



Educational Management Practices of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Developing Students' Character in Elementary Education

Habibullah*, Sugiono

Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

Email : haby.titans@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author

Character education is a fundamental component of elementary education, requiring not only pedagogical efforts but also effective educational management practices. This study aims to analyse how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers implement educational management practices in developing students' character through role modelling, religious habituation, and humanistic interaction. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved IRE teachers, school principals, classroom teachers, and students as key informants. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analysed using an interactive analysis model. The findings indicate that IRE teachers play a managerial role in character education by planning and modelling moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect; organising structured religious practices that foster discipline and order; and implementing humanistic interactions that reinforce moral development through empathetic communication and persuasive approaches. These practices collectively function as an integrated educational management process that supports character formation beyond formal instruction. The study implies that strengthening students' character requires schools to recognise IRE teachers as key actors in educational management and to institutionalise role modelling, habituation, and relational practices as part of school-wide character governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is a strategic issue in the development of human resources and has direct implications for the moral resilience of society. At the elementary education level, schools play a foundational role in shaping students' values, attitudes, and behavioral orientations that will influence their ethical

decisions in later life (Hill et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2020; Lorente et al., 2024). Recent social trends indicate increasing moral challenges among school-aged children, including declining discipline, weakened responsibility, and reduced respect for teachers and parents. These conditions threaten not only educational quality but also long-term social cohesion. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds a strategic position because it integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in value formation (Akhyar et al., 2024; Nuhrodin, 2025). However, the effectiveness of IRE in character development depends largely on how teachers manage and implement educational values in daily practice. Therefore, examining the educational management practices of IRE teachers is essential to understanding how character education can function as a meaningful societal response rather than a symbolic curricular agenda.

Despite strong policy emphasis on character education, its implementation in elementary schools remains problematic, particularly at the managerial and organizational levels. Character education is often treated as a supplementary program rather than an integral component of school management systems. Consequently, planning, implementation, and evaluation of character development are frequently fragmented and inconsistent. Teachers are commonly burdened with academic targets and administrative demands, leaving limited space for sustained attention to students' moral and behavioral development (Fathi et al., 2020; Steinwachs et al., 2022). Moreover, students are increasingly influenced by digital media, social environments, and family parenting patterns that may conflict with Islamic moral values promoted at school (Díaz-Noguera et al., 2023). In the absence of coherent educational management practices, IRE teachers face structural constraints in ensuring consistency between school values and students' lived experiences. This situation highlights that challenges in character education are not merely pedagogical issues but reflect deeper weaknesses in educational management and school governance.

Empirical conditions in elementary schools indicate that character education through IRE learning is still predominantly instructional and normative in nature. Moral values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility are often delivered conceptually, with limited emphasis on internalization through consistent practice. Religious habituation activities are not always systematically managed as part of school routines, and teachers' exemplary behavior is rarely institutionalized as an organizational culture. Although IRE teachers play a central role in character formation, their efforts frequently rely on individual initiative rather than structured management support. As a result, character education outcomes vary widely and are difficult to evaluate systematically. In many cases, character-building practices are disconnected from school planning documents, supervision mechanisms, and evaluation frameworks. This phenomenon illustrates a gap between the normative goals of

character education and the realities of educational management at the elementary level. Understanding how IRE teachers operationalize character education within their managerial roles is therefore critical to addressing this gap in practice.

Previous studies have extensively examined teachers' roles in character education. Research by Cancino (2022) and Cislowska (2024) emphasizes teacher exemplarity as a primary determinant of moral internalization among students. Other scholars highlight the importance of integrating character values into systematic instructional processes (Astuti, 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2024). Additionally, Zakiyyah et al. (2024) demonstrate that continuous habituation is more effective than incidental moral instruction. These studies contribute valuable pedagogical insights into character education practices. However, most of this literature conceptualizes teachers primarily as individual moral agents rather than as actors within educational management systems. Consequently, character education is often framed as a classroom-based instructional activity rather than an organizational process involving planning, coordination, and institutional commitment. This limitation suggests the need for a management-oriented perspective that situates teachers' character-building roles within broader school governance structures.

