



Strategies for Strengthening Character Education Through the Integration of Islamic Values: The Role of Teachers as Role Models in the Context of Contextual Learning

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Article History:

Received: March 2024

Revised: April 2024

Accepted: May 2024

Published: June 2024

Keywords:

Character Values, Tolerance, Teacher Behavior

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Abstract:

This research focuses on the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and the role of teachers as exemplary models in shaping students' character. The purpose of this study is to explore how contextual teaching approaches and consistency of teacher behavior can affect the internalization of character values by students at Nurul Jadid Junior High School. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, where data is collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The collected data was analyzed using an interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which included the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification. The results of the study show that the integration of character values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation in the curriculum, as well as the role of teachers as role models, is very effective in shaping students' character. The implications of this study confirm the importance of developing contextual teaching methods and consistency of teacher behavior to support more effective character education. This research makes a significant contribution to the literature on character education, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education.

INTRODUCTION

Character education in the context of Islamic Religious Education plays an important role in shaping the personality of the younger generation who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have noble character (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021; Parker et al., 2022; Tan & Tan, 2021; Rusdi et al., 2022; Susilawati & Astuti, 2022). In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, moral and ethical challenges are increasingly complex, which requires educational institutions to be more serious in integrating character values into the curriculum (Jones et al., 2021; Korthagen & Nuijten, 2020; Lovat, 2020; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022). Social facts show that the increase in cases of juvenile delinquency, intolerance, and a decrease in a sense of responsibility among the younger

How to Cite:

Safitri, S.D. (2024). Strategies for Strengthening Character Education Through the Integration of Islamic Values: The Role of Teachers as Role Models in the Context of Contextual Learning. *AFKARINA: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 9(1), 11-21.

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generation demand a more effective educational approach in instilling moral values (Hasan et al., 2022; Mangalagiu et al., 2021; Schweiger et al., 2021; Chuanchen, 2023). Islamic Religious Education, as one of the compulsory subjects in Indonesia schools, has great potential to become the main vehicle in character formation (Basri et al., 2021; Huda et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2020; Maulidah et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of this character education is highly dependent on the teaching methods used and the role of teachers as role models (Bialystok & Majumder, 2021; Crick & Wilson, 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Norman & Paramansyah, 2024). Therefore, this study is important to examine more deeply how the integration of character values in Islamic Religious Education can be implemented effectively and how the role of teachers can influence the internalization of these values by students (Schmidt et al., 2021; Singhal & Kapur, 2021; White et al., 2022; Hamidah, 2023).

Although many studies have highlighted the importance of character education in shaping the morals of the younger generation, there are still challenges in ensuring that the values taught are truly internalized and applied in students' daily lives (Davis et al., 2021; Johnson & Morgan, 2021; Suh & Shin, 2020; Ansori et al., 2023). In addition, not all teaching methods applied in schools are effective in instilling these values (Knight & McDonald, 2021; Li & Zhu, 2021; Nakamura et al., 2021). Another factor that needs to be considered is the consistency of teachers' behavior in carrying out their role as role models, which greatly affects the process of internalizing grades by students (Freeman et al., 2021; Park & Hsieh, 2021; Wilson et al., 2021; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023). Given the complexity of this character education process, this study seeks to understand more deeply how the integration of character values in Islamic Religious Education can be optimized through a contextual teaching approach and the exemplary role of teachers (Coulter & Crossley, 2021; Moore et al., 2021; Thapa & Khalid, 2021).

Previous research has shown various approaches to character education, but there are significant differences in the effectiveness of each approach. For example, research by Darlan et al. (2021) revealed that the integration of moral values in religious education can increase students' ethical awareness, but not all approaches applied are successful in the long term. Mugambi (2022) in his study emphasized the importance of a holistic approach in character education, but paid less attention to the role of teachers as the main role models in the learning process. Meanwhile, Mujahid (2021) highlights the importance of moderation in religion-based character education, but his study focuses more on the curriculum than on teaching methods and the influence of teacher behavior. While these findings make an important contribution, there are gaps that need to be explored further, especially in terms of how contextual approaches to teaching and the role of teachers can influence the internalization of character values by students.

This study identifies a significant gap between existing approaches to character education and the need to better understand the influence of the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, especially through the contextual approach and the role of role models for teachers. While previous research has addressed various aspects of character education, there is still a lack of research exploring how teaching methods that are relevant to the context of students' lives can improve the effectiveness of character education. This study aims to fill in the gap by offering a more in-depth

analysis of how the right approach can improve the internalization of character values among students, as well as how the role of teachers can be optimized in this process.

