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Teachers as Moral Agents: The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping Student Character

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in cultivating character values among fifth-grade students at Metro, Lampung. The research focuses on identifying the methods used, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors faced by teachers in implementing character education.

Method: The research employed a qualitative field study design. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving PAI teachers and students. Data analysis was conducted inductively through data reduction, display, and verification to ensure credibility, with triangulation applied as a validation technique.

Findings: The results reveal that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character through group activities and the implementation of the "7S" principle (smile, greet, salute, courtesy, politeness, patience, and gratitude). The main teaching methods include role modeling, advice, demonstration, and discussion. Supporting factors consist of adequate facilities and storytelling media, while inhibiting factors involve parental busyness, environmental influences, and mass media exposure. Solutions suggested include assigning meaningful tasks and strengthening collaboration between teachers and parents to foster consistent character development.

Significance: This study highlights the pivotal position of PAI teachers as moral agents in elementary schools. It contributes to the discourse on Islamic education by emphasizing the integration of religious instruction with character formation. The findings provide practical insights for educators, schools, and policymakers in enhancing strategies for value-based education to prepare morally responsible future generations.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in shaping a generation that is knowledgeable, ethical, and responsible. The Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 emphasizes that education aims to develop students' potential to become faithful, devoted, noble, healthy, capable, creative, independent, and democratic citizens. In this context, education is not only a process of knowledge transfer but also a process of character formation aligned with moral and spiritual values (Hidayatullah, 2009). An education system that prioritizes cognitive development while neglecting affective and psychomotor aspects often produces intelligent individuals who lack moral integrity. Therefore, character education from an early age becomes a fundamental need for students in elementary schools. This highlights the significance of religious education, particularly Islamic Religious Education (IRE), in addressing such challenges.

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Islamic Religious Education teachers hold a strategic role as moral agents and role models for their students. The attitudes, words, and behaviors of teachers often become mirrors imitated by students (Daradjat, 2006). In Islam, teachers are considered the successors of the prophetic mission (warasat al-anbiya), who not only transfer knowledge but also nurture students' noble character (Ramayulis, 2011). Accordingly, the success of character formation cannot be separated from the integrity of the teacher and the teaching methods employed. Through approaches such as role modeling, advice, and habituation, IRE teachers can instill values such as discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. This underlines that the role of IRE teachers extends beyond academics to encompass spiritual and moral development.

In practice, however, character education faces multiple challenges, both internal and external. Some students exhibit undisciplined behavior, lack of respect, and minimal concern for their school environment (Lickona, 2012). Family environments that do not provide adequate support, the influence of mass media, and the absence of consistent adult role models often weaken the internalization of character values (Fitri, 2012). These challenges demonstrate that character education requires strong collaboration between teachers, parents, and communities. Without such support, teachers may find it difficult to achieve the goals of character education comprehensively. Thus, investigating the strategies of IRE teachers in overcoming these challenges is of great importance.

Character education in the Islamic perspective has long been integrated into learning processes. The Qur'an emphasizes the significance of emulating the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the ultimate figure in character building (Qur'an 33:21). The Prophet is recognized as a model of honesty (shiddiq), trustworthiness (amanah), truthfulness in conveying (tabligh), and intelligence (fathanah) (Majid & Handayani, 2013). These values form the basis of character education in schools, particularly through IRE. Hence, Islamic education in elementary schools not only functions as a subject but also as a medium for shaping students' identity. Accordingly, examining the role of IRE teachers in instilling character values provides both academic and practical contributions to the field of education.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the actual practices of IRE teachers in instilling character values in elementary schools using a field-based approach. Most previous studies have primarily explored the relationship between religious education and character formation at the conceptual or policy level (Savira, 2017; Kholidin, 2018). This research, however, directly observes classroom interactions between teachers and students, identifying strategies employed by teachers to address challenges in character education. Thus, the study offers a practical and applicable perspective in understanding the role of IRE teachers.

Furthermore, this research provides concrete solutions to the obstacles faced by teachers in character education. Strategies such as implementing the "7S" principle (smile, greet, salute, courtesy, politeness, patience, and gratitude) and fostering collaboration between teachers and parents are rarely highlighted in previous studies (Gunawan, 2012). These approaches contribute to strengthening value-based education rooted in Islamic principles at the elementary school level. Therefore, this study not only enriches academic

literature but also offers practical recommendations for teachers, schools, and policymakers to enhance character education through Islamic Religious Education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative field research design to investigate the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in cultivating character values among elementary school students. Field research was chosen because it allows the researcher to directly observe natural phenomena in real educational settings without manipulating the environment (Moleong, 2013). Through this design, data were obtained from authentic classroom interactions and the everyday practices of teachers and students, making the findings more contextual and reflective of actual conditions. A descriptive approach was used to systematically present facts and events in the field, focusing on the strategies, challenges, and solutions in character education. The qualitative nature of the study enabled the researcher to interpret the meaning behind the behaviors, attitudes, and interactions that occurred during the teaching and learning process. This design also facilitated an in-depth understanding of how IRE teachers influence students' moral and spiritual development. Unlike quantitative approaches that rely heavily on numerical data, this design highlighted narratives and patterns emerging from the field. Therefore, the research design was considered appropriate to address the objectives of the study and to capture the complexities of character education in elementary schools.

