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The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Student Character Formation at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12 Pamulang

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in building student character at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12 Pamulang through religious values learning, role models, moral habits, and the strengthening of Islamic school culture. **Theoretical framework:** This study draws on character education theory, social learning theory, and Islamic education theory, emphasizing the importance of role models, social interactions, and religious habituation in building student character. **Literature review:** This study examines the concept of character education in Islam, the role of teachers as role models (*uswah hasanah*), school religious culture, and the relationship between the educational environment and student moral formation. The literature shows that student character is formed through the integration of religious values, social habits, and teacher role models in everyday life. **Method:** This study uses a qualitative case study design. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, and school officials at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12, Pamulang. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and inductive conclusion drawing. **Results:** The study indicates that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a strategic, multidimensional role in building student character. Character formation is carried out through learning religious values, habituating worship, providing motivation, moral guidance, and exemplary teacher behavior. School religious culture, such as congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, greeting culture, discipline, and socio-religious activities, has been shown to strengthen the internalization of student character values. Research also shows that students tend to imitate teacher behavior, making teachers a major factor in character formation. However, the influence of digital media, the lack of family supervision, and differences in student character pose challenges to the character development process. **Implications:** This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers through role models, religious practices, and collaboration among schools, families, and the broader social environment in shaping student character. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis of the relationships among teacher role models, school religious culture, and Islamic habits in the internalization of student character in Muhammadiyah elementary schools.

Keywords: islamic religious education teacher, character, religious culture, role model, teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental instrument for building the quality of human resources and shaping the character and civilization of the nation [1]. In the context of Indonesian national education, education is not only directed at mastering cognitive aspects but also at strengthening students' moral, spiritual, and social dimensions as part of the formation of a person who is faithful, pious, and has noble morals. Within this framework, character education is one of the main focuses of national education development, especially amidst increasing moral crises, ethical degradation, deviant behavior among students, and the challenges of globalization and digitalization that influence the mindset and behavior of the younger generation [2].

Phenomena such as low student discipline, increased individualism, a lack of respect for teachers and parents, and misuse of digital technology indicate that formal education has not yet fully achieved optimal character development in students. This situation demands the strengthening of values-based education, particularly through Islamic Religious Education (IRE), as the primary foundation for students' moral and spiritual development.

From an Islamic educational perspective, character formation is not simply a process of transferring knowledge, but rather a continuous internalization of moral values through habituation, role modeling, supervision, and the strengthening of a religious environment. Islamic education views the primary goal of education as shaping individuals who possess a balance between intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence [3]. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character from an early age, particularly at the elementary school level, a fundamental phase in moral development and personality formation. At this stage, students are in the imitation and habituation stages, making teacher role models a crucial factor in shaping students' behavior and life values [4].

Islamic Religious Education teachers serve not only as transmitters of teaching materials, but also as moral figures, spiritual guides, motivators, facilitators, and role models in students' daily lives. In character education, Islamic Religious Education teachers have broader responsibilities than other subject teachers because the material they teach is directly related to faith, worship, morals, and social behavior. Through the learning process, Islamic Religious Education teachers play a role in instilling the values of honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, social awareness, and religiosity, which are manifested in students' actual behavior both inside and outside the school environment [5]. Thus, the success of character education is greatly influenced by Islamic Education teachers' ability to integrate Islamic values into the learning process and school culture.

Theoretically, character formation in Islamic education is closely related to the concept of role models (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, and strengthening the socio-religious environment [6]. Teacher role models are crucial because elementary school students tend to imitate the behavior of figures perceived as authoritative and emotionally close. From Albert Bandura's social learning theory perspective, individual behavior is formed through observation and imitation of the surrounding social environment [7]–[9]. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education teachers who demonstrate discipline, courtesy, religiousness, and responsibility will more easily shape similar character traits in their students. Furthermore, Thomas Lickona's character education theory emphasizes that character education must involve three main aspects: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Therefore, character education does not stop at moral knowledge alone, but also at cultivating moral behavior in everyday life [10], [11].

