



## Exploring the Role of Teachers in Shaping Student Character in Schools: A Managerial Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

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This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' character in schools, primarily through their roles, namely as leaders, educators, motivators, and evaluators. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation in the school environment. Data analysis was done through data display, reduction, and conclusions drawing. The results of the study indicate that PAI teachers act as leaders who create an active and Islamic learning atmosphere and are role models for students. As motivators, teachers succeed in raising students' enthusiasm to innovate and practice religious values in everyday life. In addition, PAI teachers also play the role of evaluators by providing holistic assessments, covering aspects of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and spirituality, which help monitor the development of students' character. This study provides an important contribution to renewing perspectives on the role of teachers in character education, especially in the context of Islamic religious education. Although these findings indicate success in character formation, external challenges, such as the influence of family and peers, continue to influence the implementation of the values taught.

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## INTRODUCTION

Character building among students is one of the important aspects of education, and it is expected to create individuals with noble morals, discipline, and high integrity (Judrah et al., 2024; Iksal 2024; Safuan et al., 2024). However, there are still many problems related to student character in various schools, including at the junior high school level. The gap between the theory of character education that should be implemented and real practice in the field is crucial. The theory of character education emphasizes the importance of character building from an early age through education based on religious, moral, and social values applied in every teaching and learning activity (Anisah, 2023; Handoko et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024). However, many students have not shown behavior based on these values. For example, acts of violence, bullying, or even low awareness

of the importance of honesty and discipline. This gap occurs due to the less-than-optimal strategy teachers use to instill these characteristics. According to theory, the strategy of PAI (Islamic Religious Education) teachers has an important role in character building (Sahuri, 2022; Al-Baihaqi et al., 2024). However, practice in the field often encounters obstacles in teaching methods, time constraints, and challenges of the student's social environment that also influence the development of their character.

Conditions in the field show that although many schools have implemented character education programs, the expected results are often far from what is desired. At SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar, Probolinggo, although Islamic religious education as part of the compulsory subjects in this school has been implemented well, the character of students reflecting religious values still seems less than optimal. These students sometimes have difficulty applying religious values in their daily lives. This is caused by various factors, such as a lack of deep understanding of the importance of character based on religious teachings, limited time to study the material more thoroughly, and the influence of the social environment outside of school that does not always support the formation of positive character. Learning practices that sometimes only focus on theoretical aspects and do not integrate practical aspects also contribute to students' low implementation of character values. This illustrates a gap that needs to be found, a solution, and a resolution.

Several previous studies have examined the importance of character education and the application of religious values in shaping student behavior. One study by Mulyana et al. (2023) and Amin (2024) revealed that a religious value-based approach to character education in schools can increase students' moral awareness. However, these results also show obstacles in implementing sustainable character in students after completing religious lessons. In this case, the existing theory states that the applied religious values must be accompanied by a more comprehensive and sustainable approach in various aspects of students' lives. In addition, research by Brenner (2022) and Lantolf (2024) also suggests that the strategies implemented by teachers should rely on theory and practices that facilitate students in internalizing these values. This study emphasizes the importance of teachers as agents of change in shaping students' character but also mentions the need to evaluate and develop more innovative methods in religious education.

This research focuses on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar in shaping students' character. We will examine in more depth the methods teachers apply, the challenges faced, and the factors that influence the results of these strategies. This study aims to fill the gap in previous studies that are more general and have not touched on specific aspects, such as

the teaching methods of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the context of character education in junior high schools, especially in religious-based schools.

Based on the initial study, we argue that the success of character education is greatly influenced by the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers in teaching religious values to students. The main argument of this study is that strategies that involve a practical approach, such as habituation in daily life at school, are more effective in shaping students' character than simply relying on a theoretical approach. Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar, Probolinggo, use various methods, such as extracurricular activities, teaching by example, and group discussions to internalize religious values in students' lives. However, the challenge faced is the lack of support from students' social environment outside of school, which does not always reflect the values taught at school. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate whether these strategies effectively shape students' character or whether more innovative methods are still needed to support sustainable character formation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design (Denny et al., 2022; Bhangu et al., 2023) to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' characters at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar, Probolinggo. The qualitative design was chosen because this study aims to understand the phenomenon holistically, focusing on teachers' and students' experiences, views, and perspectives regarding the implementation of religious-based character education. Through this approach, it is hoped that in-depth insights can be obtained regarding the factors that influence the implementation of character education, which can not only be measured through numbers or statistics but also in the form of narratives that describe the dynamics in the field. This research allows researchers to explore the social and educational context more comprehensively.