Participant

The participants of this study consisted of one Islamic Religious Education teacher and fifth-grade students at SDN 3 Adipuro, Lampung Tengah. The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling, as they were directly involved in the teaching and learning process of character education. The IRE teacher served as the primary informant because of her central role as a facilitator, role model, and guide in instilling character values among students. Fifth-grade students were also included as secondary informants to provide perspectives on how character education was received and internalized in their daily behavior. In addition, other stakeholders such as school administrators and homeroom teachers were consulted to obtain complementary information about the school environment and its support for character education. This multi-participant involvement enriched the validity of the data by allowing the researcher to compare and triangulate different perspectives. The study participants reflected the social and cultural realities of the school community, making the findings relevant to similar educational contexts. Thus, the participants were considered adequate to provide comprehensive insights into the role of IRE teachers in character formation.

Instrument

The instruments used in this study were primarily human instruments, where the researcher acted as the main tool for collecting and interpreting data (Sugiyono, 2012). Supporting instruments included interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation checklists designed to ensure systematic data collection. The interview guide contained open-ended questions for the IRE teacher, students, and school administrators to explore their views and experiences related to character education.

Observation sheets were used to record the teacher's strategies during classroom activities, such as role modeling, advice, and the implementation of the "7S" principles. Documentation checklists were employed to collect relevant documents, including school profiles, organizational structures, and lesson plans. These instruments ensured that data were collected consistently and comprehensively from various sources. To enhance credibility, the instruments were validated through peer consultation with academic supervisors. By combining human instruments with structured tools, the study achieved both flexibility and reliability in data collection.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was conducted inductively through several interconnected stages. First, data reduction was carried out by summarizing and selecting the most relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents. This step helped the researcher focus on essential aspects such as the teacher's role, strategies, and challenges in character education. Second, the reduced data were presented in narrative and descriptive forms through data display, making it easier to identify emerging patterns and relationships (Sugiyono, 2012). Third, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process, ensuring that the findings were consistent with the data obtained in the field. Triangulation techniques were applied to cross-check the validity of information from different sources, including teachers, students, and school documents. The analysis emphasized meaning-making rather than statistical generalization, consistent with the qualitative paradigm. This approach enabled the researcher to provide rich insights into the practical realities of character education. Overall, the inductive analysis process produced findings that are both reliable and contextually grounded in the natural setting of the school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play a pivotal role in cultivating character values among fifth-grade students at SDN 3 Adipuro. The teacher's strategies were centered on exemplary behavior, moral advice, classroom discussions, and demonstration methods. These strategies reflected a holistic approach in which character education was integrated into both instructional activities and daily school practices. One key method implemented was the "7S" principle—*smile, greet, salute, courtesy, politeness, patience, and gratitude*—which was consistently practiced during interactions between teachers and students. Through these efforts, students were encouraged to embody discipline, responsibility, and respect in their daily behavior. The teacher's role as a moral agent was thus recognized not only through formal teaching but also through consistent personal modeling.

Supporting and inhibiting factors were also identified in the implementation of character education. The supporting factors included adequate school facilities, the use of storytelling as a medium, and the collaborative spirit among teachers. These conditions enabled the teacher to create a positive learning environment that reinforced students' moral development. On the other hand, inhibiting factors were primarily external, such as parents' busy schedules that limited their engagement in their children's moral formation,

the influence of peers and social environment, and the negative impact of mass media. Despite these challenges, the teacher demonstrated resilience by designing classroom tasks and maintaining communication with parents to strengthen character development at home. These findings highlight the importance of teacher-parent collaboration in sustaining consistent character education.

In addition, the study found that problem-solving strategies were crucial in overcoming obstacles to character education. Teachers assigned specific moral-based tasks that encouraged students to practice values in real-life contexts, such as group assignments emphasizing teamwork and responsibility. Cooperative learning activities further strengthened the internalization of values by allowing students to experience the consequences of discipline and mutual respect. The active role of the teacher in facilitating such activities ensured that character education was not limited to theory but extended to practical experiences. The integration of pedagogical strategies with moral guidance created a sustainable model for character formation in elementary schools.

