

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN FOSTERING VIRTUOUS CHARACTER AMONG STUDENTS IN TAKALAR REGENCY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' noble character (akhlakul karimah) in secondary schools in Takalar Regency. The research focuses on identifying teaching strategies, forms of exemplary conduct, and challenges faced by teachers in developing students' moral character. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and open-ended questionnaires as data collection techniques. The research subjects consisted of PAI teachers, school principals, and several students selected purposively. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that PAI teachers play a crucial role as educators, moral mentors, and role models for students. Core Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and politeness are instilled through habituation, exemplary behavior, and contextual learning. The supportive school environment and parental involvement further reinforce students' moral formation. However, teachers also face challenges such as the negative influence of digital media, limited time for moral instruction, and insufficient coordination between schools and families. The study concludes that the success of moral education depends significantly on teachers' exemplary conduct and the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders. It is recommended that PAI teachers continue to develop adaptive, example-based teaching methods, while schools and parents strengthen cooperation to create a conducive educational environment for nurturing students' Islamic character and moral integrity.

Keywords: Teacher, Islamic Religious Education, Development, Noble Character, Student

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam pembentukan akhlak mulia (akhlakul karimah) siswa di sekolah menengah Kabupaten Takalar. Fokus penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi strategi pembelajaran, bentuk keteladanan, serta tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam membina karakter siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan angket terbuka. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas guru PAI, kepala sekolah, dan beberapa siswa yang dipilih secara purposive. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, serta

penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru PAI berperan penting sebagai pendidik, pembimbing moral, serta teladan bagi siswa. Nilai-nilai kejujuran, tanggung jawab, disiplin, dan sopan santun ditanamkan melalui pembiasaan, keteladanan, dan pembelajaran yang kontekstual. Dukungan lingkungan sekolah dan keterlibatan orang tua memperkuat pembentukan akhlak mulia siswa. Namun, guru PAI juga menghadapi kendala seperti pengaruh negatif media digital, kurangnya waktu pembinaan karakter, dan minimnya sinergi antara sekolah dan keluarga. Simpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan pembentukan akhlak mulia sangat bergantung pada keteladanan guru dan dukungan kolaboratif semua pihak. Disarankan agar guru PAI terus mengembangkan metode pembelajaran yang adaptif dan berbasis keteladanan, sementara sekolah dan orang tua perlu memperkuat kerja sama dalam menciptakan lingkungan pendidikan yang kondusif bagi pengembangan karakter Islami siswa.

Kata kunci: Guru, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Pembentukan, Akhlakul Mulia, Siswa

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important aspects of life for the younger generation of Indonesians, as it serves as the primary foundation for shaping a generation that is intellectually and spiritually enlightened. The Law states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to possess religious and spiritual strength, self-control, character, intelligence, noble morals, and the skills necessary for themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Law of the Republic of Indonesia, No. 20 of 2003, Article 1, Paragraph 1). This is reinforced by the objectives of Islamic education, namely instilling faith, piety, and virtuous character in students. Furthermore, it is stated that Islamic education aims to develop well-rounded individuals by integrating moral, intellectual, and social aspects.

The objectives of Islamic education include the formation of a just, wise, and responsible personality in daily life. This includes a willingness to help others; this helpful nature is a manifestation of a living faith, a pure heart, and a high level of social concern. This is because Islamic education is a process of preparing individuals through teaching, guidance, and training to internalize and implement the true meaning of Islamic teachings in their lives—both as individuals and as members of society—in order to achieve a happy life, both physically and spiritually, in this world and the hereafter. One of the primary instruments in this effort to foster noble character is the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers.

Islamic Religious Education teachers do not merely function to transfer knowledge; rather, they have a broad and dynamic role—not only conveying instructional material cognitively but also instilling attitudes and values through habit formation and setting a good example. For teachers are the heart of Islamic education, tasked with the duty, function, and responsibility to convey, disseminate, and teach the values of Islamic teachings to students, as well as to safeguard, provide, and filtering out negative influences for the students' future well-being. In addition to serving as educators,

mentors, advisors, and role models, they also play a role in shaping students' faith, piety, and Islamic character. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' character through the teaching of religious values, exemplary behavior, moral guidance, and positive interactions.

