The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Shaping Islamic Character at MAS Al Washliyah Lubuk Pakam

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a crucial component of the national education system in addressing the challenges of globalization, moral decline among youth, and the weakening of spiritual values in daily life. Various social symptoms—such as reduced respect toward teachers and parents, dishonesty, and deviant behavior—indicate that character formation has not been carried out optimally in both family and school environments. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' Islamic character at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation involving PAI teachers, students, and the school principal. The findings reveal that PAI teachers function not only as educators but also as spiritual guides, motivators, and role models who internalize Islamic values through habituation of worship, integration of religious teachings in learning activities, and religious-based extracurricular programs. Character formation is strengthened by a supportive school culture and conducive policies, yet hindered by negative social media influence and insufficient parental guidance. Overall, the study confirms that synergistic collaboration between teachers, schools, and families is essential in fostering Islamic character that is both internalized and practiced consistently by students.

Keyword: PAI teachers; Islamic character; Islamic education; learning strategies; role modeling

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is not sufficient if it only provides knowledge; it must also be able to instill and build strong beliefs and character in students so that they are able to develop their potential and find their life purpose in accordance with rules, especially religious rules. Character education is an effort to guide students' behavior so that they know, love, and practice goodness (Qorib, 2010). The character development obtained through education can help and encourage students to have superior personalities, as stated in the goals of national education, namely developing students' potential to become human beings who believe in and fear God Almighty, possess noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens (Ainissyifa, 2014).

Strengthening character in today's context is highly necessary to address the moral crisis occurring in our country. It is undeniable that there is currently a real and concerning crisis in society involving high school students (Fanreza & Pasaribu, 2016). This crisis includes the decline of mutual respect, the rise of cheating or dishonest behavior, diminishing respect and politeness, as well as a lack of discipline and independence among students (Sihombing, 2021).

Islamic Religious Education is an effort in the form of teaching, guidance, and supervision of students so that when they complete their education, they can understand, internalize, and practice Islamic teachings and make them a way of life (Mukhlas, 2020). Through Islamic religious learning, students do not only learn theories, but are also expected to master, understand, and apply Islamic teachings in daily life, such as

trustworthiness, keeping promises, patience, forgiveness, generosity, and others (Musawamah, 2021). Therefore, Islamic religious teachers have an important role as educators who guide students to behave honestly, responsibly, independently, disciplined, respectful, polite, humble, and appreciative of others (Diananda et al., 2018).

Based on the preliminary survey conducted through observations, teachers have carried out their roles and responsibilities according to the standards in their respective fields, and students have also performed their duties as learners. However, there are still several students who display poor character, such as cheating during exams, being dishonest, arriving late to school, not maintaining cleanliness, mocking peers, and being impolite (Ilyas, 2019). This presents a major challenge to the character formation of the younger generation, especially in maintaining moral values and Islamic ethics (Hikmah, 2017).

Based on this background, the researcher feels it is important to conduct a study titled The Role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teachers in Shaping Islamic Character of Students at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam to determine the extent of the role of PAI teachers in shaping Islamic character and the strategies implemented to support character education in the school environment (Islam, 2021), MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam. Therefore, it is important to deeply examine how the Islamic Religious Education teacher plays a role in shaping students' Islamic character at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam.

This includes analyzing and describing the role of PAI teachers in the process of forming Islamic character among students in the school environment, including approaches, strategies, exemplary behavior, and supporting and inhibiting factors in this process. The focus of the problem in this study is that there are still (Pasaribu & Pohan, 2024) student behaviors that do not reflect Islamic values, such as skipping classes, disobeying teachers, sleeping in class, the suboptimal integration of Islamic values into daily learning activities, minimal evaluation and follow-up on student character development, external environmental factors, the influence of social media, and peer interactions outside school which pose challenges for PAI teachers in instilling Islamic values. There is also no comprehensive evaluation of the success of Islamic character education through PAI learning at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study, and the qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research is to understand the meaning, role, and strategies implemented by PAI teachers in shaping students' Islamic character in a deep and holistic manner (Adlini et al., 2022).

Islamic education emphasizes behaviors and norms grounded in Islamic teachings comprehensively, both in terms of actions and values. The values of Islamic education require individuals to behave according to Islamic principles, with its value context including goals and objectives that humans should become better than other creatures. Since birth, humans possess a pure nature (fitrah), which is grounded in values originating from the Creator, and normative values in Islamic education strive to elevate humans to become more virtuous (Fauziah, 2023). Ahmad D. Marimba stated that Islamic education is spiritual guidance based on Islamic laws toward the formation of a superior personality according to Islamic standards. According to Abdur Rahman Al-Nahlawi, Islamic education is the regulation of individuals and society that enables them to embrace Islam logically and comprehensively, both in personal and collective life (Somad, 2021). Therefore, this research aims to examine in depth how PAI teachers carry out their role in shaping students' Islamic character and what strategies are implemented in the process.

