



The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Cultivating Religious Character: A Case Study of Boarding School-Connected Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' religious character by examining their roles as educators, role models, mentors, and supervisors-partners. The research addresses the need to strengthen students' religious character amid challenges related to worship discipline, moral consistency, and social influences in vocational education. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation involving seven purposively selected informants consisting of PAI teachers and students. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and audit trails, while data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings reveal that PAI teachers play interconnected roles in developing students' religious character through the integration of Islamic values in learning, exemplary behavior, religious habituation, continuous guidance, and behavioral supervision. The study implies that effective religious character education requires collaboration among teachers, schools, families, and educational environments to ensure the consistent internalization of religious values in students' daily lives.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology and social transformation in the twenty-first century have significantly influenced the values, behaviors, and identities of younger generations. Although technological advancement provides broader access to knowledge and communication, it also creates social challenges, including weakened moral sensitivity, declining discipline, reduced

social responsibility, and challenges in maintaining spiritual values among adolescents (Milki et al., 2026; Sulastri et al., 2025). This issue makes character education increasingly important because schools are expected not only to develop students' intellectual competencies but also to prepare individuals with ethical awareness and moral responsibility. Religious character education is essential for society because it contributes to the development of individuals who possess faith, integrity, and responsible behavior in social life. Previous studies indicate that Islamic character development requires the integration of religious values into learning processes, school culture, and students' daily interactions (Mulyana et al., 2023; Darmansyah & Susanti, 2024). Therefore, strengthening religious character through education becomes a strategic effort to address moral challenges among younger generations.

In Islamic education, religious character formation is theoretically grounded in the concept of value internalization, social learning, and teacher exemplarity. Religious character is not merely developed through cognitive understanding of religious teachings but through continuous processes of modeling, habituation, reinforcement, and reflection. Bandura's social learning theory explains that students acquire attitudes and behaviors by observing, imitating, and receiving reinforcement from significant figures in their environment, particularly teachers. Within Islamic education, teachers are positioned as educators, role models, and moral guides who translate Islamic values into practical behaviors (Rawasiyah Rawasiyah, 2025; Tabina & Dora, 2025). Research highlights that the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers extends beyond knowledge transmission because teachers influence students' attitudes through personal example, classroom interaction, and religious practices (Khozin et al., 2024; Adib, 2024, Aprilliana et al., 2024). Furthermore, Islamic character education emphasizes that teachers' consistency between words and actions becomes a crucial factor in shaping students' moral awareness and religious identity (Abidin et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024).

Despite the strategic role of religious education, society continues to face challenges in developing students' religious character, particularly in vocational schools where educational orientation is strongly associated with professional skills and employment preparation (Mustafa & Maulana, 2024; Rahmadan & Shudiq, 2024). The emphasis on technical competence sometimes reduces attention toward moral development, ethical responsibility, and spiritual awareness among students. In this context, vocational education requires a balanced approach that integrates competency development with character formation. The problem becomes more complex when students participate in religious activities as formal obligations rather than as expressions of internalized values. Previous studies reveal that religious character development requires

more than religious instruction because it depends on supportive school culture, habituation programs, parental involvement, and consistent teacher guidance (Mushoffah & Kurniawati, 2025; Kibtiyah et al., 2025). Therefore, the challenge is not only how schools provide religious programs but also how these programs transform students' attitudes, behaviors, and personal awareness in everyday life.

Previous studies have extensively examined the contribution of PAI teachers in developing students' religious character through classroom learning, religious habituation, and moral guidance. Several studies demonstrate that teachers influence students' discipline, ethical behavior, and religious practices through Qur'anic literacy, collective worship, and character-building activities (Nasrullah et al., 2023; Ginting & Salim, 2024). Other research emphasizes the importance of school culture, Islamic traditions, and continuous habituation in strengthening students' religious identity (Solihah et al., 2024; Ramli et al., 2025). However, existing studies tend to discuss teacher roles, religious programs, or school culture separately, resulting in limited understanding of how these components interact as an integrated character-building process. Moreover, research focusing on vocational schools with strong Islamic environmental influences, such as schools connected with pesantren traditions, remains limited. This gap is important to address because vocational students require religious character not only for personal morality but also for professional ethics, workplace responsibility, and social competence.

