critique.

Quantitative Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analysis

A total of 52 Grade VII students participated in the quantitative phase. Descriptive statistics for the main variables are presented in Table 1. The mean score for the PAI Learning Experience (M = 3.85, SD = 0.72) was relatively high, indicating generally positive student perceptions of their Islamic education. However, the mean for Self-Reported Prayer Behavior (M = 3.10, SD = 1.15) was lower and exhibited greater variability, suggesting significant disparities in actual practice.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables (N=52)*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
PAI Learning Experience	3.85	0.72	2.10	5.00
Prayer Behavior (Self-Report)	3.10	1.15	1.00	5.00
Attitude Towards Prayer	4.25	0.68	2.80	5.00

Subjective Norms	3.45	0.91	1.60	5.00
Perceived Behavioral Control	2.80	1.05	1.00	4.80

Perceived Behavioral Control	0.65	0.11	.59	5.91	<.001
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Note: *B* = unstandardized coefficient; *SE B* = standard error; β = standardized coefficient.

A critical initial finding was the weak and non-significant zero-order correlation between the overall PAI Learning Experience and Self-Reported Prayer Behavior ($r = .18, p = .21$). This immediately suggests that the relationship is not direct, confirming the complexity of the value-action gap hinted at in the introduction.

Testing the Theory of Planned Behavior Model

To unpack this relationship, a multiple linear regression was conducted with Prayer Behavior as the dependent variable and the three TPB constructs (Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control) as independent variables. The results are summarized in Table 2.

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 48) = 15.42, p < .001$, and accounted for 51.2% of the variance in Prayer Behavior ($R^2 = .512$). This is a substantial improvement over the simple correlation, confirming the utility of the TPB framework.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Prayer Behavior ($N=52$)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	-0.45	0.52	-	0.87	.389
Attitude	0.28	0.18	.17	1.56	.126
Subjective Norms	0.31	0.14	.25	2.21	.032

As shown in Table 2, Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) was the strongest unique predictor ($\beta = .59, p < .001$), followed by Subjective Norms ($\beta = .25, p = .032$). Attitude was not a significant unique predictor in the model ($\beta = .17, p = .126$), largely due to its shared variance with the other constructs.

Integrated Discussion

This study set out to investigate the effect of PAI and Character Education on students' performance of the Dhuhr prayer, using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to dissect the underlying mechanisms. The findings reveal a nuanced picture that moves beyond a simple input-output model of religious education.

The Primacy of Perceived Behavioral Control: Bridging Intention and Action

The most powerful finding is the dominant role of Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), support in the study by Bukhori et al. (2022), who found that self-efficacy is a concept closely related to PBC significantly influences well-being through resilience among Muslim students in Indonesia. This quantitatively demonstrates that the primary barrier to consistent prayer is not a lack of faith or knowledge, but students' perception of their ability to overcome practical obstacles. Our qualitative data richly contextualizes this statistical result. Interviews revealed that PBC is undermined by specific, tangible barriers:

"I want to pray, but sometimes the teacher lets us out late, and my friends are already going to the canteen. I feel rushed and just skip it." (Student A, High Attitude, Low PBC)"

"I'm not confident in my movements. I'm afraid I'll do it wrong, so if I can't pray next to someone I can follow, I sometimes just don't go." (Student B, High PAI Score, Low Prayer Consistency)"

These statements align with the observational data, which confirmed errors in prayer movements among this subgroup. This finding critically synthesizes theory and practice: while the PAI curriculum successfully imparts knowledge and fosters positive attitudes, it may underemphasize the spiritual-psychological integration necessary for consistent practice, as highlighted by Syafii & Azhari (2025). It may underemphasize the habituated skills and environmental scaffolding necessary to translate this knowledge into unwavering practice. This echoes the Islamic concept of *istiqamah* (steadfastness), which requires both internal conviction and external support, a nuance that the TPB model effectively captures.