This research was conducted at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar, Probolinggo, which is known for its fairly strong Islamic religious education program. This location was chosen because this school has great potential to facilitate religious-based character education, primarily through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects taught by competent teachers. In addition, with the diversity of students from different social backgrounds, SMP Istiqlal is an ideal place to identify the challenges faced in implementing character strategies. As a school focusing on religious education, the study's results are expected to provide insight into implementing character education in a more specific context, especially in a religious-based school environment.

The data collection techniques used in this study involved three main approaches (Karunarathna et al., 2024). First, in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers and several students to explore their perspectives on the strategies implemented in shaping students' character. These semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to express their experiences and views freely. Second, participatory observation was conducted by directly monitoring the Islamic Religious Education learning process in the classroom and extracurricular activities related to character education. This observation aims to obtain a real picture of the implementation of character values in daily activities at school. Third, data collection through documentation, including the curriculum applied, teaching materials, and school activities related to character education. This technique is important to provide an overview of how character education is integrated into the education system at the school.

The data analysis process was carried out through three main stages (Chandrashekar et al., 2022; Bingham, 2023). First, data was reduced by filtering information collected through interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure that only relevant data was retained. After the data is reduced, the next stage is data display, where the data results are presented in an easy-to-understand form, such as narratives, tables, or matrices. This data presentation aims to find patterns that emerge from the research results. The last stage is data verification, where researchers will triangulate between various data sources to validate existing findings. Through this verification, it is hoped that the research findings can accurately describe the PAI teacher management strategy in shaping student character at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Leaders**

Islamic Religious Education teachers as leaders should be role models, pioneers, and initiators, and have a leadership spirit, protect, and nurture so that the existence of Islamic Religious Education teachers can influence other parties, especially students, to achieve learning goals and improve the quality of education. Islamic Religious Education teachers, as class leaders, must also create a scientific, religious, and pleasant classroom atmosphere and build the class as a pleasant place.

Teachers, as class leaders, must be able to share roles, master various information and knowledge, create an atmosphere that motivates students, generate innovation and competitive achievement, and shape students to become an intellectual and innovative generation.

In the learning process, Islamic Religious Education teachers are responsible for ensuring that all classes carry out murojah memorization of the Al-Qur'an. This program is formed with a murojah system per class, meaning that each class murojahs independently with one instructor. The first lesson teacher is responsible for the continuity of the murojah activities. However, the task of the Islamic Religious Education teacher is to ensure that the entire class carries out these activities.

The results of the interview with Syamsuddin, who is a PAI teacher at SMP Istiqlal Sumbercenteng that the role of the PAI teacher as a leader is "In the teaching and learning process in the classroom, an active learning atmosphere is created. Students are free to innovate, ask questions, and express opinions in an Islamic atmosphere, such as starting and ending activities by reading basmalah, praying, reciting the Koran, and carrying out sunnah and obligatory prayers. In addition, the role of the PAI teacher at this school is also given great responsibility in terms of leading the religious field, both in terms of leading the course of obligatory prayers, sunnah prayers, making a schedule for Friday prayer preachers, making a schedule for student sermons after midday prayers, septarian every Friday, Friday Religious activities and other habits.

From the interview results above, many values can be formed in a student through the role of the PAI teacher as a leader carried out by the PAI teacher. The efforts made by the PAI teacher in instilling character values that are religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, caring, and creative in the role can be made through extracurricular and extracurricular activities. Several school activities handled by the Islamic Religious Education teacher certainly contain religious values that are expected to be embedded in a student; for example, in the religious Friday activities carried out on Friday before starting the learning process, the religious Friday activities include tilawah echo Al-Kahfi activities, Tamiya, musyahadatil aflame religious, and other religious activities, this has a very positive impact on the character of a student.