In modern educational practice, the challenges of character formation in students are increasingly complex due to the rapid development of information technology and digital media. The presence of social media, popular culture, and unlimited access to information significantly influences the behavior patterns of elementary school-aged children. Many students are more easily exposed to consumerist, individualistic behavior and even content

inconsistent with moral and religious values. This situation means the character-forming process is no longer solely influenced by family and school, but also by the difficult-to-control digital environment. In this situation, Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to have more adaptive pedagogical, social, and spiritual skills to guide students in facing the moral challenges of the modern era.

Various previous studies have shown that Islamic Religious Education teachers have a central role in building students' character through the process of learning religious values and moral development [12]–[14]. Research shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers serve as educators, guides, role models, and motivators in shaping students' behavior in line with Islamic teachings. Teachers not only teach religious theory but also help students understand the meaning of spirituality, ethics, and social responsibility in everyday life. Furthermore, other research shows that student character formation is greatly influenced by teacher role models, the habituation of religious activities, and a school culture that supports the internalization of Islamic values [15]–[17]. A religious school environment has been proven to strengthen the effectiveness of character education, as students not only receive values in theory but also experience their practice directly in their daily activities.

However, these studies tend to focus on the normative and conceptual aspects of Islamic Religious Education teachers' roles in character education and have not examined in greater depth the actual implementation of these roles within the social and cultural contexts of specific schools. Most previous studies have also focused more on formal classroom learning strategies. At the same time, the dimensions of religious habituation, teacher personal role models, social interactions with students, and the dynamics of the school environment as factors in character formation have not been comprehensively analyzed. Furthermore, research on character education in Muhammadiyah elementary schools remains relatively limited, even though these schools have unique characteristics in integrating Islamic education, moral formation, and school religious culture.

On the other hand, there is a gap between the ideal goals of Islamic Religious Education and the reality of practice in the field. In many cases, Islamic Religious Education learning remains solely oriented toward cognitive aspects and academic achievement, resulting in suboptimal internalization of character values. Some students still exhibit undisciplined behavior, low responsibility, a lack of religious awareness, and weak social ethics despite receiving religious instruction in school. This situation demonstrates that successful character education is not achieved solely through the delivery of religious material; it requires the active involvement of teachers as role models and moral guides, consistently fostering a religious culture.

This phenomenon also highlights the structural and cultural challenges inherent in implementing character education in elementary schools. Heterogeneous family environments, the influence of digital media, weak parental supervision, and changes in children's social interaction patterns all affect the effectiveness of student character formation. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers are required not only to master pedagogical competencies but also to build emotional rapport with students, create a religious learning environment, and collaborate with parents to foster children's character [18]. Therefore, an analysis of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers needs to be conducted in a more contextualized manner, taking into account social realities, school culture, and the dynamics of students in the modern era.

Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12 Pamulang is a relevant location for studying this phenomenon because it is an Islamic educational institution that prioritizes character education as a key component of its learning system. As a Muhammadiyah-based school, this institution emphasizes not only academic aspects but also moral development, the instilling of religious habits, and the reinforcement of Islamic values in students' daily lives. The school's religious environment and teacher involvement in various character-building

activities make this school an interesting topic for in-depth study, particularly regarding how Islamic Religious Education teachers fulfill their role in developing student character.

Based on the above description, there is still a research gap regarding the concrete implementation of the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in building student character in certain Islamic elementary schools. Previous research has not comprehensively integrated pedagogical aspects, role models, religious habituation, school culture, and the challenges of modern education into a single, coherent analytical framework. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing in depth the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in building student character at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12 in Pamulang.