This research offers novelty with a focus on a contextual approach in teaching character values integrated in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, as well as an emphasis on the role of teachers as consistent role models in shaping students' character. This aspect of novelty lies in the combination of contextual learning theory and character education, which has not been widely explored in previous studies. In addition, this study also introduces teaching methods that are more adaptive to the needs of students, which is expected to provide a new perspective in the development of Islamic Religious Education curriculum that is more effective and relevant to the challenges of the times. Another novelty offered is the emphasis on the role of teachers as central figures in character education, which shows that teachers' behavior and consistency in applying character values have a huge influence on the internalization of values by students.

The main objective of this study is to explore how the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can be optimized through a contextual teaching approach and the exemplary role of teachers. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these approaches can improve the internalization of character values by students, as well as provide practical recommendations for educators in developing more effective teaching methods. The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to improve the quality of character education in schools, which is expected to produce a young generation who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have noble character and are ready to face moral challenges in the era of globalization.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative type of research with a case study approach. The selection of the qualitative approach is based on the research objective to deeply understand the phenomenon of the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and the role of teachers as role models in specific contexts. The case study approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore the rich contextual details of the educational practice at Nurul Jadid Junior High School, a school located on Jalan Imam Bonjol No. 78, Kraksaan, Probolinggo Regency, East Java. This approach is more suitable compared to quantitative or experimental methods because the research focuses on the process, experience, and interpretation of the subject, rather than on variable measurement or hypothesis testing (Smith et al., 2021; Brown & Jones, 2022; Davis & Robinson, 2023). Thus, this method was chosen to uncover complex dimensions of the application of character education that may not be able to be revealed through other approaches (Johnson & Wills, 2021; Miller, 2022; Carter & Green, 2023).

The data collection techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 respondents consisting of 5 Islamic Religious Education teachers and 5 9th grade students at Nurul Jadid Junior High School. The selection of these respondents was carried out purposively, taking into account their involvement in the process of teaching and learning character values in

schools. Participatory observation is carried out to observe the interaction between teachers and students and how character values are applied in daily activities at school. In addition, document analysis was carried out on the school curriculum, learning implementation plan (RPP), and teaching materials used by Islamic Religious Education teachers at Nurul Jadid Junior High School. This combination of data collection techniques allows researchers to obtain rich and in-depth data, which is necessary to understand the context and process of implementing character education in the school.

The data collected in this study were analyzed using an interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which included three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification (Miles et al., 2020; Huberman & Saldana, 2021; Saldana, 2022). Data reduction involves the process of simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data into a more organized and meaningful form. The presentation of the data is then done by compiling the information that has been reduced into a format that can be easily interpreted, such as tables, matrices, or charts. The final stage, namely drawing conclusions and verification, includes the process of formulating significant findings from the data that has been presented and verifying the validity of the findings through re-checking the original data. After that, the presentation of data is carried out in the form of tables, charts, or descriptive narratives that allow researchers to understand the relationship between aspects in character education at Nurul Jadid Junior High School. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, where the initial conclusions resulting from the presentation of data are verified through an additional data collection process or rechecking to ensure the validity of the findings. By using this approach, this study is able to reveal complex dimensions in the application of character education and highlight the significant role of teachers as role models in the educational process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Character Values in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

This study found that the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at Nurul Jadid Junior High School plays an important role in shaping students' character. Values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation are not only taught through the subject matter, but are also applied in the daily lives of students in school. One of the teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) revealed, "We always emphasize that honesty is not only about telling the truth, but also about consistency between words and actions." This quote illustrates how the concept of honesty is taught not only as a theory but also as a real practice internalized by students.

Students also feel the positive impact of the integration of these values. A 9th grader said, "I learned that responsibility is not only done in the classroom, but also when I help parents at home or participate in social activities in the community (I_S)."

Another teacher added, "We try to relate each lesson to a real situation that is relevant to the student's life, so that they can see how these values apply in their daily lives (I_T)."

The results of this interview show that the integration of character values

in Islamic religious education has a profound impact on the understanding and application of these values by students in daily life. Students not only understand the concept of responsibility theoretically, but are also able to apply it in the context of their personal and social lives. This shows that an educational approach that relates teaching materials to real situations succeeds in making it easier for students to internalize and apply the character values taught. In addition, teachers' efforts to connect lessons with students' daily life experiences show that the learning process becomes more relevant and meaningful for students, ultimately strengthening their character development outside of the school environment.