Syamsuddin, Islamic Religious Education Teacher at Istiqlal Junior High School Sumbercenteng, In addition to the religious character, the caring character of the Islamic Religious Education teacher's tausiyah in terms of explaining about caring for Palestine, Aleppo, and so on. The character of discipline and honesty can be seen when students come from the classroom to the mosque, which the HRT has previously reminded that the start of this religious Friday activity starts from 06.40 to 08.30 WIB. This is because learning will occur as usual after the activity. In addition, students at Istiqlal Junior High School are trained to have a responsible character in being an imam in the implementation of Dhuhur and Asr prayers; this is done alternately according to the schedule made by the PAI

teacher; this is done so that the attitude of responsibility, discipline, and creativity in making a schedule for religious lectures after prayer is embedded in students.

The results of the observation and interview show that the PAI teacher has carried out his role as a class leader and religious activity leader by creating a conducive, motivating, and enjoyable atmosphere. The PAI teacher also always instills the values of Islamic teachings and motivates students in various activities to be happy and enthusiastic about learning and worshiping.

### **Teachers as Educators**

The role of teachers as educators is to have the task and responsibility of conveying knowledge (transfer of knowledge) to students. From the results of the interview at Istiqlal Junior High School from the results of the supervision that he carried out every month, the PAI teachers at Istiqlal Junior High School have carried out their role as teachers by making learning plans and carrying out the teaching and learning process at school. The documentation results in surveillance instruments show that several things must be mastered and possessed by each teacher at Istiqlal Middle School. It also shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers have carried out their role as teachers well.

The points that must be mastered by Islamic Religious Education teachers at Istiqlal Middle School are making annual programs, semester programs, syllabi, lesson plans, education calendars, making learning agendas, making value lists, making learning outcome analysis, making teaching completion criteria analysis, making standard competency and fundamental competency mapping analysis, making question item analysis and question banks. In the learning process, if the subject requires direct practice, such as prayer, ablution, or reciting the Koran, then the Islamic Religious Education teacher directly practices with students.

The results of an interview with Syamsuddin, an Islamic Religious Education teacher at Istiqlal Middle School, showed that in conveying knowledge or what is known as the transfer of knowledge to students, it would be better if the teaching was carried out using analogies. So, the teaching style of Islamic Religious Education teachers in front of students needs to provide concrete examples of the material to be taught. For example, in teaching the chapter on work ethic, it is necessary to convey to students the success of the Prophet's companions, with the efforts, optimistic attitudes, and hard work that they did so that they could achieve brilliant success.

In terms of classroom teaching, many values can be instilled in students, including religious values, which can be seen before starting learning; the teacher first asks students to read a prayer, then the teacher does not go directly into the material but first conveys Islamic values in the form of verses of the

Koran, hadiths or Islamic motivations related to the material to be taught. Creative values, honesty, and responsibility can be seen when the teacher gives assignments to students; for example, in the Mawaris chapter material, students are asked to create an inheritance distribution scheme and make products using song lyrics so they are easy to memorize. Then, the learning is closed and ends with a prayer; this teaches and instills religious values towards the Almighty knowledge owner.

Similar to character formation in other chapters, the teaching given at Istiqlal Middle School is theoretical and more about inviting students to think creatively and practically so that students better understand the goals and expected results in the learning given by the PAI teacher. For example, in teaching the chapter on janaiz, students are directly invited to practice the procedures for taking care of a corpse by making one of the students a corpse in the procedures for taking care of the corpse so that such teaching is much more understandable to students than just explaining the theory in class. Then, in addition to that, the assignment of products in the chapter on Asmaul Husna in class VII, in addition to students being invited to analyze the behavior reflected in understanding Asmaul Husna, students are also asked to make Asmaul Husna products in groups, by singing 99 Asmaul Husna by making the best possible style variations, and then the product is made into a cassette. In addition to religious values, students' creative values, responsibility, caring for others, and discipline in collecting assignments are also formed from the assignment.

### **Teachers as Role Models**

Teachers as role models are very important in shaping students' character. As figures who directly interact with students, Islamic religious teachers at Istiqlal Middle School must display attitudes and speech that students can emulate. This exemplary behavior includes various aspects, such as attitudes in everyday life, how to dress, speak, work, and human relationships carried out by teachers. Teachers must be consistent examples of integrity, honesty, and mutual respect. This is important because students' characters are greatly influenced by what they see and experience daily from authoritative figures in the school environment.