The novelty of this research lies in its analytical approach, which not only views Islamic Religious Education teachers as transmitters of religious learning materials but also as key actors in the process of internalizing values, establishing a school religious culture, and transforming students' morals through exemplary behavior, habituation, and educational social interactions. This research also positions character formation as a multidimensional process shaped by the relationships among teachers, students, the school environment, and the challenges of the digital era. Therefore, this research is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic education and character education studies, while also providing practical contributions to schools, teachers, and policymakers in formulating strategies to strengthen student character through Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Women's Agency in Social and Gender Studies

The concept of female agency has become a key framework for understanding women's position in social practices, including in the context of *ampa sabae*. In contemporary gender studies, agency is not only interpreted as absolute freedom, but also as an individual's ability to act within the constraints of existing social structures. Saba Mahmood critiques liberal approaches that view agency solely as resistance to structures, and asserts that agency can also emerge in the form of strategic adherence to norms [19]. In this context, women in the practice of *ampa sabae* do not simply oppose patriarchal structures but utilize social norms to achieve specific goals, such as demanding responsibility from men and maintaining social honor. In line with this, Anthony Giddens, through his structuration theory, explains that social action is the result of interactions between agents and structures [20]. Structures do not completely constrain individuals, but also provide space for action. In the practice of *ampa sabae*, women act as agents, using customary structures and social norms as instruments to resolve the problems they face. This demonstrates that women's agency is contextual and relational.

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers

Teachers are a central element in the educational process, serving not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as molders of students' morals, ethics, and character. In Islamic Religious Education (ISE), the teacher's position becomes increasingly strategic, as they not only perform pedagogical functions but also serve as spiritual guides, moral role models, motivators, and agents of value transformation in students' lives. Islamic Religious Education, in essence, is not only oriented toward mastering the cognitive aspects of religion but also toward internalizing Islamic values in students' daily behavior [21]. Therefore, the success of character education is greatly influenced by Islamic Education teachers' ability to integrate religious, ethical, and moral values into the learning process and school culture.

From the perspective of social learning theory, put forward by Albert Bandura, individual behavior is formed through the process of observation, imitation, and modeling of the

surrounding social environment. Students tend to imitate the behavior of figures perceived as authoritative, emotionally close, and socially influential, including teachers. In this context, Islamic Religious Education teachers become central figures in shaping students' character, as students not only receive theoretical materials but also internalize values through teachers' behavior in everyday life. Thus, the process of character education is not only instructional, but also relational and exemplary. Teachers who demonstrate religious, disciplined, honest, polite, and responsible behavior will be more effective in shaping similar character traits in students.

In line with this, Thomas Lickona explains that character education comprises three main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Character education is not enough to simply provide an understanding of moral values; it must also foster emotional awareness and concrete actions in students' lives. Within this framework, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers have a significant responsibility to create learning experiences that emphasize not only religious knowledge but also shape students' spiritual awareness and moral behavior in concrete ways. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers must be educators who integrate religious values into learning, social interactions, and the overall school culture.

From an Islamic educational perspective, teachers are viewed as role models, or *uswah hasanah*, who have a moral responsibility to guide students toward noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*). Exemplary behavior is an important principle in Islamic education because character formation occurs not only through verbal advice but also through concrete practices in daily life [22]. Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to embody Islamic values, such as honesty, patience, responsibility, discipline, compassion, and tolerance, in their interactions with students. Thus, character education in Islam is an integrative approach that encompasses knowledge, behavior, and spirituality.

Religious Habits and School Culture in Internalizing Character Values

Religious habituation is a method of character education that involves the continuous repetition of positive behaviors, thereby ingraining them in the learner. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, habituation is the process of training the soul through repeated actions, resulting in enduring morals within a person [23]. Jacob explained that habituation is a practical effort to shape children's behavior through the practice and repetition of activities in accordance with religious values, thereby forming an Islamic personality [24]. Meanwhile, Firmansyah stated that religious habituation is the process of instilling Islamic values through routine activities consistently carried out, thereby enabling students to develop religious behavior in their daily lives [25]. From a behaviorist perspective, BF Skinner explains that human behavior can be shaped through continuous reinforcement and stimulus, resulting in permanent habits [26]. Therefore, religious practices such as congregational prayer, Quran reading, praying before and after learning, greetings, and other religious activities are effective strategies for shaping students' religious character.