They are not only responsible for teaching religious knowledge to students but also have a significant opportunity to instill religious values—such as moral principles and noble character—in students' daily lives. Noble character refers to behaviors and attitudes that reflect Islamic values in daily life, such as honesty, patience, tolerance, compassion, and responsibility. This is highly relevant to cultivate in the field of education, as it serves as the primary foundation for shaping a civilized, tolerant, and principled society. However, the reality on the ground shows that the cultivation of noble character does not always align with current teaching practices. Many students experience moral decline, engage in deviant behavior, and lack spiritual awareness in their daily lives. This phenomenon raises questions about the extent of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering students' noble character, as well as the strategies and approaches they employ. It cannot be denied that Islamic Religious Education teachers face various challenges, both internal—such as time constraints and limited teaching methods—and external—such as the influence of the social environment, digital media, and a lack of support from families.

This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic religious education teachers in fostering noble character among students in junior high schools in Takalar Regency. The primary focus of this study is to identify the strategies employed by Islamic religious education teachers, the examples of virtuous behavior they model, the challenges they face in the process of teaching moral values, and the tangible impact on students' attitudes and behavior. Through a qualitative approach, this study is expected to comprehensively and contextually describe the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers, thereby serving as a reference for the development of noble character education in other educational institutions.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' noble character. This approach was chosen so that the researcher could capture the meanings, experiences, and values inherent in the natural practice of religious education within the school environment. Research Location and Subjects: This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Bontonompo Selatan Satap Salajo in Takalar Regency. The location was selected through purposive sampling because the school has active Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and offers a student character-building program through religious activities. The subjects in this study included one PAI teacher. Data Collection Techniques: Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the PAI teacher, the principal, and several students to explore the role, strategies, and impact of teaching *akhlakul karimah* values. Participatory observation was used to observe

interactions between teachers and students, including the teacher's attitude while teaching and student behavior within the school environment. **Research Instruments:** The researcher served as the primary instrument (human instrument), aided by an interview guide, an observation sheet, and an open-ended questionnaire developed based on a framework aligned with the research focus. **Data validity** was tested through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. **Data Analysis Techniques:** Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which comprises three stages: a. Data reduction, to sort out important information according to the research focus; b. Data presentation, in the form of descriptive narratives; and c. Drawing conclusions, while maintaining the validity of meaning through re-verification with the subjects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' noble character is a highly strategic aspect of the education system, particularly in the context of character education based on Islamic values. PAI teachers do not merely serve as conveyors of instructional material but also as agents of value internalization who play a direct role in shaping students' personalities. In practice, the development of noble character cannot be achieved instantly but rather through a continuous, structured process involving various mutually reinforcing pedagogical approaches. The findings of this study indicate that PAI teachers employ various integrative strategies, ranging from providing conceptual understanding, creating a conducive learning environment, modeling exemplary behavior, reinforcing positive behavior, to engaging students in real-world activities that support the development of Islamic character.

First, the most fundamental aspect of fostering noble character is providing a systematic and easily understandable explanation of the concept of *akhlakul karimah* to students. PAI teachers not only convey normative definitions of character but also strive to contextualize them so they are relevant to students' daily lives. In this process, narrative approaches—such as the use of stories and exemplary accounts of the prophets, the Companions, and other Islamic figures—serve as effective tools for simultaneously fostering affective and cognitive understanding. These stories function as concrete moral models, enabling students not only to grasp values in the abstract but also to internalize the moral meanings embedded within them. For example, when explaining the concept of honesty, teachers do not merely define honesty as telling the truth but also relate it to real-life situations such as honesty during exams, in social interactions, and within family life. Consequently, students' understanding becomes more comprehensive and applicable.

Second, creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment is a crucial factor in supporting the internalization of *akhlakul karimah* values. PAI teachers act as facilitators who foster a democratic, open classroom climate that values every student's opinion. Such an environment allows students to feel psychologically safe when expressing their opinions, asking questions, or engaging in discussions. In the context of humanistic

learning theory, these conditions strongly support the development of students' affective aspects because they do not feel pressured or afraid during the learning process. Teachers also strive to avoid authoritarian approaches, instead prioritizing interactive dialogue that fosters students' moral awareness. In a positive environment, values such as mutual respect, tolerance, and empathy can grow naturally through daily learning interactions.