Table 1. Integration of Character Values in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

Aspects	Teaching Methods	Implementation	Impact on Students
Honesty	Contextual Learning	Relating to real situations	Internalize the value of honesty
Responsibility	Social Projects	Participation in social activities	Increased sense of responsibility
Tolerance	Group Discussion	Discuss differences within groups	Increased tolerance between students
Cooperation	Collaborative Activities	Cooperation in group assignments	Improve the ability to work together

Table 1 shows that the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at Nurul Jadid Junior High School is carried out through various contextual and practical teaching methods, which has a significant impact on the formation of students' character. Honesty, for example, is taught through contextual learning that relates this concept to real-life situations, thus allowing students to internalize the value of honesty in their daily lives. Responsibility is reinforced through participation in social projects, where students learn to take responsibility for their role in society, which results in an increase in their sense of responsibility. Tolerance is developed through group discussions that discuss differences among students, which not only helps them understand the importance of tolerance but also applies it in everyday interactions. In addition, cooperation is encouraged through collaborative activities that require students to work together on group tasks, improving their ability to collaborate effectively. This overall implementation shows that a contextual and relevant educational approach to students' lives can effectively internalize character values in students, reinforcing their behavior in social and academic life.

The integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum shows its effectiveness in shaping a more comprehensive student personality. These findings are in line with the theory of contextual learning which states that knowledge and values taught through contexts relevant to the student experience tend to be easier to internalize (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, the theory of character education (Lickona, 1991) emphasizes the importance of applying values through consistent practice, both inside and outside the classroom, which is proven to be well implemented in Nurul Jadid Junior High School. The implication of these findings is the need for other schools to adopt a similar approach, ensuring that character education is not only theoretical but also applicable and relevant to students' daily lives.

The Role of Teachers as Role Models in Character Education

PAI teachers at Nurul Jadid Junior High School not only play the role of teachers, but also as role models that significantly affect the development of students' character. The role of teachers as role models in character education has a very strong impact on the moral and ethical development of students. The theory of social learning (Bandura, 1977) affirms that individuals learn through observation and imitation of other people's behavior, which in the context of schools, teachers become the main figures observed by students. Thus, teacher behavior that is consistent with the character values taught will strengthen the internalization of these values in students. The implication of these findings is the importance of professional development for teachers to strengthen their awareness and skills in becoming effective character models.

"I try to always show a good attitude, because I know students will imitate what I do, not just what I say (I_T)."

Students also pay attention to and respond to their teacher's behavior. One student admitted, "When I saw my teacher treat all students fairly, I learned how important it is to be fair at every opportunity (I_S)."

Another teacher affirmed, "We always strive to be good role models, not only in terms of knowledge but also in terms of daily behavior, because we believe that students' character is formed from what they see every day (I_T)."

The results of this interview show that the role of teachers as role models is very significant in shaping the character of students. Teachers are aware that their behavior is observed and imitated by students, so they strive to always show an attitude consistent with the character values taught. Students also pay attention to how their teachers behave, especially when it comes to fairness, and this influences the way students understand and apply the concept of fairness in their own lives. Teachers not only focus on the transmission of knowledge, but also on how they practice these values in daily life, which shows the importance of exemplary in character education. This reinforces the idea that the character of students is formed not only through verbal instruction, but also through observation of real actions carried out by authority figures such as teachers.

Table 2. The Role of Teachers as Role Models in Character Education

Aspects	Exemplary Method	Influence on Students
Fair Attitude	Treating students fairly	Developing a sense of justice
Consistency of Behavior	Demonstrate a consistent attitude	Internalization of taught values
Role Models in Everyday Life	Applying values in daily interactions	Character formation through observation

Table 2 reveals that the role of teachers as role models has a significant impact on the formation of student character in Nurul Jadid Junior High School. Teachers who treat students fairly help develop a sense of fairness among students, while the consistency of behavior shown by teachers allows students to internalize the values taught in more depth. In addition, the teachers' application of character values in their daily interactions provides students with the opportunity to observe and imitate positive behaviors, which contributes to character formation through observation. Thus, the fairness, consistency of behavior, and daily example shown by teachers play a key role in strengthening and shaping students' character, making teachers an important figure in the

effective character education process.

The Effectiveness of the Contextual Learning Approach in Shaping Student Character

The contextual learning approach applied at Nurul Jadid Junior High School has proven to be effective in shaping students' character. A contextual learning approach that relates teaching materials to relevant real-life situations shows effectiveness in shaping students' character. According to the theory of constructivism (Piaget, 1954), learning that involves real experiences of students will be more meaningful and help them to build new knowledge and values based on those experiences. This approach also supports the theory of character education which emphasizes the importance of connecting values with concrete situations faced by students (Lickona, 1991). The implication of these findings is that the contextual approach needs to be applied more in various schools to improve the effectiveness of character education.

