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The Role of Islamic Education Teachers as Role Models in Character Building for Students at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a crucial role in shaping a nation's progress, with teachers serving as key agents in guiding students toward moral and intellectual maturity. This study explores the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as moral exemplars in shaping students' Islamic character at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran. Using a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving PAI teachers, the school principal, guidance counselors, and students. The findings reveal that PAI teachers act not only as educators but also as role models who integrate Islamic values through consistent discipline, politeness, and religious practice. Character formation strategies include modeling behavior (*uswah hasanah*), moral guidance (*mau'idzah hasanah*), and habituation through daily activities such as congregational prayers and religious programs. Collaboration between teachers, parents, and the school environment enhances the effectiveness of character building by creating a consistent moral framework both at home and at school. This study concludes that exemplary behavior by PAI teachers significantly influences students' moral and spiritual development. Future research could explore digital and community-based strategies to strengthen Islamic character education in diverse school settings.

1. Introduction

The success and course of a nation's development are significantly influenced by its level of education. Humans endeavor to mold personalities that align with prevailing societal values through education. According to John Dewey in Fauzi, (2019) education serves a social purpose in addition to being a basic human need. It is a platform for growth and guidance that instills discipline in daily life. Teachers play a crucial role when discussing education. As individuals who not only instruct but also mold the character of the next generation, teachers play a major role in

determining the success of education (Husain & Mustofa, 2025). For students and their surroundings, teachers act as mentors, role models, and moral role models. Accordingly, an ideal teacher should be independent, disciplined, responsible, and have authority. In the field of Islamic Religious Education, teachers are even more crucial. In order for students to make the connection between religious teachings and everyday knowledge, they must not only teach knowledge but also inculcate Islamic values. Thus, religious education goes beyond theory and develops into a set of life lessons that promote harmony between faith and reason (Rince et al., 2021).

Teachers in Islamic education are crucial in helping students develop their moral character while they are in school. They are characterized as educators who act as inspiration and role models for students, helping them to comprehend and implement Islamic principles in their daily lives. According to this perspective, PAI teachers' responsibilities extend beyond simply imparting religious knowledge and include helping students develop their attitudes, routines, and personalities. (Setyowati et al., 2025). PAI teachers continue to play a significant role in fostering moral and spiritual values in the face of increasingly contemporary educational advancements. Their presence fosters a learning environment that develops character, where virtues like accountability, self-control, and integrity emerge organically through interactions in the classroom. Students are inspired to behave well both academically and socially by their teachers' model behavior (Karlina, 2021).

Simple behaviors like regular worship, courteous speech, a disciplined attitude, and the capacity to inspire others using a humanistic approach are examples of this teacher's excellent behavior that are evident at SMP N 1 Kunduran. This creates a religious and supportive learning environment where students feel appreciated and supported without feeling under pressure. Through interactions between teachers and students both inside and outside of the classroom, values like accountability, integrity, and respect for others are developed. This phenomenon is worth investigating further because it demonstrates the moral and spiritual fortitude of PAI teachers, which can affect students' attitudes and actions.

Previous studies reinforce the phenomenon observed in the field. Nuroniah & Jannah, (2025) found that teacher role modeling contributes significantly to the formation of students' religious character, especially at the elementary school level. Sari & Basri, (2024) also explained that PAI teachers play a role in fostering a religious culture in schools through consistent attitudes and discipline in implementing Islamic values. Meanwhile Sufiani, (2024) highlights that teacher role modeling is the most effective method in Islamic character building because it fosters respect and trust from students towards their educators. More recent research findings reinforce this view. Fatimatur Rohmah & Qomari, (2025) through research in the *Ilmuna Journal*, found that the transformation of PAI teachers' exemplary behavior can be strengthened through the support of the school environment and the use of digital technology, so that the internalization of Islamic values can adapt to the challenges of the modern era. Rozak, (2023) explains that Islamic education

teachers' strategies for instilling religious character are carried out through habituation, exemplary behavior, and continuous supervision, both inside and outside the classroom. In addition, Palunga & Marzuki, (2022) show that teachers' small behaviors and habits, such as polite speech and respectful attitudes, are a real part of the process of developing students' religious character.