Third, setting a good example (*uswah hasanah*) is a key factor inseparable from the role of PAI teachers in shaping students' character. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as behavioral models observed and emulated by students. From the perspective of social learning theory, an individual's behavior is significantly influenced by the process of observing models deemed significant. Therefore, every action a teacher takes—whether in speaking, behaving, or interacting with students and colleagues—has a direct impact on the formation of students' character. PAI teachers are expected to consistently demonstrate behavior that reflects Islamic values, such as honesty, discipline, patience, responsibility, and social concern. This exemplary behavior serves as a form of indirect learning that often has a stronger influence than verbal explanations in the classroom.

Fourth, the use of positive reinforcement and constructive reprimands is also a crucial component of strategies for fostering noble character. Islamic Education teachers express appreciation to students who demonstrate behavior aligned with Islamic values, such as helping peers, speaking truthfully, or exhibiting polite manners. This positive reinforcement can take the form of praise, verbal recognition, or other forms of acknowledgment that can boost students' intrinsic motivation to continue behaving well. Conversely, when students violate moral values, teachers do not immediately impose repressive punishments but instead emphasize a corrective approach that fosters self-awareness. Reprimands are delivered wisely, without humiliating students, and are geared toward self-reflection so that students understand the mistakes they have made and their impact on themselves and others. This approach aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which prioritize compassion and the gradual development of character.

Fifth, student involvement in practical and social activities serves as a vital means of internalizing the values of *akhlakul karimah*. Islamic Education teachers do not limit learning to the classroom but also integrate learning experiences with real-world activities such as social events, community service, religious activities, and community outreach programs. Through these activities, students are given the opportunity to practice values such as compassion, solidarity, mutual cooperation, and social responsibility. For example, during community service activities, students learn to share with those in need, so that the values of empathy and compassion are not merely understood theoretically but are truly experienced firsthand. This hands-on experience has a more profound impact on character development than purely cognitive learning.

Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction delivered by teachers demonstrates an integrative approach that combines theoretical and practical aspects. Topics such as the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*) and the pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*) are

not merely taught as religious concepts to be memorized but are always linked to their application in daily life. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers strive to bridge the gap between theological understanding and students' social realities, ensuring that religious values do not remain merely theoretical knowledge but truly serve as a guide for action. For example, when discussing the pillar of Islam regarding zakat, teachers do not merely explain its definition but also connect it to the values of social compassion and responsibility toward others. Similarly, when discussing honesty, teachers do not merely explain the concept but also provide concrete examples in various life situations—such as honesty during exams, in social interactions, and in the increasingly complex digital world.

This integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in PAI instruction demonstrates that moral education cannot be separated from the overall learning process. PAI teachers serve as facilitators who not only transfer knowledge but also guide students through the process of internalizing values. In this context, religious education serves as a means of character transformation oriented toward the formation of the “whole person” (*insan kamil*)—that is, an individual who is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses strong moral and spiritual integrity.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also indicate that the success of fostering noble character is significantly influenced by teachers' consistency in applying these strategies. When all approaches are implemented continuously and in an integrated manner, the process of internalizing values will be more effective. However, the challenges faced cannot be ignored, such as differences in students' backgrounds, the influence of the environment outside of school, and technological developments that can significantly affect student behavior. Therefore, the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must be supported by collaboration with parents, school administrators, and the broader social environment.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a vital role in shaping students' noble character through a comprehensive approach, including conceptual learning, setting a good example, reinforcing behavior, creating a conducive learning environment, and engaging in practical activities. This process not only produces students who understand religious values theoretically but also enables them to consistently implement these values in their daily lives. Thus, Islamic religious education truly serves as the primary foundation for shaping the character of the younger generation—one that is virtuous, possesses integrity, and is capable of facing the challenges of the times while remaining steadfast in Islamic values.

DISCUSSION

In today's era of globalization, students' noble character is under intense scrutiny, as their moral standards have deteriorated to an alarming degree. Consequently, serious anticipation and intervention are needed to address this problem—and this is where the role and methods of teachers become essential, as their role is of paramount importance

and cannot be underestimated. Teachers are not merely conveyors of academic material but agents of moral transformation who bear the responsibility of shaping students' personalities. This is because teachers are highly influential figures in students' lives, particularly in guiding them toward maturity so they may become individuals who contribute positively to society and their nation. Therefore, a teacher is required to possess noble character so that they can also set a good example for students. The cultivation of noble character is one of the primary goals of education, particularly Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

PAI teachers bear a crucial responsibility in guiding and shaping students' character through the teaching of Islamic moral values and ethics. This is because Islamic Religious Education plays the most vital role in nurturing students' character so that they may grow and develop into well-rounded individuals—intelligent, skilled, and God-fearing toward Allah SWT. Character development essentially provides guidance so that students can do good and avoid what is bad; therefore, it is very important to implement character development. Instilling religious education in children will have a positive impact on their development; through such education, children's behavior will be guided by the rules established by religion, thereby protecting them from falling into the abyss of immorality and promiscuity, which would ultimately ruin their future.