Other studies underline teachers' multifaceted roles as educators, mentors, and moral role models (Muhammad et al., 2025), yet these discussions tend to remain normative or policy-oriented. While some research addresses character education policies, few studies empirically investigate how such policies are translated into daily practices by IRE teachers in elementary schools (Jamil, 2024; Mariyono, 2024; Safuan et al., 2024). As a result, limited attention has been given to the managerial dimensions of character education, particularly how teachers plan, implement, and sustain character-building activities within institutional constraints. This gap indicates a lack of empirical models that explain character education as an educational management practice rather than a set of moral ideals. Addressing this research gap is essential for developing practical and sustainable character education frameworks that can be implemented effectively at the school level.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic examination of IRE teachers not only as subject instructors but also as practitioners of educational management in character development. This research integrates pedagogical, religious, and organizational dimensions to analyze how character values are planned, enacted, and maintained in everyday school life. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on concepts or policies, this study emphasizes actual management practices, including teacher exemplarity, religious habituation, and humanistic interaction as organized and sustained processes. By adopting this perspective, the study positions character education as a core element of school management rather than an auxiliary moral agenda. This approach contributes to the

advancement of educational management discourse by embedding character development within the operational realities of elementary education institutions.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study seeks to address the central question of how Islamic Religious Education teachers implement educational management practices to develop students' character in elementary education. The research focuses on teachers' managerial roles, the strategies employed in learning processes, the character values emphasized, and the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing implementation. The core argument of this study is that the success of character education largely depends on the capacity of IRE teachers to integrate Islamic values into daily educational practices through systematic and sustainable management. The preliminary assumption suggests that teacher exemplarity, structured habituation, and humanistic approaches constitute the foundation of effective character development. The originality of this study lies in its empirical and contextual mapping of these practices, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of educational management and character education policy in elementary schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design (Kekeya, 2023). This design was selected to align with the research objective, which seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers enact educational management practices in developing students' character through instructional processes and everyday interactions within the school environment. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on meanings, processes, and lived experiences rather than on the quantitative measurement of variables. The case study design allows for a comprehensive exploration of character education practices within a real-life context, enabling a holistic understanding of the managerial roles of IRE teachers in elementary education settings.

The research was conducted in an elementary school in Indonesia that actively integrates Islamic Religious Education with character development programs. The site was purposively selected because the school systematically implements religious learning, moral habituation, and daily character-building activities as part of its educational practices. The presence of structured religious programs and routine moral activities provided a relevant context for examining how IRE teachers manage, organize, and sustain character education initiatives. This setting offered rich and contextual data, making it suitable for analysing educational management practices related to students' character development at the elementary level.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and

documentation (Cole, 2024). Observations were conducted to examine IRE learning processes, teacher–student interactions, and students’ behavioural patterns in daily school activities. In-depth interviews were used to explore the perspectives, experiences, and strategies of IRE teachers in developing students’ character, as well as the views of school principals and classroom teachers regarding character education implementation. Documentation served as supporting data, including lesson plans, religious programs, school regulations, discipline records, and documents related to character development activities.

Data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously, following the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying data relevant to the research objectives through a systematic reduction process. The condensed data were then displayed in organized and descriptive narratives to clarify relationships among themes and categories. Finally, verification was conducted through interpretation and pattern identification to draw credible conclusions, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the educational management practices of IRE teachers in developing students’ character.

To ensure data validity, this study applied triangulation techniques (R. E. Cole, 2024). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from IRE teachers, school principals, classroom teachers, and students. Method triangulation was achieved by cross-checking data from observations, interviews, and documentation. Additionally, data were reviewed and clarified through discussions with key informants to confirm that the findings accurately represented the actual conditions observed in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the main findings derived from field data collection and analysis. The study focuses on the educational management practices of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in developing students’ character through role modelling, religious habituation, and humanistic interaction. The findings describe the forms, processes, and patterns of character development as embedded in daily educational practices at the elementary school level.

Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Role Models in Character Development

Based on the findings, Islamic Religious Education teachers play a central role as moral and behavioural role models through their attitudes, conduct, and

daily habits consistently displayed in interactions with students. Role modelling is reflected not only in instructional delivery but also in teachers' ways of speaking, decision-making, emotional regulation, and responses to students' behaviour. Teachers are perceived as figures who are continuously observed and imitated by students; therefore, every action performed by the teacher contributes to students' character formation. In this context, role modelling is understood as a natural educational process that occurs through concrete examples rather than verbal instruction alone. The findings indicate that IRE teachers function as a foundational element in instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and proper conduct among students.

Interviews with IRE teachers revealed that role modelling is considered the primary strategy in character development. One teacher stated, "I always try to be careful with my words and behaviour in front of students, because whatever I do will be directly imitated by them." Another informant emphasized, "If teachers only give advice without providing examples, students find it difficult to internalize the values. They imitate actions faster than they listen to instructions." These statements indicate that teachers are aware of their managerial and moral responsibility in shaping students' character through personal conduct. Role modelling is not perceived as a formal obligation, but as an inherent ethical responsibility attached to the professional identity of IRE teachers.