From these findings, it can be concluded that the strength of PAI teachers lies in their ability to present Islamic values in the practical realities of school life. Studies that specifically describe the role of PAI teachers in public schools with heterogeneous social and religious backgrounds, such as SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran, are still very limited. This condition is interesting because public school environments present different dynamics: religious values are not always the main focus of the curriculum, and students come from diverse family backgrounds in terms of religious practices. In addition, previous studies have tended to highlight the cognitive aspects of religious education, namely the transfer of Islamic knowledge in learning, while the affective and practical aspects of teacher role models in building student character have not been explored in depth in public schools. Therefore, more contextual and empirical research is needed to understand how PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran carry out their strategic role in fostering students' religious character amid the challenges of globalization and the digital age.

This study aims to explore how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran function as moral exemplars in shaping students' Islamic character, identify the strategies they employ to internalize Islamic values in daily school life, and examine how these practices manifest in students' attitudes and behaviors. In addition, this study aims to analyze the extent to which collaboration between teachers, parents, and the school environment strengthens the effectiveness of character building. It also seeks to understand the contextual challenges faced by PAI teachers in public schools with diverse student backgrounds, particularly in maintaining the consistency of Islamic values amid the rapid influence of digital culture. By articulating these objectives, the study provides a clearer foundation for understanding how character education is practiced holistically and adaptively in contemporary school settings.

2. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method to explore in depth the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as role models in shaping students' character at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran. This approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive and contextual understanding of how teachers internalize Islamic values through example, guidance, and collaboration with parents and the school environment. The subjects of this study consist of PAI teachers as the main informants, along with supporting informants such as the school principal, guidance and counseling teachers, and several students who are actively involved in religious and moral activities. The selection of informants used

the purposive sampling technique, in which participants were chosen based on their direct experience and relevance to the research focus (Sulistyawati, 2023).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation. The interviews, lasting approximately 30–45 minutes per session, explored teachers' perceptions, strategies, and challenges in integrating character education in PAI learning. Observations were conducted in classrooms and religious school activities such as congregational prayers and Ramadan programs to see the real implementation of teachers' exemplary behavior. Documentation, including lesson plans (RPP), religious activity reports, and photographs, was used to support the interview and observation data. The researcher served as the main instrument (human instrument), responsible for designing interview guides, conducting fieldwork, interpreting findings, and verifying data credibility (Sulistyawati, 2023).

Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Relevant data were selected and categorized into thematic patterns such as the teacher's role as a model, strategies for character formation, and environmental involvement. The results were presented narratively to highlight contextual meanings and relationships among categories. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, source and technique triangulation were applied by comparing interview data with observations and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by confirming the interpretation of findings to the informants to ensure meaning accuracy. Through this systematic process, the data obtained are credible, dependable, and replicable, providing a strong foundation for understanding the contribution of PAI teachers as role models in shaping students' Islamic character.

3. Results and Discussion

Before delving into the findings, it is important to describe the process of data collection through interviews. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with four Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran. Each interview session lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted face-to-face in the teachers' lounge and, in some cases, in the school prayer room to provide a comfortable and familiar setting for participants. The interviews aimed to explore teachers' understanding of their roles as moral exemplars, the strategies used to instill Islamic values, collaboration with parents and school staff, and the evaluation process of students' character development. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to elaborate freely on their experiences, and follow-up probes were employed to clarify and deepen the discussion when necessary. All conversations were recorded using a digital voice recorder (with informed consent) and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Table 1 presents the main interview themes and example questions used during the data collection process.

Table 1. Interview Questions

No	Interview Theme	Questions
1	Definition of PAI Teacher's Role	"How do you define the role of a PAI teacher in shaping students' character?"
2	Core Character Values	"What Islamic character values do you consider most important to be developed in students?"
3	Integration of Character Education	"How do you integrate character education into your PAI classroom learning activities?"
4	Teaching Strategies and Methods	"What methods or strategies do you usually apply to instill Islamic values and moral behavior in students?"
5	Teacher as Role Model	"In what ways do you demonstrate exemplary behavior to serve as a role model for your students?"
6	Parental and School Involvement	"How do parents and the school environment contribute to supporting the formation of students' Islamic character?"
7	Assessment of Character Formation	"How do you assess or evaluate the success of students' character development in daily life?"
8	Challenges in Character Education	"What challenges do you face in implementing Islamic character values among students?"
9	Future Expectations	"What are your hopes and suggestions for the future role of PAI teachers in nurturing morally upright generations?"