Therefore, teachers teach knowledge and demonstrate the values that must be applied in students' lives. Islamic religious teachers and components at Istiqlal Middle School also provide examples to students. The principal, employees, and all parties in the school environment must demonstrate good and professional behavior. Ahmad Tafsir emphasized that exemplary behavior must come from all parties interacting with students because they are examples that students will imitate. Therefore, SMP Istiqlal has a strategic role in creating an

environment that supports student character development. By implementing a clear and structured curriculum, the school provides guidelines for all teachers to behave, speak, and interact with students.

SMP Istiqlal's curriculum also provides a strong foundation for teachers to continually improve themselves in carrying out their duties as educators. Through existing rules and guidelines, teachers at this school are encouraged to become individuals who continue to make continuous improvements in professionalism and character. With this focused approach, teachers at SMP Istiqlal are expected to be good role models in academics and everyday behavior. Before expecting students to become good individuals, teachers must provide clear and real examples so that students can imitate and practice these values .

### **Teachers as Motivators**

Teachers, as motivators, are very important in encouraging students to achieve optimal learning outcomes. Motivation is closely related to individual needs, where a person will be motivated to act when a need must be met. In the context of education, teachers play a role in identifying and responding to students' academic and emotional needs. Thus, teachers must be creative in generating learning motivation, one of which is clarifying the goals students want to achieve to have a clear direction in the learning process. This helps students feel more focused and motivated to achieve these goals.

In addition, teachers must also strive to create a pleasant learning atmosphere. A positive and conducive atmosphere will encourage students to be more active and enthusiastic in participating in learning. One way that can be done is by praising for the success achieved by students, even if it is small, and providing constructive assessments and comments on students' work. Praise can increase students' self-confidence, while appropriate assessments will help them know the extent of the development that has been achieved. This is part of an effective motivational strategy in learning.

PAI teachers at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar have successfully carried out their role as motivators. PAI teachers always try to inspire students not only to master Islamic religious study materials, but also to practice the values of Islamic teachings in their daily lives. By providing real examples in their lives and inviting students to be actively involved in discussions and religious activities, PAI teachers have successfully guided students to understand the importance of good character, such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility, which are part of Islamic teachings.

In addition, collaboration between PAI teachers also strengthens their efforts to motivate students. By supporting and working together, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Istiqlal can create a climate that supports

the development of students' character. They teach religious knowledge and guide students to practice these values in their daily lives. This is important so that the desired character can be formed consistently and sustainably, both inside and outside the classroom, and is expected to positively impact students' personal development.

### **Teachers as Evaluators**

Teachers as evaluators play a vital role in assessing students' achievements, both in academics and social and character aspects. The evaluations must be based on wise, careful, and objective considerations, especially when assessing the behavior and values in students' daily lives. Fair and accurate assessments will provide a clear picture of students' development and help in planning the following steps to support the formation of their character. Teachers, as evaluators, must ensure that their assessments not only cover aspects of knowledge but also attitudes, skills, and moral values that students need to master.

In practice, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Istiqlal Kotaanyar have carried out evaluations very well. At the beginning of each learning process, Islamic Religious Education teachers utilize apperception to explore students' initial understanding and relate it to the material taught. At the end of the learning process, Islamic Religious Education teachers also conduct a post-test to evaluate the extent of students' understanding of the material that has been delivered. In addition, evaluations are carried out through daily assessments, mid-term exams, and final semester exams using various assessment formats that include aspects of skills, attitudes, and knowledge. The assessments carried out focus on academic results and include aspects of student character formation.

The assessment of Islamic Religious Education teachers covers four main aspects that are very important in the formation of student character, namely spirituality, skills, knowledge, and social attitudes. Islamic Religious Education teachers continue to monitor student development in each of these aspects through a religious activity monitoring book that records student character development. By using this guide, Islamic Religious Education teachers can systematically evaluate and record student progress in every activity related to religious and character learning. In addition, evaluations of students' social attitudes, such as cooperation, tolerance, and sense of responsibility, are carried out both in and outside the classroom to provide a comprehensive picture of their character development.