The state of the art of this research lies in developing an integrated understanding of the role of PAI teachers in shaping students' religious character through four interconnected dimensions: educator, role model, mentor, and supervisor-partner. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize instructional activities or religious habituation programs, this study highlights the relational process between teacher professionalism, exemplary behavior, continuous guidance, and collaborative supervision in creating sustainable religious character development. The research focuses on SMK Negeri Ihya Ulummudin Singojuruh Banyuwangi, an educational setting characterized by the interaction between vocational learning and Islamic boarding school values. This context provides a unique opportunity to examine how religious character formation occurs within a vocational education environment where students must develop both technical competence and moral integrity. The novelty of this study is the formulation of a holistic perspective that views PAI teachers not only as instructors of religious knowledge but also as key actors who construct a religious educational ecosystem through interaction, habituation, and partnership.

Based on the identified issues and research gaps, this study addresses the research problem of how PAI teachers contribute to shaping students' religious character within a vocational school environment influenced by Islamic educational traditions. The temporary argument of this research is that effective religious character formation is achieved when PAI teachers simultaneously perform their roles as educators, role models, mentors, and supervisors who connect religious learning with students' daily experiences. This study argues that character development cannot rely solely on religious materials or formal programs but requires consistency between teacher behavior, school culture, student participation, and environmental support. Therefore, the contribution of this research is to provide empirical insight into an integrated model of religious character formation in vocational education, offering practical implications for schools, teachers, and educational policymakers in designing sustainable Islamic character education strategies. Through this approach, religious education can contribute not only to students' spiritual development but also to the creation of ethical, responsible, and socially competent future generations.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' religious character at SMK Negeri Ihya Uloomudin Singojuruh Banyuwangi. A qualitative case study was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of educational practices, social interactions, and value internalization processes within a specific school context. This design is appropriate for examining how teachers perform their roles as educators, role models, and facilitators in developing students' religious attitudes through classroom learning and school-based religious activities (Nasrullah et al., 2023; Mulyana et al., 2023). The research was conducted during the 2025/2026 academic year at SMK Negeri Ihya Uloomudin Singojuruh Banyuwangi. This site was selected because the school implements Islamic character development programs integrated with PAI learning and daily religious habituation, providing a relevant context for investigating the strategies and contributions of PAI teachers in fostering students' religious character (Abidin et al., 2024; Solihah et al., 2024).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. The research participants consisted of seven informants, including three PAI teachers as primary informants and four students as supporting informants. The PAI teachers were selected because they were directly involved in designing learning activities, guiding religious practices, providing moral examples, and monitoring students' religious behavior, while students were involved as recipients who experienced the character-building

process directly. The informants were determined using purposive sampling based on their relevance, involvement, and experience related to religious character formation activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' roles, strategies, challenges, and experiences in implementing religious character education. Observations were carried out to examine classroom interactions, religious routines, and school culture, while documentation was used to analyze supporting materials such as school regulations, religious activity schedules, and program archives. The combination of these techniques strengthened the credibility of findings through methodological triangulation (Rochim & Khayati, 2023; Mushoffah & Kurniawati, 2025).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were selected, categorized, and organized according to themes related to the role of PAI teachers and religious character formation. The data were then displayed systematically through thematic descriptions to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the research findings. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by continuously comparing the collected data with evidence from different sources to ensure consistency and accuracy. Data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and audit trail documentation. These procedures were applied to ensure that the interpretation accurately reflected the implementation of Islamic character education practices in the school context (Khozin et al., 2024; Hishnuddin & Jazilurrahman, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Educator in Forming Character Religious Learners

Research result show that Islamic Religious Education teachers interpret character religious as reflected morals in attitudes and behavior participant educate everyday. Character religious No only related with implementation of worship, but also includes honesty, discipline, politeness, caring, and attitude respect to teachers, parents and each other. The PAI teacher said:

“Character religious That Language easy about morals. Participants educate must respecting people who are older old, especially Again to his teacher, and loves those more young.”(G1)

Statement the show that morals become the core in formation character religious participant educate. Attitude respect to teachers and parents viewed as form real practice Islamic teachings. Participants education is also directed for value friend, take care words, and avoid behavior that can harming others. Meaning the in harmony with view participant educate:

“Character religious is appropriate attitude with religious teachings, such as diligent worship, honesty, discipline, respect for parents and teachers, as well as do Good to everyone.”(S1)

Harmony teacher and participant views educate show that character religious understood as unity between obedience worship and morals social. Islamic Education teachers do not only direct participant educate for understand religious teachings in general conceptual, but also encouraging they apply it in interaction daily. Planting mark done through advice, stories the Prophet's exemplary behavior, as well as directions for respect teachers, parents and friends.