The results of interviews and observations revealed several interrelated themes regarding the role of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in shaping the character of students at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran. The findings of the study explain that PAI teachers do not merely function as conveyors of religious knowledge, but also as moral role models and motivators who guide students in internalizing Islamic values in their daily lives. These findings also highlight that students respond more positively to character messages that are demonstrated through consistent teacher behavior rather than through formal instruction alone. The interaction patterns observed during learning and religious activities show that the teacher's presence significantly shapes students' emotional readiness and moral awareness. In addition, the data indicate that character formation emerges not only through structured programs but also through spontaneous daily interactions that reflect the teacher's integrity and empathy. The findings and analysis are presented below.

The Role of PAI Teachers as Moral Role Models

A role is an element of position or status that is constantly changing. If someone carries out their duties and rights in accordance with their position, then they have fulfilled their role. Teachers have a crucial role in education, especially in teaching and learning activities, just as students do. In essence, the teacher's job is to help students develop and maximize their skills and abilities. As professionals in the field of education, teachers play a crucial role in shaping the nation's future generations. Teachers are individuals who are experienced in their field. They can use their knowledge to educate students. In Javanese philosophy, teachers are defined as people who are "digugu dan ditiru" (trusted and imitated). Digugu means that everything they say must be believed. Meanwhile, ditiru means that students must imitate all of the teacher's attitudes and actions. The PAI teachers at SMP N 1 Kunduran view their role as more than just teaching religious material, but also as *uswah hasanah* or good role models for their students. Teachers demonstrate

discipline, politeness, and consistency in applying Islamic values in their daily lives. In addition, PAI teachers often give positive advice and warnings to students outside of class hours. For example, during breaks or prayer times. Based on the interview results, students find it easier to emulate teachers' behavior that demonstrates good character directly than through theoretical explanations in class.



Figure 1. PAI Teacher Teaching in Class

The findings of this study are in line with the results of a study conducted by Dewi et al., (2025) in *Lensa Pedagogika: Jurnal Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan*, which explains that Islamic Education (PAI) teachers have a strategic role as the main role models in shaping students' religious and social characters. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering teaching materials, but also for being moral figures whose behavior is directly emulated by students. This is consistent with the views of Nizar et al., (2025) who emphasize that teacher role modeling is the most effective component in shaping discipline, responsibility, and honesty in schools. In addition, Ernawati, (2022) found in her research that the role of PAI teachers as moral role models also functions as agents in preventing negative behaviors such as bullying, because students tend to imitate the positive behaviors of teachers who consistently demonstrate noble character.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are in line with Albert Bandura's social learning theory in Khozin et al., (2024), which asserts that individuals learn through the process of observation and imitation of behavioral models that are considered credible. In the context of Islamic education, PAI teachers serve as models of Islamic behavior that are observed and internalized by students in their daily lives. As also explained by Mutia Nur Putri et al., (2023), the formation of honest behavior in students was successfully instilled because PAI teachers demonstrated integrity and honesty in their actual actions, not just verbal instructions.

Islamic Character Values Instilled

At SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran, the majority of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers emphasize that the main pillar of character education is the instillation of

noble character through teaching positive behavior, such as greeting others politely, maintaining environmental cleanliness, and respecting parents and teachers. Based on interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, character education and religious practices are closely related. For example, reciting prayers before and after lessons, practicing greetings, and praying in congregation are important components in the process of fostering students' morals and faith. Teachers believe that strong faith is reflected in good morals, so that the practice of Islamic values in daily life must be accompanied by the strengthening of morals.

Research conducted by Wahid, (2024) at Ma'arif Pandaan High School confirms that Islamic Education (PAI) teachers play an important role in shaping students' discipline through various religious activities. Teachers set examples, give advice, and enforce discipline in activities such as congregational prayers so that students become more obedient and responsible. Similarly Fadli, (2024) found that Islamic Religious Education teachers can foster students' intrinsic moral awareness by instilling noble character through worship activities and constructive social interactions. Nurhakim et al., (2023) showed that Islamic principles such as empathy and honesty can prevent bad behavior in schools because students can emulate the good behavior of their teachers in their daily lives.

Character Building Strategies and Methods

The findings show that Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran use various strategies and methods to shape students' personalities, with a particular emphasis on habituation, direct guidance (*mau'idzah hasanah*), and exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*). Based on the interview results, the teachers emphasized that real examples are more effective than verbal instructions. They aspire to be role models who embody Islamic principles in their daily lives, including self-control, responsibility, and politeness in speech and dress. Teachers also help students get used to applying the "5S" principle, namely Smile, Greet, Greet, Be Polite, and Be Courteous as a concrete example of Islamic ethics in the classroom.