Interviews with the school principal and classroom teachers further strengthened this finding. The principal explained, "IRE teachers serve as behavioural references for students, especially in matters related to religious attitudes and manners." Similarly, a classroom teacher noted, "When the IRE teacher arrives on time and shows patience, students adjust their behaviour accordingly." These perspectives suggest that the influence of IRE teachers' role modelling extends beyond students and is also recognized by other educators. Consistent behaviour creates psychological and moral influence, positioning the IRE teacher as a value reference within the school environment.

Classroom observations confirmed that IRE teachers consistently demonstrated character values such as polite communication, patience when correcting students, and direct participation in religious practices. Teachers were also observed initiating activities in an orderly manner and respecting time, which students subsequently followed. This consistency between speech and action reinforces the teacher's credibility as a role model. Overall, the data reveal a clear pattern: sustained behavioural consistency, emotional presence, and alignment between values taught and values practiced form the foundation of

effective character modelling in elementary education management.

Humanistic Interaction as a Reinforcement of Students' Moral Values

Humanistic interaction in this study refers to educational relationships characterized by empathy, respectful communication, persuasive guidance, individualized academic support, and constructive behavioural mentoring. These interactions are evident in the ways teachers provide instructions, correct mistakes, and respond to students' problems without applying verbal pressure, intimidation, or punitive measures. In practice, humanistic interaction positions students as respected moral and emotional subjects within the learning process. The findings indicate that this approach plays a crucial role in strengthening students' moral values, particularly respect, empathy, responsibility, and behavioural awareness within the school setting.

Table 1. Documentation of Activities and Indicators of Findings

Observation (Activity Documentation)	Indicator
Teachers engage in direct dialogue with students in class	Polite and open communication
Teachers provide assistance to students facing learning difficulties	Empathy and care
Teachers correct students using a persuasive approach	Emotional regulation and respect for students
Classroom atmosphere is communicative and conducive	Positive teacher–student relationships

Documentation data demonstrate that teacher–student interactions consistently reflect humanistic communication patterns that support moral development. Dialogical approaches foster a safe and comfortable learning atmosphere, enabling students to express themselves without fear. Individual assistance illustrates care and empathy that are directly experienced by students, while persuasive correction emphasizes dignity and respect in behavioural guidance. These practices suggest that moral reinforcement occurs through respectful communication, patience, and relational sensitivity rather than authority-based control.

The data patterns show that moral values are strengthened through sustained empathetic and dialogical interactions. Teachers who establish open communication tend to build positive emotional relationships, making students more receptive to guidance and behavioural direction. This pattern is evident across various situations, both during instruction and when addressing students' personal challenges. Humanistic interaction contributes to a learning

environment that encourages students to develop respectful behaviour, emotional self-control, and social responsibility. Thus, moral development emerges from healthy and continuous social relationships rather than from authoritarian or purely instructional approaches.

Religious Habituation as a Mechanism for Developing Student Discipline

Religious habituation in this study is defined as structured and routine religious activities integrated into daily school life, including prayers before and after lessons, collective worship, and students' participation in religious routines. These practices function not only as spiritual activities but also as mechanisms for developing student discipline. In the field, religious habituation is understood as a character education process that relies on consistent repetition to shape behavioural habits. Discipline is reflected in punctuality, regular participation, compliance with school rules, and students' readiness to engage in learning activities. The findings indicate that religious habituation serves as an effective medium for cultivating discipline through lived daily experiences.

Observations revealed that students participated orderly in morning prayers before lessons began. Most students arrived in class on time and engaged simultaneously in prayer activities led by teachers. Following these activities, students demonstrated readiness to learn by sitting properly and focusing on instructions. This regularity suggests that religious routines function as implicit training for time management and self-regulation. Repeated practice enables students to internalize behavioural expectations without explicit enforcement.

Further observations showed that during collective religious activities, students consistently complied with established rules, arrived punctually, and organized themselves neatly without repeated reminders. Students who arrived late were guided persuasively, while punctual students displayed higher engagement and readiness. These habits were interpreted as outcomes of consistent and structured religious routines embedded in school culture. Over time, repetition fostered collective awareness that discipline is a shared responsibility rather than an imposed obligation.