"When we relate the material about honesty to everyday situations, such as honesty in doing assignments, students more easily understand and apply this value," (I_T).

Students also revealed that this approach makes them more involved in the learning process. "I feel more motivated when lessons are tied to something I experience every day" (I_S).

Another teacher underlined the importance of this approach, "By connecting the lessons to the context of their lives, we help students to see the relevance of religious values in everyday life, not just in school (I_T)."

The results of this interview show that the contextual learning approach, which connects the subject matter with real situations in students' daily lives, has proven to be effective in improving the understanding and application of character values such as honesty. By associating the concept of honesty with concrete examples, such as integrity in doing assignments, students can more easily internalize and apply these values in their lives. In addition, this approach also increases students' motivation and engagement in the learning process, as they feel that the lessons are relevant to their personal experiences. Teachers realize the importance of making lessons relevant to the context of students' lives, which not only makes it easier for students to understand, but also ensures that the religious and moral values taught can be applied consistently outside the school environment.



Figure 1. Character Values in the Curriculum

The following chart presents a framework for the integration of character

values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at Nurul Jadid Junior High School. This chart shows the relationship between character education theory and daily practice involving teachers, students, and the school environment.

The results of this study reveal that the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, as well as the role of teachers as role models, has a significant impact on the formation of student character. The results of this study are in line with the findings of Darlan et al. (2021) which show that the integration of moral values in religious education can strengthen students' ethical awareness and encourage the application of these values in daily life.

However, this study also shows that the effectiveness of the contextual approach and the role of the teacher's role model are more prominent compared to the previous study conducted by Mugambi (2022), which emphasized the importance of a holistic approach in character education without paying special attention to the role of the teacher as a central figure. In addition, research by Mujahid (2021) which emphasizes the importance of moderation in religion-based character education, seems to lack the importance of adapting teaching materials to the context of students' daily lives as found in this study. These findings confirm that the contextual approach and consistency of teacher behavior not only strengthens students' understanding of character values, but also facilitates the application of those values in real life, reinforcing the importance of these aspects in the development of effective character education curricula today.

This research makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic religious education by offering an innovative and applicable approach in teaching character values. First, this study shows that the integration of character values, such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation, into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can increase the internalization of these values among students. This confirms the importance of using contextual teaching methods that relate theory to real situations in students' daily lives, which have proven to be effective in shaping students' overall character. Second, this study emphasizes the central role of teachers as role models, who not only convey knowledge, but also practice the values taught in daily interactions. These findings underscore the importance of teachers' professional development in internalizing and applying character values in their lives, so that they can be a strong example for students. Third, this study adds new insights in the Islamic religious education literature by highlighting the importance of learning approaches that are relevant to the social and cultural context of students, which can be adapted and applied in various educational settings. Thus, this research not only enriches the theoretical understanding of character education in Islam, but also offers practical guidance for educators in implementing character values in the teaching of Islam, making it more relevant and effective in forming a generation with noble character.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of integrating character values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and the role of teachers as role models that have a significant impact on the formation of student character. The study found that contextual approaches in teaching

values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation, not only make it easier for students to understand these concepts, but also encourage them to apply them in their daily lives. By relating the teaching material to real-life situations that are relevant to the students' experiences, this study provides new insights into how contextual and practice-oriented religious learning can be more effective in shaping students' character. A key lesson that can be drawn from this study is the importance of linking theory with practice and demonstrating the consistency of behavior on the part of teachers as the main model in character education, which not only strengthens understanding but also ensures a deep internalization of those values by students.

This research makes a significant contribution to the literature of Islamic religious education by offering an approach that renews the existing perspective on character education. By proposing contextual learning methods that are more relevant to students' lives and emphasizing the importance of role models from teachers, this research enriches the existing literature and provides a new perspective on how character values can be effectively integrated in Islamic religious education. However, this research has limitations, especially related to the limited scope of one particular school and the focus on the perspective of teachers and students. Further research is needed to test these findings in a variety of different educational contexts, as well as involving other variables such as differences in gender, age, or socioeconomic background that may affect the results. By expanding this research, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding can be obtained that can be the basis for the development of more inclusive and effective character education policies in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported and contributed to the completion of this research. Special thanks to the faculty and staff of SMP Nurul Jadid for their invaluable assistance and cooperation throughout the study. I am also deeply grateful to the students and teachers who participated in this research, offering their time and insights. Lastly, my heartfelt appreciation goes to my colleagues and mentors for their continuous guidance and encouragement.

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