Regular religious practices such as congregational Dhuha prayers, morning recitation of the Quran, and commemoration of Islamic holidays also play a role in character building. In addition to using these models and methods of habit formation in the classroom, PAI teachers also use them outside of class hours, namely during breaks, scouting, and school community service. Student participation in these activities helps foster the values of accountability, teamwork, and honesty. To encourage character development outside the classroom and build continuity between moral education at home and at school, PAI teachers also emphasize the importance of communication with parents and guidance counselors.

These results are in line with the research by Lestari & Mahrus, (2025), which shows that a consistent approach of habituation and exemplary behavior is effective in helping students at Wahdah Islamiyah Islamic Elementary School develop honest character. Meanwhile, Komala & Gunawan, (2022) found that PAI teachers who

applied the *uswah* and *mau'idzah hasanah* techniques succeeded in changing the behavior of students who were less disciplined into more polite and responsible behavior. This conclusion is reinforced by the research of Fauzan et al., (2024) which found that the ability of PAI teachers to be true role models of the values they teach is very important for their success in character development.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which states that social reinforcement, understanding, and observation can shape individual behavior, is theoretically related to this strategy of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers. This theory is in line with the idea of *uswah hasanah*, which states that morals are taught to students by observing the actions of exemplary teachers (S. Lestari et al., 2021). Furthermore, Ibn Miskawaih's perspective, which states that virtue (*fadhilah*) can only develop through consistent practice and habit until it becomes an innate character (*malakah*), also supports the teacher's habit-forming approach (Putra, 2021). Thus, the results of this study reinforce the finding that the most effective strategy in character education is a combination of exemplary behavior, habituation, and continuous educational communication. PAI teachers play a role not only as teachers of values, but also as moral guides and mentors who instill Islamic morals through real examples in all aspects of school life.

Parent and School Environment Involvement

Character development at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran involves not only PAI teachers, but also the active participation of parents and school community members. According to PAI teachers, maintaining good habits at home and at school is very important for effective character education. Therefore, PAI teachers constantly provide information to parents about their children's religious activities, including the Ramadan Book, through parent-teacher meetings, collaboration with homeroom teachers, and various other means. Because parents are asked to accompany their children in all religious activities, this book is a valuable resource for integrating worship and student behavior at home.

The interview results show that teachers emphasize that when parents are involved, students behave more consistently. Students who receive parental supervision and guidance tend to show higher levels of discipline, manners, and responsibility than their less supervised peers. The school environment is also very important in helping to practice Islamic values. This is done through religious extracurricular activities, regular religious study groups, and school cultural programs that encourage students to greet each other, smile, and pray together before class. Thus, cooperation between families and schools creates a moral environment that helps students develop their Islamic character.

These findings reinforce the research by Nizar et al., (2025) which states that collaboration between teachers, parents, and schools greatly influences the success of developing students' religious character. Makrup et al., (2025) found that supervision of student behavior increased when Islamic Education teachers interacted with parents through a two-way communication system, either directly

or through digital platforms. Munawar et al., (2025) also stated that parental involvement in religious activities at school helps students become more disciplined and honest because they feel supported by an environment that has the same moral values at home and at school.

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Kunduran is not limited to transferring religious knowledge, but extends to being moral exemplars and character builders who integrate Islamic values into students' daily lives. Through consistent modeling (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, and collaborative engagement with parents and the school environment, PAI teachers effectively cultivate students' discipline, responsibility, empathy, and respect. The findings confirm that exemplary behavior is a more powerful medium of moral education than verbal instruction alone, as students are more influenced by what teachers do than by what they say. Moreover, character education is most effective when supported by a harmonious relationship between home, school, and religious culture, which reinforces moral consistency across environments.

This study successfully met its objective of describing how PAI teachers function as role models in shaping Islamic character through a holistic approach combining teaching, mentoring, and community collaboration. The results also emphasize that effective character formation requires not only curriculum-based instruction but also the embodiment of Islamic values in teachers' attitudes and actions. Future research is encouraged to examine the role of digital media and technological integration in strengthening the character education process, especially in diverse school contexts. Longitudinal studies may also explore how the influence of PAI teachers' exemplary behavior sustains students' moral development beyond school years. Overall, this study highlights that the moral integrity and exemplary conduct of PAI teachers are essential pillars in nurturing a generation of students with strong faith, noble character, and social responsibility.

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