Overall, the findings indicate that religious habituation plays a significant role in shaping student discipline through routine, order, and time adherence. Discipline is not taught through direct commands, but through daily experiences that cultivate self-control and responsibility. Data patterns confirm that structured and continuous religious activities gradually embed discipline into students' daily behaviour, transforming it into a habitual and internalized character trait within elementary education management practices.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers as moral role models aligns closely with educational management literature that positions teachers as central agents in students' character development. Previous studies consistently emphasize that exemplary-based character education is among the most effective approaches, as students internalize values through social imitation (Alfarezel, 2025; Alhamuddin, 2024; Bali, 2024). This study reinforces these arguments by demonstrating that teachers' behavioral consistency, alignment between speech and action, and emotional presence significantly shape students' honesty, responsibility, and courteous behavior. From a management perspective, this finding suggests that character education is not merely an instructional strategy but a form of moral leadership embedded in teachers' professional practice (Fakhrurrozi et al., 2023; Herlina, 2024).

Distinct from prior studies, this research highlights that exemplary conduct functions not only as a pedagogical technique but also as a continuous moral practice arising from teachers' professional awareness. Such awareness enables values to be transmitted organically and sustainably within the school environment. In this sense, educational management practices that emphasize teacher integrity and ethical consistency become crucial mechanisms for embedding character education into daily school life. This reinforces the idea that effective educational management must integrate moral dimensions into teacher performance standards and school culture development.

The findings related to religious habituation practices and student discipline are also consistent with character education literature, which underscores habit formation as a key driver of behavioral change. Several studies have shown that discipline is more effectively cultivated through repeated routines rather than through verbal instruction alone (Abdullah, 2024; Aziz & Sain, 2025; Fernando, 2022). This study supports these conclusions by demonstrating that consistently implemented religious routines foster orderliness, punctuality, and rule compliance among students. From an educational management standpoint, structured habituation reflects effective organizational planning and routine institutionalization within the school system.

However, this study extends existing scholarship by revealing that religious habituation not only shapes technical discipline but also nurtures

students' internal self-regulation. Discipline is thus perceived not as external coercion but as a personal necessity grounded in daily practice. This finding implies that educational management should prioritize sustainable routines that promote intrinsic motivation and self-awareness, positioning character development as a long-term institutional objective rather than a short-term behavioral outcome.

Furthermore, the humanistic interactions between teachers and students observed in this study are congruent with humanistic education theory, which emphasizes emotional relationships as the foundation of moral development. Prior research confirms that empathetic communication and dialogical approaches foster positive learning climates and support moral growth (Bahri et al., 2023; Izzah et al., 2024). This study strengthens these arguments by providing empirical evidence that persuasive approaches, personal guidance, and respectful communication play a critical role in cultivating mutual respect and empathy among students. Within educational management, such interactions reflect relational leadership practices that enhance moral internalization (Luthfi et al., 2025; Ninoersy et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study reinforces the concept of integrative character education, which combines role modeling, habituation, and social interaction into a unified educational process (Hina, 2024; Jali, 2025). The findings affirm that character development cannot be separated from everyday school practices and must be reflected in teachers' attitudes, institutional culture, and educational relationships. Practically, the study implies that schools should strengthen character-based educational management by promoting behavioral consistency, reinforcing religious routines, and adopting humanistic pedagogical approaches. Islamic Religious Education should therefore be understood not merely as the transmission of normative values but as a lived character formation process manifested through meaningful social experiences (Munawwaroh, 2024; Putri et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, this study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play a pivotal role in developing students' character through effective educational management practices. The most significant insight of this study lies in the identification of three interrelated pillars that shape students' character: teachers' exemplary conduct, consistent religious habituation, and humanistic teacher–student interactions. IRE teachers function not merely as transmitters of religious knowledge but as moral leaders whose

attitudes and behaviors are continuously observed and internalized by students. Regular religious routines foster discipline, order, and responsibility, while humanistic interactions strengthen moral values through positive emotional relationships. The key lesson drawn from this study is that successful character education cannot rely solely on normative instruction; rather, it must be embedded in sustained, lived practices within everyday school life.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the field of character education and educational management by offering an integrative framework that connects pedagogical, religious, and social dimensions within Islamic Religious Education. It enriches the literature by providing empirical evidence of how character formation is operationalized through concrete management practices at the elementary education level. Nevertheless, this study is subject to limitations, as it was conducted within a single institutional context and involved a limited number of participants, thereby restricting the generalizability of its findings. Future research is recommended to involve multiple educational institutions, compare diverse school contexts, and examine the interaction between the roles of IRE teachers, family environments, and community influences to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of students' character development.

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