Table 1. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Character Education at SDN 3 Adipuro

Category	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Facilities & Media	Adequate school facilities; availability of storytelling media	Limited parental involvement due to busy schedules
School Environment	Collaborative spirit among teachers; positive school climate	Negative influence of peers and social environment
Instructional Strategies	Implementation of 7S principles; use of role modeling, advice, and discussion	Negative impact of mass media and technology distractions

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the crucial role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in shaping students' character values, which aligns with the findings of Lickona (2012) that teachers are central figures in moral education. The teacher's role went beyond cognitive teaching to encompass affective and behavioral guidance through role modeling and habituation. The consistent practice of the "7S" principle demonstrated how character values can be integrated into daily interactions rather than limited to formal lessons. This supports previous research by Gunawan (2012), which emphasized that character education is most effective when embedded into everyday school practices. Thus, the study reinforces the idea that teachers serve as both instructors and moral exemplars in the school environment.

The findings also highlight the effectiveness of methods such as advice, demonstration, and discussion in instilling values of discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. These approaches resonate with the study by Hidayatullah (2009), which found that character education requires strategies that touch students' emotional and cognitive domains simultaneously. By using these methods, the teacher created meaningful learning experiences that shaped students' moral awareness and behavior. This indicates that character education cannot rely solely on curriculum content but must involve pedagogical practices that encourage reflection, empathy, and action. The integration of Islamic principles into these methods further strengthened their effectiveness in the local context.

Supporting factors, such as adequate facilities and storytelling media, played an important role in sustaining the implementation of character education. This finding is consistent with the study by Fitri (2012), which reported that supportive learning environments contribute significantly to the success of moral education programs. The availability of resources allowed the teacher to diversify learning methods and maintain student engagement. Furthermore, collaboration among teachers within the school fostered a consistent culture of discipline and respect. These findings suggest that character education is most effective when supported by structural and institutional resources that reinforce the teacher's role.

On the other hand, inhibiting factors such as parental busyness, negative peer influence, and the impact of mass media posed challenges to character formation. Similar issues were highlighted by Savira (2017), who found that external factors often undermine school-based character education programs. The lack of parental involvement weakens the continuity of value formation between home and school, leading to inconsistencies in student behavior. Moreover, the influence of media and peers often contradicts the values promoted by teachers, creating conflict in students' internalization of character. This emphasizes the need for stronger partnerships between schools and families to build a shared responsibility in character education.

The novelty of this study lies in its documentation of practical strategies adopted by teachers to address these challenges. Unlike prior studies that focused primarily on theoretical frameworks (Kholidin, 2018), this research identifies concrete solutions such as assigning moral-based tasks and strengthening cooperation with parents. These strategies demonstrate the adaptive capacity of teachers in responding to contextual challenges while maintaining the goals of character education. The emphasis on cooperative activities and experiential learning also highlights the dynamic role of teachers as facilitators of moral practice, not merely transmitters of knowledge. This finding provides practical insights that can be adopted in similar educational contexts.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic education by demonstrating how religious instruction can be integrated with character formation to address contemporary challenges. The use of Islamic principles as the foundation of character education ensures that moral development is both culturally and spiritually relevant. This is consistent with the argument of Ramayulis (2011), who stressed that Islamic education should integrate intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. By highlighting the teacher's strategies and adaptive solutions, this research provides new perspectives for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen character education in Indonesia. It also enriches international discussions on value-based education by presenting an example from an Islamic educational context.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play a fundamental role in cultivating character values among elementary school students. By employing strategies such as role modeling, advice, discussion, and the implementation of the "7S" principle, teachers successfully foster values of discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. Supporting factors such as school facilities and storytelling media enhanced the

process, while inhibiting factors such as parental busyness, peer influence, and mass media posed significant challenges. The study's novelty lies in its identification of practical solutions, including moral-based tasks and collaborative efforts with parents, which have not been extensively explored in previous research. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating Islamic values into character education and provide valuable insights for educators, schools, and policymakers in strengthening value-based education in Indonesia.

AUHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Nur Ainih Dwi Lestari conceived the research idea, designed the study, conducted fieldwork, collected data through interviews, observations, and documentation, and drafted the initial manuscript.
Mukhtar Hadi supervised the research design and methodology, provided critical input on data analysis, and contributed to the refinement of the theoretical framework.
Nuryanto reviewed and edited the manuscript, ensured the alignment of findings with existing literature, and contributed to the discussion and conclusion sections.

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