In addition to religious habits, the culture of religious school also plays a crucial role in the internalization of students' character values. Religious school culture is a system of values, norms, traditions, and habits that reflect the implementation of religious teachings in daily school life. Deal and Peterson state that school culture is a collection of values, beliefs, traditions, and habits developed by all members of the school community and becomes the identity of the educational institution. Zamroni explains that school culture is a pattern of values, norms, and habits that guide the behavior of all members of the school community [27]. Meanwhile, Utaminingsih et al. define school religious culture as the atmosphere of school life that reflects the application of Islamic values in all educational activities to shape students' religious character [28]. According to Koentjaraningrat, culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works obtained through the learning process [29]. In education,

the religious school culture serves as a means of socializing values , as students learn directly through the social environment they encounter every day.

Internalizing character values is the process of instilling moral and religious values in students so that these values become part of their daily attitudes and behaviors. According to Mulyasa, internalizing character values is the process of instilling values through learning, habituation, role modeling, and environmental conditioning to foster good character in students [30]. Thomas Lickona explains that character education encompasses three main aspects, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which must be carried out in an integrated manner so that character values are truly embedded in students. Peterson states that character is a way of thinking and behaving that characterizes an individual in society. From an Islamic educational perspective, internalizing character values aims to shape individuals who are faithful, pious, and have noble morals [31]. Therefore, religious habits and religious school culture are important factors in the successful internalization of character values because both create an educational environment that supports the formation of moral, spiritual, and social attitudes in students.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in building student character in the school environment. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore meanings, experiences, and social interactions in depth. This aligns with research suggesting that a qualitative approach is effective for in-depth study of social and educational phenomena in natural contexts [32]. The subjects of this study were Islamic Religious Education teachers and students at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12, Pamulang. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on specific considerations relevant to the research objectives. This technique allows researchers to obtain more in-depth, specific data aligned with the research focus. Previous research has shown that purposive sampling is widely used in educational research to gather information from informants with direct experience of the phenomenon being studied [33].

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. Observations were used to directly observe learning activities and teacher-student interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers and students to obtain information regarding the role of teachers in character building. Documentation was used to supplement the data, including activity notes, photographs, and school archives. The use of these three techniques aims to increase data validity through triangulation. This is supported by research that states that method triangulation can increase data validity in qualitative research [34]. In addition, research on the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers shows that a combination of observation and interviews is an effective way to reveal the process of character formation in students [35]. The data analysis technique in this study uses the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Data reduction involves selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research. Data presentation is done in the form of descriptive narratives for easy understanding. Next, conclusions are drawn to find patterns and meaning from the analyzed data. This analytical model is widely used in qualitative research because it can provide a systematic picture of complex social phenomena [36].

Table 1. Research Method Used in This Study

Aspect	Description
Type of Research	Qualitative descriptive research.
Approach	Qualitative approach focusing on understanding social and

	educational phenomena in natural settings.
Research Objective	To analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in building students' character at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12, Pamulang.
Rationale for Approach	Chosen to explore meanings, experiences, and teacher–student interactions in depth.
Key Figures Analyzed	Islamic Religious Education teachers and students.
Main Data Sources	Observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (photos, activity records, school archives).
Method of Analysis	Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model.
Theoretical Framework	Character education and the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in moral and character development.
Focus of Analysis	Teacher roles include educator, mentor, motivator, role model, and creator of religious school culture.
Expected Outcome	A comprehensive understanding of how IRE teachers contribute to students' character formation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Building Student Character

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12, Pamulang, it was found that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers have a very strategic and multidimensional role in shaping students' character. This role is realized not only through formal classroom learning activities but also through religious habits, moral development, behavioral modeling, motivation, and the strengthening of an Islamic school culture. IRE teachers function as educators, guides, motivators, behavior controllers, and role models who actively instill character values in students' daily lives. Research findings indicate that student character formation is carried out in an integrated manner through the learning process, social interactions, religious activities, and a school culture that are consistently and sustainably developed.