The role of the teacher as educators are also realized through integration Islamic values in Islamic Religious Education learning. Religious material is connected with close situation with life participant educate, such as procedures shake hands, exchange words with polite, respect people more old, and guard ethics when communicate with friend. The Islamic Education teacher explained:

“In Islamic Religious Education materials are available values Islam, such as method shaking hands, speaking to teachers and other people old, and speak with fellow friends. Participants students are also accustomed to for No speak dirty.”(G2)

Findings the show that Islamic Education learning does not only mastery - oriented material, but also on the formation attitudes and habits. Participants educate confess existence change after get learning and coaching from the Islamic Education teacher:

“I become more diligently praying in congregation, more polite to teachers and parents, as well start get used to say regards when meet other people.”(S3)

Observation and documentation results supporting interview data. Planting mark morals seen become part from the learning and interaction process everyday life in the environment school. The teacher gives directions about method good speaking, attitude respect to someone more old, and importance guard behavior as part from practice Islamic teachings.

Formation character religious is also directed as supplies term long. Islamic Education teachers expect mark morals No only implemented during participant educate was at school, but still maintained after graduating and living in the middle society. This start seen from confession participant educate:

"I get used to it say regards when enter home, helping parents, talking with polite, and follow activity religious in the environment around."(S4)

Based on results interviews, observations, and documentation, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as educator realized through meaning character religious as morals, cultivation attitude respect, integration Islamic values in learning and coaching behavior. The role aims for participants educate No only understand religious teachings, but also capable apply mark religious in a way sustainable in schools, families and communities.

The role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Example in Forming Character Religious Learners

Research result show that Islamic Religious Education teachers carry out role as example through suitability between values taught and behavior displayed in life school. Role model the realized through 5S culture, namely smile, greet, say hello, be polite and courteous. The Islamic Education teacher explains:

"Ihya State Vocational School Ulummudin implementing 5S, namely smile, greet, say hello, be polite and courteous. When meeting teachers, students Already get used to attitude said."(G3)

Implementation 5S culture becomes form real habituation Islamic morals in connection between teachers and participants educate. Teachers do not only give directions, but show attitude friendly, greeting students, saying greetings, and use polite language. Exemplary behavior the recognized by participants educate:

"PAI teachers always greet student with friendly, saying regards moment enter class, speaking polite, and give example How respect others so that we are encouraged for imitate it."(S1)

Findings the show that teacher behavior becomes references direct for participant educate in build method interact. Role model No limited to space learning, but seen in encounter everyday life in the environment school. Participants educate accustomed to say greeting and shaking hands hand when meet the teacher as form respect. The PAI teacher stated:

"When meeting, participants educate accustomed to say greetings, then shake hands with teachers. That is one of the habituation religious practices that are implemented."(G2)

Habituation the has applied by participants educate in activity school. Students disclose that greeting and shaking hands hand has become habit every Morning or when meet with the teacher. This is show that teacher's exemplary behavior is not stop at delivery value, but develop become habit social activities carried out in a way repeating.

Islamic Religious Education teachers also instill good speaking etiquette through practice directly. Participants educate directed for No shout, no use inadequate greeting polite, listening when other people are talking, and using the words "please", "sorry", and "thank you" love". Before convey needs to teachers, participants educate guided for say greetings, asking permission, and use polite language. The Islamic Education teacher explains:

"Participant educate given practice method speak with more people old in a way polite and courteous. When they meet teachers, they say greeting, shaking hands, and asking Sorry before convey needs."(G3)

exemplary behavior is also visible through his involvement in activity religious school. Islamic Religious Education teachers do not only direct participant educate for performing congregational prayers, istigasah, Dhuha prayers, and Friday Taqwa, but participate follow and guide implementation. Participants educate state that involvement the push they for copy teacher habits and more active follow activity religious.