Through evaluations that are carried out routinely and continuously, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Istiqlal have succeeded in providing constructive feedback to students regarding their character development. This

evaluation is critical to determine whether the religious values that have been taught have truly been internalized in students and applied in everyday life. Therefore, teachers as evaluators are not only responsible for assessing academic results but also for paying more attention to the formation of student character, which will ultimately form individuals who are not only intelligent but also have noble morals and good personalities.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers play an important role in shaping students' character through their various roles, namely as leaders, educators, motivators, and evaluators. The role of teachers as class leaders is reflected in their efforts to create an active, Islamic, and enjoyable learning atmosphere and involve students in various religious and social activities. This is based on the literature, which states that teachers with leadership qualities can create an environment that supports the development of students' character (Arifudin et al., 2022; Haluti et al., 2023; Cerlin et al., 2023). The success of Islamic Religious Education teachers in leading religious and social activities, such as Friday religious activities and prayer, aligns with the theory that religious activities can strengthen the formation of students' character (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). However, although the role of teachers as leaders has been running well, challenges arise in creating a balance between academic activities and character outside the classroom, which still needs more attention in its integration.

As motivators, Islamic Religious Education teachers demonstrate the ability to arouse students' enthusiasm for learning by providing freedom to innovate and express opinions and creating a pleasant learning atmosphere. This aligns with the view of Malecka et al. (2023) and Bukhari et al. (2023), who stated that intrinsic motivation can be fostered by creating learning conditions that support student involvement. The results of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers have successfully applied motivation well, one of which is through giving praise and creative tasks. However, although motivation can encourage student involvement, external factors such as social pressure and peer influence still affect student motivation in learning.

As evaluators, Islamic Religious Education teachers also carry out their roles carefully, conducting evaluations not only in academic aspects but also in developing student character, such as social attitudes and spirituality. This holistic assessment reflects a comprehensive character education approach, as expressed by Wahid et al. (2024) in the theory of character education, which emphasizes the importance of assessing attitudes and moral values. Islamic Religious Education teachers also utilize periodic evaluations, such as daily tests

and midterm exams, to monitor student character development. This is related to the theory that ongoing evaluation is important to ensure that the values taught can be applied consistently in students' lives. However, although the evaluation is carried out well, the main challenge lies in implementing the evaluation results in students' daily lives outside the classroom.

This finding implies the importance of integrating academic learning and character development in the education curriculum. Arifudin, (2022) explains that successful education develops students' knowledge and strong character. Islamic Religious Education teachers have successfully integrated these two aspects through extracurricular and extracurricular activities involving religious values. However, the results of this study also show that although activities in schools support character formation, external factors such as family environment and peers still influence the implementation of values taught in schools. Therefore, collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities must be strengthened to create an environment that supports the formation of students' character.

Thus, this study provides an important contribution to understanding the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in forming students' character. Although the role of teachers as leaders, motivators, and evaluators has been running well, there are still challenges in creating a balance between academic learning and character outside the classroom. For this reason, strengthening collaboration between schools and parents and increasing public awareness of the importance of character education should be the primary focus in supporting the success of the formation of student's character as a whole. As a next step, further research is needed to explore how other external factors influence the formation of students' character and what efforts can be made to optimize the role of teachers in achieving it.

## CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in schools is vital in forming students' character through the approaches of leaders, educators, motivators, and evaluators. Islamic religious education teachers teach religious knowledge and serve as role models who positively influence students in social, spiritual, and academic aspects. Through extracurricular and extracurricular activities involving religious values, Islamic Religious Education teachers have succeeded in forming the character of disciplined, honest, caring, and creative students. This study provides the wisdom that character education is not only limited to classroom learning but must involve all elements in the school environment to create sustainable change.

The strength of this paper lies in its contribution to renewing the perspective on the role of teachers in the formation of student character, especially in the context of Islamic religious education. This study adds to the understanding that the approach taken by Islamic Religious Education teachers involves more than just religious teaching; it also includes motivation, leadership, and ongoing evaluation. However, the limitations of this study are its focus, which is limited to one school and only involves students of a certain age, without considering gender variations and socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, further research with a broader survey method covering various schools and variations in age and gender is needed to provide a more comprehensive picture, which can be used as a basis for more appropriate and targeted education policies.

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