Promoting Learners' Autonomy in Modern Era: A Textbook Analysis Under the Zone of Proximal Development Approach

Dodi Ilham[1]* https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0557-4508 , **Abdul Pirol**[2], **Baderiah**[3] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7711-8478 ,
Muhammad Iksan[4] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1756-5174 , **Erwatul Efendi**[5], **Andi Husni A. Zainuddin**[6]
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1915-6738 , **Samsu Alam**[7]
[1,2,3,4,5,6,7]State Islamic Institute of Palopo, Indonesia
*e-mail: [1]*dodi@iainpalopo.ac.id

Article Information	ABSTRACT
	This research aims to explore the integration of Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory in the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and character-building, focusing particularly on fostering student autonomy. The study addresses the need for a more holistic educational approach in IRE and character-building, which emphasizes transmitting religious knowledge and values and cultivates essential life skills like independence. This literature study employs qualitative descriptive methods, analyzes learning materials in IRE and character-building textbooks, and evaluates how these materials support students in their ZPD. Results indicate that this education is crucial in instilling honest, responsible, and independent behavior involving physical, economic, intellectual, moral decision-making, and spiritual aspects. However, several sub-indicators of independence are not yet fully integrated into the curriculum, indicating room for further development. Applying ZPD in learning depicts a dynamic and interactive approach, with teachers acting as active facilitators. This research highlights the need for IRE and character-building teachers to utilize ZPD to enhance student understanding and independence, focusing on the practical application of Islamic values in daily life. This study opens new insights in Islamic education literature, emphasizing significant and applicable learning, and supports the development of independent individuals, both in action and belief. Consequently, this education reinforces the internalization of religious and moral values, shaping competent and independent individuals in modern society.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and character-building have traditionally emphasized transmitting religious knowledge and values (Aripin & Nurdiansyah, 2022; Jackson, 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2022). However, in the modern era, educational demands extend beyond mere knowledge, including developing life skills such as autonomy. Autonomy in IRE and character-building encompasses not just

academic aspects but also personal, emotional, and spiritual growth. Creating independent individuals necessitates a holistic approach that integrates Islamic values with developing essential life skills.

Previous research has underscored the integration of innovative and interactive learning methods (Kharismatunisa, 2023; Malik, 2020; Minhaji et al., 2022) in IRE and character-building. These methods focus not just on religious knowledge but also on practical application in daily life. In this context, Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory (Eun, 2019) offers a valuable framework. ZPD highlights the difference between what learners can achieve independently and what they can achieve with assistance. It emphasizes the crucial role of teachers as facilitators (Glassman et al., 2023; Margolis, 2020; Warford, 2011) in helping students internalize and apply Islamic concepts and values.

Teaching autonomy in IRE and character-building requires a balanced approach between guidance and freedom, allowing students to explore and apply Islamic values independently within a structured environment. The application of Vygotsky's approach in IRE and character-building (Syabana, 2022; Tambak et al., 2022) can enrich the learning process by providing a supportive context for students to explore and apply Islamic values in their lives, encouraging them to become not only independent learners but also emotionally and spiritually mature individuals.

Significant student development is anticipated through strategies to reinforce autonomy in IRE and character-building. Teachers play a central role in fostering student autonomy through tasks emphasizing independent aspects (Cerino, 2023; Janiszewski, 1988; Ritchhart et al., 2011; Rose-Duckworth & Ramer, 2009), such as independent projects or individual assignments. The goal is to train students in autonomous learning, developing self-organization skills, time management, and enhancing self-confidence (Takdir et al., 2022). Additionally, teachers play a role in developing students' independent learning skills, including information-seeking abilities, note-making, and the application of effective learning strategies. Positive feedback upon completing independent tasks is expected to boost their learning motivation. Furthermore, teacher encouragement for students to actively ask questions and independently explore topics is expected to strengthen their autonomy in learning and enhance their critical thinking abilities.