2. LITHERATURE REVIEW
A. *The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers*

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, according to Nurzannah (2025), hold a strategic role in shaping students' character and personality, and this role does not only include delivering religious knowledge but also fostering Islamic attitudes and behaviors, as PAI teachers act as educators, guides, motivators, and role models (uswah hasanah) in students' daily lives. The role of educator is reflected in the process of teaching religious material aimed at helping students understand and practice Islamic teachings, while as guides, PAI teachers provide direction in applying moral values in everyday life, and as motivators, they encourage students to love worship and noble character. Meanwhile, the role as role models becomes a central element in character education because a teacher's behavior is highly likely to be imitated by students (Amalia & Harfiani, 2024), thereby making exemplary conduct essential. Thus, PAI teachers not only teach what is good but also demonstrate how to practice goodness in real life, which directly influences the internalization of faith and moral values reflected in students' actions.

B. *Islamic Character Education*

Islamic character education is the process of instilling religious values derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah to shape behavior and personality that align with Islamic teachings. Islamic character values include honesty (shidq), discipline (intizham), responsibility (amanah), politeness (adab), cooperation (ta'awun), and

piety (taqwa) (Ramadhani & Nasution, 2022). Character formation in the school context can be carried out through:

1. Habituation of Worship, such as congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation (tadarus), and daily supplications;
2. Teacher Exemplification, where teachers demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that reflect noble character;
3. Strengthening the School Environment, such as greeting culture, polite language, and scheduled religious activities;
4. Religious Extracurricular Activities, such as short-term Islamic boarding programs (pesantren kilat), Islamic holiday commemorations, and social service activities.

Through consistent habituation and role-modeling, Islamic character values can be internalized within students and form sustainable good habits.

C.   Al-Ghazali's Theory of Moral Formation

According to Al-Ghazali, morality (akhlak) is a trait embedded in the soul that drives individuals to act spontaneously without requiring prior rational deliberation. Good character does not emerge instantly but is formed through the process of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), carried out with awareness, continual training, and repeated habituation. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that moral formation should be conducted through several methods, namely:

1. Exemplification, where children learn by observing the behavior of adults or teachers;
2. Habituation, meaning performing good actions repeatedly until they become character;
3. Advice and Guidance, which direct the heart to always incline toward goodness;
4. Self-Control, enabling learners to restrain desires and negative impulses.

PAI teachers play an essential role as moral figures who demonstrate Islamic behavior in daily school activities. Worship routines, proper speech etiquette, dressing etiquette, and mutual respect are practices of moral education aligned with Al-Ghazali's concept. When students consistently observe and perform good behaviors, noble character will naturally form within them.

3.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design aimed at deeply understanding the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' Islamic character at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore meanings, experiences, and character-building practices as they occur in real educational settings. The research subjects consist of PAI teachers, students, and the school principal, selected through purposive sampling because they are considered the most knowledgeable regarding the character development process in the school.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were used to obtain information about strategies, practices, and the roles played by PAI teachers in character formation. Observations were conducted to directly examine learning activities, religious routines, and school interactions that reflect the habituation of Islamic values. Documentation—such as lesson plans, program agendas, photos, and school policy documents—was used to support and validate the collected data.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of four stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process was carried out continuously from the data gathering stage until the final findings were concluded. To enhance data validity, source triangulation was implemented by comparing interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure objectivity and credibility in the interpretation of results.

MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam was selected as the research site because it has a strong religious atmosphere and consistently implements structured religious programs, making it relevant for examining the process of Islamic character formation. This information is considered sufficient without requiring extensive detail about the selection rationale.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
A.   Results
1)   Religious Habitual Programs (Observation Findings)

Observations show that religious activities at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam are carried out routinely and systematically. Students participate in daily Qur'an recitation (tadarus) in their classrooms, followed by regular dhuha and dzuhur congregational prayers in the school mosque. Students are also accustomed to greeting teachers with salam, reciting prayers before and after learning, maintaining classroom cleanliness, and using polite language. These activities have formed a consistent religious atmosphere at school, although some students were still seen arriving late or showing inconsistent behavior during religious routines.

2) Teacher Exemplification

PAI teachers serve as role models by demonstrating Islamic behavior in their daily interactions with students. Teachers arrive earlier than students, greet politely, correct behavior gently, and display discipline in speech, dress, punctuality, and conduct. These consistent examples reinforce character formation through imitation, aligning with Al-Ghazali's view that character develops through habitual action and exemplary modeling.