Observations show that Islamic Religious Education teachers not only focus on delivering religious material theoretically, but also actively relate Islamic values to students' daily lives. Throughout the learning process, teachers consistently instill religious values, discipline, responsibility, honesty, courtesy, social awareness, and mutual respect through advice, guidance, and the cultivation of positive behavior in the school environment. During the learning process, teachers appear to guide students in maintaining good manners when speaking, respecting teachers and peers, keeping the classroom clean, and cultivating disciplined behavior during learning activities. These conditions indicate that character education in schools is not only conveyed through the transfer of knowledge but also through the formation of a culture of positive behavior and social interaction in the school environment.

Based on classroom observations, the Islamic Religious Education teacher always begins learning activities with a group prayer and recitation of verses from the Quran. This activity is carried out daily as part of the students' religious practices. In addition, the teacher provides guidance on the importance of maintaining morals in the learning process, such as speaking politely, listening when the teacher explains, and respecting others when they are speaking. During the observations, the researcher found that most students have become

accustomed to saying hello when entering the classroom, kissing the teacher's hand upon meeting, and maintaining order without being constantly reminded by the teacher. This situation indicates that consistent religious habits have formed positive behavioral patterns in students' daily lives in the school environment.

Interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers indicate that character building is considered a primary goal of Islamic education in elementary schools. Teachers stated that the success of Islamic Religious Education learning is measured not only by students' cognitive understanding of religious material but also by changes in their behavior and morals in everyday life. One teacher stated:

“If a child only understands religious theory but doesn't behave well, it means their education hasn't been fully successful. The most important thing is how children can respect their parents, be disciplined, honest, and have good morals in their daily lives.”

This statement demonstrates that teachers view character education as central to the Islamic educational process. Therefore, teachers strive to instill Islamic values not only through lectures or material explanations, but also through a humanistic approach, behavioral habits, and role models in daily school life.

Interview results also showed that teachers understand the importance of role models in shaping students' character. Teachers recognized that elementary school students have a strong tendency to imitate the behavior of adults they see every day, particularly teachers, who are authoritative figures in the school environment. One teacher stated:

“Children are more likely to imitate behavior than simply listen to advice. Therefore, teachers must be careful in their speech and behavior, because what teachers do is often imitated by students.”

Based on observations, teachers were seen striving to demonstrate discipline, patience, responsibility, and politeness in their interactions with students. Teachers arrived on time, spoke politely, and displayed a friendly and attentive attitude toward students. Researchers also found that students tended to imitate teacher behavior, such as polite speech, greeting habits, and disciplinary practices, during school activities. This indicates that teacher role models have a significant influence on students' character development in elementary school.

The research findings also indicate that students have a fairly good emotional connection with their Islamic Education teachers. Based on student interviews, most stated that Islamic Education teachers not only teach but also monitor their behavior and moral development. One student stated:

“Our religious teachers often reminded us to pray diligently, be honest, and not to tease our friends. If we made a mistake, they would give us gentle advice and not get angry immediately.”

This statement indicates that teachers use a persuasive, educational approach to guide student behavior. They avoid repressive punishments and prioritize providing advice, moral understanding, and emotional support to help students understand their mistakes and consciously improve their behavior. This approach makes students feel valued and cared for, making them more receptive to the teacher's guidance.

Student character development is also carried out through structured, ongoing religious practices. Based on observations, the school has various religious habituation programs carried out daily, such as congregational Dhuha prayer, Quran reading before the start of classes, group prayer, a culture of greeting and smiling, and maintaining a clean school environment. These programs are not only formal ritual activities, but also serve as a means of internalizing the values of discipline, responsibility, religiosity, social awareness, and togetherness in students' daily lives.