Moreover, teachers provide opportunities for students to speak in public, aiming to train students autonomy in communication and build self-confidence. They also present challenges and allow room for students to make mistakes, helping them develop resilience in facing challenges and learning from less successful experiences. With these efforts, students are expected to become highly motivated individuals capable of independent learning, with good critical thinking skills, superior communication abilities, and resilience in facing challenges (Mazid & Suharno, 2019; Takdir et al., 2022). This research fills a gap in the existing academic literature by combining the application of ZPD theory in the context of IRE and character-building, an aspect not extensively explored. Aripin & Nurdiansyah (2022) and Jackson (2018) revealed that prior research in this field focused on the traditional transmission of religious knowledge and values, often overlooking life skill development and autonomy aspects. While studies like those conducted by Kharismatunisa (2023) and Malik (2020) have highlighted the importance of innovative and interactive learning methods, this approach has not been fully integrated in the context of IRE and character-building with a focus on autonomy.

This gap becomes significant as, according to Syabana (2022) and Tambak et al. (2022), there is a need to approach Islamic education more comprehensively, considering the students' need to develop life skills and autonomy in modern society. This research thus brings a new perspective by emphasizing the development of autonomy in religious learning, not just through knowledge but also through applying values in daily life. Furthermore, the role of teachers as facilitators in learning, as explained by Margolis (2020) and Glassman et al. (2023), previously focused more on general contexts but has not been deeply explored in the context of IRE and character-building. This research fills that gap by applying this concept in religious teaching, identifying ways teachers can support student autonomy in religious and moral contexts.

This research explores how an autonomy-focused approach can enrich the learning process in IRE and character-building, not just in terms of religious knowledge but also in applying Islamic values in daily life, and how the role of teachers as facilitators can optimize this learning. This research understanding of the development of autonomy to deepen IRE and character-building focuses on the central question: "How can the integration of the ZPD approach and the use of innovative and interactive

learning methods in the IRE and character-building curriculum support the holistic development of student autonomy, encompassing personal, emotional, spiritual, and life skill aspects?"

METHODS

This study is a literature review employing qualitative descriptive methods, focusing on learning autonomy values in IRE and character-building textbooks. The primary data sources are twofold: first, teacher and student handbooks, a collaboration of the Ministry of Education and Culture Number 57/IX/PKS/2020 and the Ministry of Religion Number 5341 the Year 2020, developed by the Decision of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 958/P/2020 (Ghozaly & Ismail, 2017); second, the Student Anti-Corruption Value Map from the Directorate of Elementary Schools of the Directorate General of Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education.

The study also considers how these materials support or reflect the principles of ZPD in data collection from the handbooks and the Anti-Corruption Value Map. It includes examining the design of materials in supporting students' transition from performing tasks with assistance to independence. Data analysis employs content analysis methods, particularly in evaluating sub-indicators of autonomy and how materials support students in their ZPD. It includes assessments of how materials facilitate the transition from needing external assistance to autonomy, including self-confidence and independence.

The analysis focuses on examples of scaffolding in the materials, emphasizing sub-indicators of autonomy: self-confidence, independence, not depending on others' services, not relying on others, and optimism. Materials in both teacher and student textbooks are analyzed based on these indicators. The analysis results are validated by three experts, encompassing Islamic religious education, anti-corruption, and character education specialists. They will provide feedback on the suitability of the materials with autonomy values and their effectiveness in supporting students' cognitive and social development in line with ZPD principles. This validation aims to assess the materials' suitability and the data's validity. The research methodology follows the framework that Kuhlthau (2002) proposed for systematic guidance in conducting research. The research steps are detailed as follows:
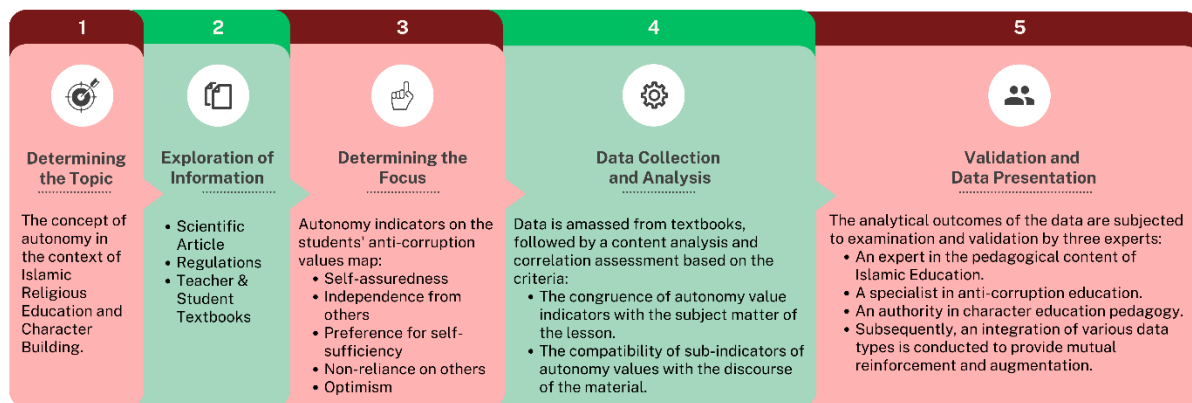