"I become more diligently praying in congregation, more polite to teachers and parents, as well start get used to say regards when meet other people."(S4)

Observation and documentation results strengthen findings that 5S culture, habituation greetings, shaking hands hands, use Language politeness, and teacher involvement in activity religious has become part from activity school. Based on results mentioned, the role of the Islamic Religious Education teacher as example realized through giving example behavior, habituation polite interaction, instilling good manners in speaking, and involvement direct in activity religious. Exemplary the help participant educate understand and practice Islamic morals in life daily.

The role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Supervisor in Forming Character Religious Learners

Research result show that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a role as mentor through coaching, mentoring and habituation activity religious. Guidance especially directed to participant students who have not yet disciplined and not yet consistent apply good morals. The PAI teacher said:

"What is needed fostered are students who have not diligent and not yet Can apply good morals in life everyday."(G1)

Guidance done through prayer together, reciting Surah Yasin every morning, congregational Dhuhur and Asr prayers, as well as the Friday Taqwa program which is filled with with istigasah and Dhuha prayer in congregation. When the sound tarhim heard, activities learning stopped and participants educate directed heading to the mosque. The Islamic Education teacher explained:

"When the sound tarhim at the mosque already resound, we deliver appeal to participant educate for go out from class go to the mosque and perform congregational prayers."(G2)

The teacher does not only give direction, but also involved direct in activity religious. Participants educate state:

"PAI teachers always follow performing congregational prayers, leading prayer, following Friday Taqwa activities, istigasah, and giving directions during activity ongoing."(S3)

Based on statement from the PAI teacher and results observation and documentation, coaching character religious is also supported by the environment Cottage Islamic boarding school Yes Ulummudin in activity religious school. Support the seen in implementation reading of Surah Yasin, prayer together, congregational prayers, and Friday Taqwa. Participants students are also given not quite enough answer as Surah Yasin reader, leader prayer, muezzin, bilal, and khatib. Giving not quite enough answer the support coaching discipline, courage, and responsibility answer participant educate.

With Thus, the role of Islamic Education teachers as mentor realized through giving direction, guidance worship activities, habits religious, and involvement participant educate in implementation of religious programs school. Environment Islamic boarding school become element supporters based on Islamic Education teacher's statement, results observation and documentation activity school.

The role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Supervisors and Partners in Formation Character Religious Learners

Research result show that Islamic Religious Education teachers carry out function supervision through monitoring in a way direct to behavior participant educate in the environment school. Supervision done for ensure participant educate apply values religious who have taught in learning and activity religious everyday. The Islamic Religious Education teacher explains:

"For supervise behavior participant educate, we always notice attitudes and habits they are at school. If There are participant students who show behavior not enough accordingly, we provide direction and coaching for them return apply religious values in life everyday."(GPAI-1)

Supporting factors formation character religious covering existence Cottage Islamic boarding school Yes Ulummudin, a mosque in the neighborhood school, Madrasah Diniyah material about monotheism and fiqh, as well activity prayer together, congregational prayers, Friday prayers, and religious programs that are carried out in a way periodically.

Obstacle main lies in instability motivation participant educate. Some participants educate Still easy forget, affected friends, or not yet capable maintain habit religious in a way consistent.

“Sometimes I Still forget or carried away atmosphere moment joking with Friend so that not yet always apply habits taught in schools.”(PD-1)

Observation and documentation results show that Islamic Religious Education teachers are active do supervision to implementation activity religious as well as behavior participant educate in the environment school. With Thus, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as supervisor realized through monitoring, provision direction, coaching, and strengthening habit religious so that participants educate capable apply it in a way consistent in life daily.

Discussion

The findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers conceptualize students' religious character as a comprehensive manifestation of faith, worship practices, moral conduct, discipline, honesty, politeness, and respect toward others. Religious character is not limited to ritual obedience but is reflected in students' daily attitudes, communication patterns, and social interactions within the school environment. This finding confirms that Islamic character education should integrate spiritual values with interpersonal ethics, because religious identity is developed through the relationship between humans and God, themselves, others, and society. Previous studies emphasize that religious character formation requires the integration of Islamic values into learning processes, school culture, and students' everyday experiences rather than merely transferring religious knowledge (Darmansyah & Susanti, 2024; Mulyana et al., 2023). In the context of vocational education, this approach is particularly important because religious character becomes a foundation for professional ethics, responsibility, and social competence when students enter the workplace.