During the observation, researchers found that students began engaging in positive behaviors without direct teacher instruction. For example, students spontaneously greeted the teacher when meeting, helped friends experiencing difficulties, kept the classroom clean, and disposed of trash properly. Furthermore, students appeared more orderly during congregational worship and began to develop a sense of calm during religious activities. This demonstrates that consistent religious practices can gradually shape students' positive character and moral awareness.

Interviews with students also showed that religious activities at school helped them become more disciplined and understand the importance of good behavior in everyday life. One student said:

“If we pray together and read the Quran every day, we will become accustomed to discipline and remember to be kind to our friends.”

This statement demonstrates that regular religious activities shape students' moral and spiritual development. Religious activities are not merely a religious obligation but also part of the formation of positive behaviors and habits in daily life.

Implementation of Religious Culture in the Formation of Student Character

The research results show that the school's religious culture is a key factor supporting the successful character development of students at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12, Pamulang. This religious culture is reflected in various school activities that integrate Islamic values into students' daily lives. The school environment is built on a religious, disciplined, and conducive atmosphere, thus supporting the ongoing internalization of character values.

Based on observations, all members of the school community habitually greet each other, maintain politeness in speech, dress according to Islamic norms, and actively participate in religious activities. Furthermore, the school provides supporting facilities such as a prayer room, a worship development program, and regular religious activities that help students develop religious awareness and positive behavior.

Documentation shows that the school regularly holds religious activities, including commemorating Islamic holidays, conducting short-term Islamic boarding schools (pesantren kilat), conducting charity activities, promoting moral development, and offering other socio-religious programs. These programs are important tools for instilling in students the values of social awareness, responsibility, discipline, and religiosity. Throughout the program, students were actively involved in school activities and demonstrated enthusiasm for both religious and social activities. One teacher stated:

“Religious culture in schools is not just about worship activities, but how to accustom students to having good morals in their daily lives.”

This statement demonstrates that a school's religious culture is understood as a system of habituating Islamic behavior that is applied comprehensively throughout school life. Therefore, student character formation occurs not only through formal classroom learning but also through the social and cultural experiences they encounter every day in the school environment.

Observations also show that the school's religious culture positively influences student behavior. Students appear more polite in their interactions, more disciplined in following school rules, and more concerned about their environment and peers. Furthermore, students are beginning to show mutual respect and maintain order during both learning and religious activities. This demonstrates that the school's religious culture serves as a social environment that supports the ongoing development of student character.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Student Character Formation

This study found that the success of student character development is influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors originating from the school environment, family, and modern social developments. One of the main supporting factors is a religious school environment and the active involvement of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering students' morals. Consistently implemented religious habituation programs are an effective means of developing positive behavior and moral awareness in students.

A good emotional connection between teachers and students is also a crucial factor in supporting the internalization of character values. Interviews revealed that students feel comfortable and close to their teachers, making them more receptive to their guidance and advice. School support for the character education program is also evident in the facilities, policies, and activities that strengthen religious culture.

However, this study also identified several factors that inhibit student character development. One major obstacle is the influence of technology and digital media on the behavior of elementary school-aged students. Teachers reported that the use of gadgets and social media is beginning to affect student behavior, including decreased discipline in studying, reduced social interaction, and the emergence of individualistic tendencies. One teacher stated:

“The challenge is greater now because gadgets and social media so influence children. Sometimes what they learn in school differs from what they see online.”

Lack of parental supervision and guidance at home also hinders students' character development. Several teachers reported that the values taught in school are not always reinforced within the family environment, resulting in inconsistent positive behaviors among students. Differences in family background, psychological well-being, and character also present challenges for teachers in character development.

Despite these various obstacles, Islamic Religious Education teachers continue to strive to fulfill their roles optimally through persuasive approaches, role models, religious habits, and ongoing moral development. The findings of this study indicate that student character formation is a multidimensional process influenced by formal learning, school culture, family environment, and the ever-evolving dynamics of modern society.