Figure 1. The Research Design Flow adapted from (Kuhlthau, 2002)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Autonomy Values

Autonomy within IRE and character-building play a pivotal role in inculcating the value of self-reliance. It is reflected in lessons designed to instill honest, responsible, and independent behavior in students. The educational content emphasizes the importance of decision-making based on principles of justice, integrity, and transparency, which align with Islamic teachings. In this context, autonomy extends beyond physical or economic independence to intellectual autonomy and moral decision-making. It requires students to cultivate critical thinking abilities, self-confidence, and the skills to act according to the religious and moral values they have been taught. Autonomy in IRE and character-building also involves a spiritual dimension, wherein students are encouraged to develop a strong personal connection with their religious values (Ilham et al., 2023), becoming independent individuals in their actions and their beliefs and understanding of their faith.

Table 1. Conceptual Map of the Autonomy Value Indicators in the IRE and Character-Building textbook for 5th Grade

Indicator Values vs Subject Matter Topics		Sub-Indicator Values vs Material Discussion Analysis		
Indicator Values	Subject Matter Topics	Sub-Indicator Values		Material Discussion Analysis
Autonomy	**Chapter 2:** Closer to the Names of Allah	1	Self-assuredness	Chapter 2 (p. 45) Chapter 10 (p. 247)
		2	Independence from others	Chapter 2 (p. 47)
		3	Non-reliance on others	*Not Found*
	Chapter 10 Exemplary Conduct of Khulafaur Rasyidin	4	Preference for self-sufficiency	*Not Found*
		5	Optimism	Chapter 2 (p. 45)

The table of concepts in the IRE and character-building for the 5th-grade textbook connects the curriculum with the pivotal values that support student autonomy. Through Chapters 2, "Closer to the Names of Allah," and 10, "Exemplary Conduct of Khulafaur Rasyidin," the textbook embeds the notion of independence as an intrinsic part of learning. The exploration of values such as "Self-confidence" and "Independence from others" on pages 45 and 47 of Chapter 2 reflects a recognition of the significance of autonomy within a spiritual context and social and personal realms.

Furthermore, Chapter 2 delves into "Optimism" as a key element in fostering autonomy, providing students with the understanding that a positive outlook is intertwined with self-confidence and self-reliance and that these values can become integral to their fundamental character through recognition and repetition. It acknowledges that optimism is not merely an attitude but a strategic component in equipping students to navigate and influence their environment.

Conversely, Chapter 10 offers further insight into how historical figures in Islam, such as the Khulafaur Rasyidin, exhibited independence and self-assurance that can serve as student exemplars. On page 247, there is the potential to discuss how their exemplary conduct could inspire students to cultivate their self-confidence. This perspective reveals that history and tradition can impart enduring lessons on autonomy through time.

However, the absence of discussion on sub-indicators of autonomy such as "Not wanting to be always served" and "Non-reliance on others" indicates a potential gap in teaching. It suggests that while some aspects of independence are well-addressed, other areas require further development within the curriculum so that all dimensions of autonomy can be explored and strengthened in teaching.

Integration of ZPD Theory and Application of Autonomy Learning in IRE and Character-Building