It is essential for teachers to guide students so they possess religious wisdom in resolving both life's challenges and academic difficulties at school. Islamic education refers to an educational system that empowers individuals to lead their lives in accordance with Islamic ideals and values that are deeply ingrained in their character. As explained above, character development is essential to align with the moral example of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who serves as a role model for his followers. Given the importance of character in building resilient individuals, character education must be implemented effectively. To achieve this, commitment is needed from various stakeholders—including the government, society, families, and educational institutions—especially in this era of disruption.

The positive impact of the era of disruption in the world of education includes the introduction of advanced learning media, suitable internet systems, online learning systems, various global advancements, and other computer science learning programs. However, this turbulent period has had a negative impact on the morals and character of the nation's children. Children today are immersed in a culture of instant gratification. With the proliferation of the internet, children can now easily access information. Consequently, many children imitate negative behaviors. Factors influencing morality include habits, training, heredity, environment, and education. An alternative approach to character development in education and schools is to optimize the teaching of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), specifically education on prayer and Akhlakul Karimah (noble character). In the context of millennial globalization, the Indonesian education system must help children understand the existence of other nations and their own nation in relation to global issues.

Therefore, teachers must maximize their roles, as they serve as mentors, educators, role models, practitioners of teaching methods and media, and creators of a conducive learning environment. Teachers are individuals who hold a position and play a vital role in education. Their role is essential for educating, guiding, and motivating students. Teachers also serve as conveyors of knowledge, catalysts, and advisors. To use a metaphor, teachers are like a painting that students will emulate. Fundamentally, whether the resulting “painting” is good or bad depends on the example set by the teacher. As the saying goes, teachers are respected and imitated. In other words, teachers must play a vital role as role models for students—especially elementary school-aged children—who will consistently mimic their teachers’ every behavior at school. At that age, children are highly impressionable and may even view their teachers as idols, placing them above their own parents. Given this role, it is clear that a teacher must possess a good and upright character.

This is because a teacher’s duties extend beyond simply teaching; they also involve instilling and developing students’ character values. In the learning process, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers have the responsibility to teach the moral values contained in religious teachings. This includes teaching the importance of honesty, responsibility, empathy, and mutual respect. Through interactive and engaging teaching methods, PAI teachers can help students understand and internalize these values. For example, by using stories from the Qur’an and Hadith that illustrate virtuous behavior, teachers can provide concrete examples of how *akhlakul karimah* can be applied in daily life. Additionally, PAI teachers play a role in fostering students’ character through extracurricular activities. Activities such as religious study sessions, community service, and other religious programs can provide students with practical experience in applying the values of *akhlakul karimah*. In these activities, students not only learn theory but also have the opportunity to interact with and contribute to the community. This will strengthen their understanding of the importance of behaving well and making a positive contribution to their surroundings.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a strategic and fundamental role in shaping the noble character of students in junior high schools in Takalar Regency. PAI teachers serve not only as educators who impart religious knowledge but also as moral role models, spiritual guides, and motivators in building students’ Islamic character. Through interactive, contextual, and engaging teaching methods—such as exemplary stories, the cultivation of positive behaviors, and religious activities—teachers are able to instill the values of honesty, responsibility, discipline, and good manners, which form the foundation of *akhlakul karimah*. Teachers’ exemplary conduct is a key factor, as their behavior and attitudes directly influence how students behave and perceive virtue. Furthermore, this study indicates that the process of character development cannot be effective without the support of the school environment, the active role of parents, and community involvement. The synergy among these three elements

creates an educational climate conducive to the internalization of moral values. However, PAI teachers also face challenges such as the negative influence of digital media, a lack of time for character development, and limited parental oversight of student behavior. Therefore, adaptive, collaborative, and role-model-oriented teaching strategies are needed to address these challenges. The role of PAI teachers in shaping students' noble character is integral and ongoing. With moral commitment, professionalism, and support from all parties, the goal of Islamic education—to produce a generation that is knowledgeable, faithful, and of noble character—can be realized, leading to the emergence of a civilized, tolerant, and dignified society.

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