Discussion

The research results show that the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in building student character is complex, strategic, and multidimensional. IRE teachers not only convey religious material but also serve as moral educators, spiritual guides, behavioral role models, motivators, and agents of school cultural transformation. From an Islamic educational perspective, teachers have the responsibility to shape individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess noble character, moral integrity, and spiritual awareness in their daily lives [37]. Therefore, the formation of student character cannot be separated from the quality of the teacher's role in building an integrative educational process that encompasses knowledge, values, attitudes, and behavior.

The findings of this study align with Al-Ghazali's view that teachers are central figures in shaping students' morals. According to Al-Ghazali, teachers are not only instructors of knowledge but also educators of the soul, tasked with instilling moral and spiritual values through role models and habituation. In Islamic education, success is measured not only by academics but also by the development of good morals in students. Therefore, Islamic Education teachers hold a strategic position in building student character through a holistic, sustainable educational process.

This study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play a crucial role in instilling character values in students. Teachers not only convey value concepts

normatively but also explain the moral and spiritual significance of each behavior taught, such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social awareness. This process demonstrates the crucial role of cognitive aspects in character formation, as students need to understand the rationale and purpose of a value before they can internalize it in their daily behavior.

This finding is relevant to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which holds that moral development progresses through stages of understanding social values and norms. According to Kohlberg, individuals demonstrate more mature moral behavior when they can understand the rational and ethical reasons behind an action [38], [39]. Thus, teachers' explanations of the meaning of character values help students develop a deeper moral awareness so that positive behavior is not only carried out out of fear of punishment, but also out of internal awareness. In addition to the cognitive aspect, this study shows that character formation requires continuous guidance through a persuasive and educational approach. Islamic Religious Education teachers provide advice, direction, and ongoing moral guidance so that students can consciously improve their behavior. This approach shows that character education is not an instant process but a long-term endeavor that requires consistency, patience, and emotional closeness between teachers and students.

These findings align with Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, which emphasizes the importance of positive interpersonal relationships in the educational process. Rogers explained that students will develop optimally when they are in an environment that provides appreciation, empathy, and positive acceptance [40]. In this context, teachers who can build warm, supportive relationships will more easily influence students' character development than those who use an authoritarian, repressive approach. Therefore, moral guidance provided by teachers through persuasive communication is an important strategy in shaping students' internal awareness. This study also found that teacher role models are a dominant factor in shaping students' character. At the elementary school level, students have a strong tendency to imitate the behavior they see from teachers. Discipline, honesty, responsibility, patience, and teacher interaction are concrete examples that directly influence student behavior. In practice, students find it easier to apply character values when they see teachers demonstrating consistent behavior between words and actions.

This finding aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning theory, which explains that human behavior develops through the observation and imitation of important social models. Bandura emphasized that children learn through modeling, that is, by imitating the behavior of figures who possess authority and emotional closeness. In education, teachers serve as primary role models whose behavior students observe and imitate daily. Therefore, inconsistent teacher behavior can weaken students' internalization of character values. This research shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers also serve as motivators in building students' character. Teachers provide moral reinforcement, appreciation for positive behavior, and psychological encouragement to ensure students remain consistent in applying character values in their daily lives.

This form of motivation helps students build self-confidence and an awareness that good behavior is valuable to themselves and their social environment. This finding aligns with Chiu's Self-Determination Theory, which explains that intrinsic motivation develops when individuals feel valued, supported, and have positive social relationships [41]. In character education, students are more likely to develop positive behaviors when teachers provide emotional support and appreciation for their moral development. Therefore, teacher motivation not only serves as external reinforcement but also helps build students' internal awareness to maintain positive behavior independently.

This study also shows that a religious and conducive school culture influences character formation. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play an active role in creating a school environment that supports the internalization of character values through various habituation programs, such as communal and congregational prayer, greetings, time discipline, and other

religious activities. A positive school social environment helps students experience character values directly in their daily lives.