Applying ZPD theory within the context of IRE and character-building invites a dynamic and interactive learning approach, acknowledging individual differences in understanding religious and moral concepts. As a concept illustrating the potential learning space between what students can achieve independently and what they can achieve with assistance, it provides a framework for educators to identify and support the individual learning needs of each student. The following outlines the adapted stages of implementing ZPD theory within the context of IRE and character-building:
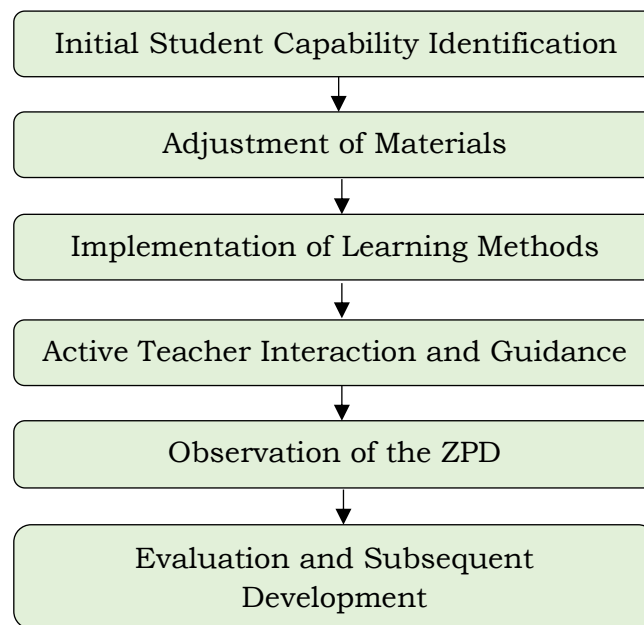
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      Initial Student Capability Identification      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                        ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│             Adjustment of Materials               │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Implementation of Learning Methods         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Active Teacher Interaction and Guidance    │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                        ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│               Observation of the ZPD              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Evaluation and Subsequent              │
│                 Development                        │
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Figure 2. Flowchart Illustrating the Application of ZPD Theory in the Context of IRE and Character-Building Learning

Implementing the ZPD for IRE and character-building begins with "Initial Student Capability Identification," where the student's preliminary understanding of the material is ascertained before initiating instruction. The subsequent phase, "Adjustment of IRE and character-building Material," involves adapting content based on the student's initial capability. Following this, "Implementation of Learning Methods" must employ methodologies congruent with the student's ZPD. This process is succeeded by "Active Teacher Interaction and Guidance," where the educator actively engages and guides students throughout the learning process. "Observation of the Zone of Proximal Development" becomes a crucial step, where the educator observes how students interact and learn within their ZPD. Ultimately, "Evaluation and Further Development" are conducted to assess student progress and plan future educational development. This process provides a step-by-step insight into how the ZPD theory can be effectively applied in the IRE and character-building context, focusing on material adjustment, appropriate learning method application, and active teacher interaction to support and facilitate student growth.

IRE and character-building teachers can utilize ZPD in their practice by identifying students' initial understanding of religious and moral content and guiding them to higher levels of understanding through appropriate activities. It might involve guided group discussions, where students with more advanced understanding can assist their still-developing peers. This approach fosters interaction and dialogue, facilitating a more inclusive and collaborative learning experience. In analyzing Chapters 2 and 10 of the IRE and character-building textbook for 5th Grade, the focus lies on how the material supports students in their ZPD.

Firstly, the use of historical exemplars, particularly in Chapter 10, featuring the struggles of the Khulafaur Rasyidin, provides tangible examples that facilitate students' understanding of autonomy and leadership values. It reflects the essence of ZPD, where students gain understanding through real-life examples with guidance from the teacher, such as in group discussions and presentations. *Secondly*, the interactive and collaborative learning approach, through group discussions and project-based learning activities, plays a role in reinforcing cooperation, initiative, and student autonomy. This method positions the learning material within the bounds of ZPD, allowing students to face challenges with adequate support. *Thirdly*, as emphasized in Chapter 10, reflection and self-evaluation activities empower students to analyze and apply knowledge about autonomy and leadership independently. It is an integral aspect of ZPD, where students receive information and learn to critique and apply that

knowledge. *Fourthly*, the book provides enrichment and remedial activities, supporting various levels of student learning abilities. It aligns with ZPD principles, ensuring that all students, regardless of their initial ability level, have the opportunity to grow and learn at a challenging yet reachable level. *Fifthly*, Chapters 2 and 10 offer a holistic approach to learning autonomy, covering aspects from self-confidence to leadership. It allows students to develop a broader and deeper understanding of autonomy, which is vital in the context of ZPD.

Furthermore, the application of scaffolding or support provided by educators and the learning environment enables students to exceed their current capacities, as per Margolis (2020), Puntambekar and Hubscher (2005), and Simons & Klein (2007). In the context of this book, teacher support might include guiding questions, additional explanations, or demonstrations. The structure of the learning material is designed to facilitate a gradual understanding of the concept of autonomy, using relevant stories and examples. Group work and class discussions are also forms of scaffolding that allow students to learn from each other, developing a deeper understanding of the value of autonomy. Additional learning resources like reflective questions, projects, or research activities support students' understanding of autonomy. The importance of gradually withdrawing scaffolding as students become more competent, allowing them to engage in personal reflection or take initiative in learning autonomy values, is echoed by Hadwin et al. (2005) and Zackariasson (2020).