The Enduring Power of Subjective Norms in Adolescent Religiosity

The significant role of Subjective Norms confirms that adolescent religious behavior is profoundly social. The quantitative data shows that perceived expectations from teachers and peers meaningfully influence prayer behavior. The qualitative findings elaborate that this is not a monolithic pressure. For the consistently praying students, the norm

was internalized and reinforced by a close-knit peer group:

"We always go together. It's just what we do. We remind each other." (Student C, High Consistency)

Conversely, for the irregular attendees, the norm was experienced as an external pressure, reliant on teacher supervision. This finding aligns with Abidin et al. (2022), who emphasized that peer group optimization is crucial for developing sustainable religious culture among students. When that external scaffold was removed, the behavior faltered. This highlights a critical pedagogical challenge: the transition from externally-regulated compliance to internally-motivated devotion. This finding resonates with the *tarbiyah* model's goal of internalization (*tazkiyah*) but suggests that for nearly 40% of students, the social environment is not yet conducive to achieving this.

The Attitude-Behavior Paradox and the Limits of Cognitive Learning

The non-significant unique contribution of Attitude is a theoretically intriguing result. It creates a paradox: students reported highly positive attitudes towards prayer ($M=4.25$), yet this did not reliably predict their behavior. This is a classic manifestation of the "value-action gap." The qualitative interviews provided the explanation: attitude, in this context, often reflected a cognitive affirmation of a religious ideal rather than a motivational driver.

"Of course prayer is important, it's a pillar of Islam. I believe that." (Student D, High Attitude Score, Low Prayer Consistency)

This student's behavior diverged from their stated belief, indicating that the PAI learning, while successful in building a positive cognitive schema around prayer, may not have fully connected this knowledge to the student's personal identity and daily decision-making processes. This finding calls for a critical re-evaluation of how "effectiveness" in PAI is measured; success in knowledge and attitude acquisition is necessary but insufficient for ensuring behavioral enactment.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the utility of the TPB for diagnosing challenges in religious education. It reveals that the PAI-to-prayer pathway is not direct but is mediated by social and control beliefs. This provides a more sophisticated, mechanism-based understanding than previous correlational studies.

To address these challenges, PAI interventions should incorporate interactive methods suitable for Generation Z, as suggested by Rafsanjani et al. (2024), who found that digital-era teaching approaches significantly enhance religious learning engagement. Practically, the findings suggest that to improve prayer consistency, PAI interventions must move beyond content delivery and explicitly address the PBC and social dynamics:

1. Scaffold Habit Formation

Implement structured prayer breaks, create peer-mentoring programs, and provide remedial practice for prayer movements to build confidence and reduce barriers (PBC).

2. Cultivate Positive Peer Cultures

Facilitate group activities and discussions that strengthen pro-religious peer networks, helping to internalize subjective norms.

3. Deepen Personal Connection

Integrate reflective pedagogies that help students connect the cognitive knowledge of prayer to their personal spiritual experiences and identity, thereby transforming abstract attitudes into concrete motivations.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to one school and a specific age group. The self-report measure of prayer behavior, though triangulated with observation, remains a limitation. Furthermore, the measurement model for the dependent variable combined behavioral intention and self-reported behavior. While this provided a parsimonious outcome variable for this initial model test, it precludes a formal analysis of intention as a mediator between the TPB antecedents (Attitude, Subjective Norms, PBC) and behavior, as outlined in the full TPB framework. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to track how the influence of TPB constructs changes over time and should test the complete mediation model where intention predicts subsequent behavior. Additionally, studies could explore the role of family influence and digital distractions on Perceived Behavioral Control, which are emerging as critical factors in contemporary adolescent religiosity.