The study further identifies four interconnected roles of PAI teachers in developing students' religious character: educators, role models, mentors, and supervisors. As educators, teachers provide religious understanding and contextualize Islamic teachings into students' daily lives; as role models, they demonstrate moral behavior through consistent actions; as mentors, they provide guidance in developing students' attitudes and habits; and as supervisors, they monitor and strengthen students' religious practices. These findings extend previous research that mainly highlights the instructional role of PAI teachers by emphasizing the multidimensional function of teachers as agents of character transformation. The effectiveness of PAI teachers is strongly influenced by their personal integrity, exemplary behavior, and ability to create meaningful religious

experiences for students (Adib, 2024; Ginting & Salim, 2024). Furthermore, the findings support the argument that character education becomes more effective when teachers function not only as knowledge providers but also as moral figures who represent the values being taught (Abidin et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024).

The results also demonstrate that religious character formation at SMK Negeri Ihya Ulummudin Singojuruh Banyuwangi occurs through the integration of classroom learning, religious habituation, and school culture. Activities such as congregational prayers, Friday religious programs, Qur'anic recitation, collective prayers, and daily etiquette practices provide students with repeated opportunities to internalize Islamic values. This finding supports the view that character formation requires continuous habituation supported by institutional culture, because repeated religious practices gradually transform external regulations into internalized personal values (Mushoffah & Kurniawati, 2025; Ramli et al., 2025). In addition, teacher modeling plays a significant role because students observe, interpret, and imitate teachers' behaviors in various school contexts. This process reflects Bandura's social learning perspective, where character development occurs through observation, imitation, reinforcement, and motivation (Khozin et al., 2024). Therefore, the present study contributes by showing that religious character development in vocational schools is not only a result of formal PAI instruction but also emerges from a broader ecosystem involving teachers, religious routines, and institutional culture.

However, the findings indicate that religious habituation alone does not automatically guarantee the internalization of religious values. Some students continue to participate in religious activities because of school regulations rather than personal awareness. This condition demonstrates that character education requires deeper processes of reflection, dialogue, and personal meaning-making. Similar findings indicate that sustainable religious character development depends on the ability of schools to transform religious activities from routine practices into conscious value-based behaviors (Hishnuddin & Jazilurrahman, 2025; Ju'subaidi et al., 2024). The study also identifies supporting factors, including the presence of Islamic boarding school culture, mosque facilities, Madrasah Diniyah programs, teacher commitment, and parental support. Meanwhile, challenges emerge from peer influence, inconsistent motivation, and differences in family-based religious reinforcement. These findings broaden previous discussions by demonstrating that religious character formation in vocational schools requires collaboration between formal education, pesantren traditions, families, and the wider social environment (Kibtiyah et al., 2025; Riswadi et al., 2024).

The main contribution and novelty of this study lie in proposing an integrated model of PAI teacher roles in religious character formation within a vocational school context, consisting of four interconnected dimensions: teaching, modeling, mentoring, and supervision-partnership. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine teachers' instructional roles or religious habituation programs separately, this research demonstrates how these dimensions operate simultaneously as a character-building ecosystem. The findings provide practical implications that schools should strengthen teacher exemplarity, connect religious learning with real-life vocational contexts, and develop continuous collaboration between teachers, parents, and Islamic educational environments. Such an approach is essential because students in vocational schools require not only technical competencies but also ethical awareness, communication skills, responsibility, and professional attitudes rooted in religious values. Therefore, effective religious character education should be managed as a sustainable educational ecosystem that integrates curriculum, school culture, personal example, and community involvement (Marlina et al., 2025; Pujiанти & Nugraha, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the most important finding is that the formation of students' religious character is not achieved through religious instruction alone but through the integrated performance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as educators, role models, mentors, and supervisors. The main lesson derived from this research is that sustainable religious character development requires the alignment of Islamic knowledge, teacher exemplarity, continuous habituation, and consistent guidance within the school environment and its surrounding Islamic educational culture. Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of Islamic education by expanding the understanding of PAI teachers' roles from merely transmitters of religious knowledge into transformative agents who construct a religious character ecosystem through interaction, modeling, and collaboration. Practically, the findings provide implications for schools in designing character education programs that connect classroom learning, religious activities, and stakeholder involvement. However, this study is limited by its qualitative case study design and its focus on a single vocational school context, which restricts the generalization of findings. Future research should examine broader educational settings, involve multiple institutions, and explore the long-term development and sustainability of students' religious character formation.

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