3) Interview Findings

a) Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers emphasize that role modeling and habituation are the most effective approaches in character education, as students tend to remember behavior they see rather than what they hear. Teachers implement this by leading worship activities, reminding students about discipline, and integrating Islamic values into lessons.

b) Principal's Perspective

The principal confirms that the school supports character development through structured programs such as daily tadarus, dhuha and dzuhur prayers, short-term pesantren activities, and Friday charity. He also highlights that character development cannot rely solely on Islamic Education; all teachers must contribute.

c) Students' Perspectives

Students report positive behavioral changes, including improved consistency in worship, increased respect for teachers, and better discipline. However, some admit that external challenges—such as lack of support at home, peer influence, and distractions from mobile phones—affect their character development.

4) Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

a) Supporting Factors:

- Strong religious school culture
- Collaborative support from principal and teachers
- Parent involvement in supervising student behavior
- Availability of religious extracurricular activities

b) Inhibiting Factors:

- Negative influence of social media
- Lack of reinforcement in the home environment
- Varied student commitment and personal motivation
- Limited class time for PAI compared to the scope of character objectives

B. Discussion

The findings show that Islamic character formation at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam aligns with Islamic educational theory emphasizing habituation and moral exemplification. Religious routines such as congregational prayer and tadarus reflect the concept of behavioral conditioning, where repeated action forms consistent character. Al-Ghazali's theory supports the role of teacher exemplification, as students imitate visible moral conduct modeled by their educators. The school's religious climate also strengthens value internalization, illustrating that Islamic character building is most effective when supported by environment, family, and structured routines. However, modern challenges such as digital media and inconsistent home support highlight the need for continuous monitoring and holistic collaboration.

Figure 1. Teaching and learning activities

The research was conducted at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam, an Islamic secondary school in North Sumatra known for its strong religious environment and commitment to character education. The school applies an educational model that integrates Islamic values into daily learning activities, supported by the Alwashliyah organization, which has a long-standing reputation in Islamic education. The school environment reflects a

religious atmosphere visible through its structured routines, such as greeting culture, clean learning spaces, and continuous religious activities throughout the school day.

A central role in the school's character formation is played by two Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who oversee religious programs and set behavioral examples for students. They arrive early, speak politely, demonstrate discipline in appearance and conduct, and guide students during worship practices. This form of moral exemplification aligns with classical Islamic educational principles emphasizing that students learn and internalize character through direct observation of consistent role models.

Observation findings show that religious routines at the school run regularly and systematically. Students participate in daily Qur'an recitation held in classrooms each morning, followed by dhuha and dzuhur congregational prayers in the school mosque. Students also perform prayers before and after lessons and are expected to maintain respectful and ethical behavior. Although most students participate actively, some were observed showing inconsistent discipline, such as arriving late or being less focused during activities, indicating room for improvement in reinforcement systems.

Interview data support these observations. Teachers reported prioritizing role modeling and habituation because students internalize values more effectively when they observe behavior directly rather than through verbal instruction alone. The principal affirmed that character development is not only the responsibility of PAI teachers, but a collective duty involving all teachers. Interviews with students revealed that participation in structured religious activities increased their confidence in reading the Qur'an and strengthened their discipline, though they still face challenges such as peer pressure, mobile phone distractions, and limited guidance at home.

Document analysis, including lesson plans, attendance lists, photographs of worship activities, and program agendas, shows that religious and character-building initiatives are systematically planned and implemented. The school maintains a consistent structure for programs such as daily Qur'an recitation, organized congregational prayers, short-term pesantren, religious celebrations, and Friday charity activities. These programs help cultivate social values such as cooperation, caring for others, responsibility, and mutual respect among students.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that character development at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam is strengthened by the synergy of role modeling, religious habituation, value integration into learning, and a supportive school culture. Supporting factors include a deeply rooted religious environment, collaboration between teachers and parents, and administrative policies aligned with character goals. Meanwhile, challenges such as social media influence and lack of family reinforcement require more consistent monitoring and guidance. Nonetheless, the coordinated efforts of teachers, school leadership, and families contribute significantly to nurturing students' Islamic character development in both academic and daily school life.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Islamic Religious Education teachers at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam hold a central role in shaping students' Islamic character through consistent role modeling, structured religious habituation, and the integration of values into daily learning. These efforts are supported by a religious school culture that reinforces students' discipline, responsibility, and spiritual development.

The effectiveness of character formation is strengthened when teachers' guidance is aligned with school policies and supported by parents at home. Therefore, stronger collaboration between teachers and families is implicitly needed to sustain students' moral development beyond the school environment. Additionally, continuous monitoring and follow-up mechanisms are required to ensure that religious practices do not remain ceremonial but translate into lasting behavioral change.

Overall, character development at MAS Alwashliyah Lubuk Pakam demonstrates that an integrated approach combining role modeling, value-based learning, and a supportive environment can successfully nurture Islamic character in students.

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