In conclusion, the effect of PAI and Character Education on Dhuhr prayer performance is not a simple matter of

teaching leading to practice. It is a complex process mediated significantly by students' perceived behavioral control and the social environment. While students emerge from PAI with strong knowledge and positive attitudes, the transition to consistent practice falters without the skills, confidence, and supportive social structures to navigate real-world barriers. By addressing these mediating factors, educators can more effectively bridge the value-action gap and fulfill the holistic aims of Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to move beyond a simple correlation and instead investigate the mechanisms through which Islamic Religious and Character Education (PAI-BP) influences the religious practice of Grade VII students at SMP Negeri 4 Rengat, using the Dhuhr prayer as a critical indicator. The findings conclusively demonstrate that the pathway from religious learning to behavioral enactment is not direct but is fundamentally mediated by psychosocial factors, as elucidated by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Also, This research demonstrates that achieving this goal requires a holistic strategy that empowers students with the confidence, skills, and supportive community necessary to bridge the gap between religious knowledge and lived practice, echoing findings on moral reasoning as a mediator in prosocial behavior (Yusoff et al., 2022; Purwono et al, 2019).

The primary and most significant conclusion is that Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) is the dominant factor determining students' consistency in

performing the Dhuhr prayer. The regression analysis revealed PBC to be the strongest predictor ($\beta = .59$), a finding richly explained by the qualitative data which highlighted tangible barriers such as time constraints, social distractions, and a lack of confidence in performing the prayer movements correctly. This indicates that a primary reason for the observed "value-action gap" is not a deficit in faith or knowledge, but rather a deficit in the situational confidence and practical ability to overcome daily obstacles. For many students, the Islamic educational process has successfully conveyed the "why" of prayer but has been less effective in equipping them with the tools to consistently execute the "how" amidst the complexities of adolescent life.

Secondly, the study confirms the substantial role of Subjective Norms in shaping adolescent religious behavior. The significant predictive power of social influence ($\beta = .25$) underscores that prayer practice is, for this age group, a socially embedded activity. The qualitative findings delineated this further, distinguishing between internalized norms, where prayer is a self-reinforcing practice within a peer group, and external norms, where compliance is dependent on teacher supervision. This highlights a crucial developmental challenge in Islamic education: fostering the transition from externally-driven compliance to internally-motivated devotion.

A third, and more paradoxical, conclusion is the limited unique predictive power of Attitude on its own. While students held highly positive cognitive attitudes towards prayer, this did not

reliably translate into behavior within the multivariate model. This suggests that PAI-BP learning has been effective in instilling a theoretical appreciation of prayer's importance, but that this positive attitude alone is insufficient to guarantee practice when PBC is low or social norms are not supportive.

Theoretically, this study validates the application of the TPB in a religious-educational context, revealing it as a powerful diagnostic tool for identifying the precise points of failure between instruction and practice. It moves the scholarly conversation from whether PAI-BP has an effect to how that effect is mediated, offering a more granular understanding of the value-action gap.

Practically, these conclusions demand a pedagogical shift. Enhancing the effectiveness of PAI-BP requires moving beyond cognitive and affective domains to explicitly address behavioral control and social dynamics. Interventions should include:

1. Structured Scaffolding that Implementing school-wide policies that protect prayer time and creating "prayer buddies" or peer-mentoring systems to reduce practical barriers.
2. Competency-Based Learning that Integrating focused, practical sessions on prayer movements (salah labs) to build confidence and correct errors, thereby increasing PBC.
3. Cultivating Positive Ecosystems that Deliberately fostering peer groups and a school culture that normalizes and values religious observance, helping to internalize positive subjective norms.

This study was conducted in a single school, and its findings, while insightful, should be tested across diverse contexts. The reliance on self-reported behavior, despite observational triangulation, remains a limitation. Future research should build upon this mediated model by incorporating additional variables from the students' ecological system. Longitudinal studies could track how the influence of PBC and Subjective Norms evolves over time. Furthermore, investigating the role of digital media consumption and its impact on PBC for religious practice represents a critical and contemporary research direction.

In final analysis, the success of Islamic Religious and Character Education must be measured not by the knowledge it imparts, but by the consistent worship it inspires. This research demonstrates that achieving this goal requires a holistic strategy that empowers students with the confidence, skills, and supportive community necessary to bridge the gap between the classroom and the prayer mat.

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