Finally, encouraging students to apply what they have learned to real-life experiences helps reinforce understanding and internalization of autonomy. The use of thought-provoking questions is another critical aspect of ZPD (Kargar Behbahani & Karimpour, 2024; Margolis, 2020; Warford, 2011) in IRE and character-building. Questions designed to provoke reflection and criticism help students delve deeper into their understanding and develop critical thinking skills. It also allows them to connect religious teachings to real-life situations, thus deepening their understanding of character-building in a practical context. Stories and analogies, often used in IRE, become valuable tools in applying ZPD. Through engaging and relatable narratives, teachers can convey complex religious and moral concepts in a more comprehensible format, allowing students to make personal connections with the material (Slade et al., 2019; Souto-Manning, 2014). It helps reinforce memory and understanding and enhances students' daily ability to apply these concepts.

In the context of evaluation and feedback, ZPD demands a more formative approach, where educators continuously assess and adjust teaching methods based on student progress and needs (Ash & Levitt, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Dann, 2019). The feedback provided to students focuses on the correctness of their answers, the thought process, and deep understanding. The ultimate goal of applying ZPD in IRE and character-building is to develop independent learning among students. With this student-centered and adaptive approach, students gain a theoretical understanding of religious teachings and can apply them practically and reflectively. This literature review affirms that ZPD provides an effective foundation for teaching IRE and character-building, emphasizing meaningful and applicable learning aligned with each student's needs and capabilities.

The application of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory and emphasis on autonomy development in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and character building can yield significant impacts on students' overall learning experiences (Ariansyah, 2023). By considering the ZPD, teachers can identify individual students' levels of understanding and provide instructional materials tailored to these levels. This enables students to develop more complex cognitive skills, such as problem-solving and critical analysis, according to their abilities (Mustakimah, 2023). Additionally, the emphasis on autonomy allows students to become more active in the learning process, taking responsibility for their own learning and developing social skills such as teamwork and empathy through group collaboration. By designing learning experiences aligned with students' ZPD, teachers can also enhance students' motivation and engagement in their learning (Ariansyah, 2023; Kusmaryono & Kusumaningsih, 2021). Overall, this approach creates a student-centered learning environment, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of IRE and character building education in improving students' understanding and the development of their cognitive and social skills.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the value of independence in IRE and character-building plays a significant role in instilling honest, responsible, and independent behavior in students. The educational

material emphasizes decision-making based on principles of justice, integrity, and transparency in alignment with Islamic teachings. Here, independence encompasses physical, economic, intellectual, and moral decision-making aspects, necessitating students to develop critical thinking skills, self-confidence, and the ability to act according to religious and moral values. Independence also includes a spiritual aspect, supporting students in developing a personal connection with their religious values.

Material analysis indicates a correlation between independence and the lesson content in the IRE and character-building textbook for 5th Grade, particularly in Chapters 2 and 10. These chapters explore values such as self-reliance and non-dependence on others, recognizing optimism as a crucial element in independence. However, some sub-indicators of independence, like "Not wanting to be always served" and "Non-reliance on others," are not yet fully integrated, indicating a need for further curriculum development.

Integrating ZPD theory in teaching demonstrates a dynamic and interactive approach, acknowledging individual differences in understanding religious and moral concepts. ZPD provides a framework for educators to identify and support each student's learning needs individually. Applying ZPD involves adjusting materials, employing appropriate teaching methods, active teacher interaction, and formative evaluation to support student growth. It encourages collaborative, reflective, and critical thinking learning, focusing on developing students' independence in learning.

IRE and character-building teachers must utilize ZPD to enhance student understanding through group discussions and appropriate activities, fostering independence and self-confidence. This education should focus on meaningful and applicable learning tailored to the needs and abilities of students. The curriculum should be further developed to cover all aspects of independence, ensuring students understand and apply the theory practically. This approach will strengthen the internalization of religious and moral values, forming independent individuals in action and belief.

Funding and Conflicts of Interest

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