This finding aligns with Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of educational ecology, which holds that individual development is influenced by the social environment in which an individual interacts [42]. Schools, as microsystems, have a significant influence on students' moral and social development through intensive interactions among students, teachers, and the educational environment. Therefore, character formation is not solely achieved through formal classroom learning; it also requires a consistent school culture that implements moral and religious values. This study also found that student character formation faces various challenges, particularly external environmental influences such as digital media, social interactions, and a lack of family supervision. The development of digital technology brings with it various values and information that are not always aligned with the values of character education in schools. This situation presents teachers with the challenge of maintaining consistent student behavior outside the school environment.

These findings reinforce Thomas Lickona's view that character education requires collaboration between schools, families, and communities. According to Lickona, character cannot be formed solely through formal learning but must be strengthened through a consistently supportive social environment. Therefore, the success of character education depends heavily on the synergy between teachers, parents, and the community in providing examples and reinforcing values to students. Furthermore, this research shows that students have different characteristics, social experiences, and family backgrounds, requiring teachers to use a flexible, individualized coaching approach. Teachers cannot apply the same coaching approach to all students because each student's emotional needs and moral development differ.

This aligns with Vygotsky's constructivist theory, which emphasizes that individual development occurs through social interactions and contextual learning experiences. Vygotsky explained the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which states that students will develop optimally when they receive guidance appropriate to their developmental level [43]. In character education, teachers need to understand students' psychological conditions so that the moral development process can be carried out effectively, tailored to the needs of each individual.

In 21st-century education, character building is becoming increasingly important, as students are required to possess not only academic skills but also moral, social, collaborative, and spiritual abilities to address global challenges. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers have a strategic responsibility in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses moral integrity and strong social awareness. The results of this study indicate that the success of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in building student character is determined not only by pedagogical skills, but also by the teachers' spiritual, emotional, and social capacities in carrying out their role as educators.

Teachers who present Islamic values in a humanistic, contextual manner tend to be more readily accepted by students than those who focus solely on delivering material in a formalistic manner. In the practice of character education, students need figures who can provide a sense of security and respect, and who serve as real role models in everyday life. This condition shows that character education is essentially a relational education process, namely, an educational process built through the quality of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. This perspective aligns with the thinking of Ki Hajar Dewantara, who emphasized that education must be carried out through role models, habituation, and moral guidance, with a focus on the formation of students' complete personalities [44]. Therefore, Islamic Education teachers need not only to possess academic competence but also moral integrity, emotional intelligence, and social sensitivity to be inspiring educational figures for students.

This study confirms that character education through the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers must be viewed as an integrative, transformative, and sustainable educational process. Character education is not achieved simply through the theoretical delivery of moral material. Still, it must be realized through teacher role models, social habits, a conducive school culture, a humanistic emotional approach, and the active involvement of all educational components. Islamic Religious Education teachers have a central role in balancing students' intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence, so that education produces not only students who excel academically but also those who possess noble morals and moral responsibility in social life. Therefore, strengthening the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in character education is a crucial need, especially in the face of the dynamics of social change and the challenges of 21st-century education. Thus, character education based on Islamic values is expected to produce a generation that is not only intelligent and competitive but also possesses integrity, social awareness, religiosity, and the ability to uphold human values amid the dynamic developments of the times.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a highly strategic, multidimensional, and sustainable role in building students' character at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 12, Pamulang. This role is not limited to teaching religious material formally in the classroom, but also includes serving as moral educators, spiritual guides, motivators, behavioral role models, and drivers of the school's religious culture. Islamic Religious Education teachers actively internalize character values such as religiosity, discipline, responsibility, honesty, courtesy, social awareness, and mutual respect through the learning process, religious habits, persuasive approaches, and role models in the school environment. The research findings indicate that student character formation is more effective when Islamic values are not only taught theoretically but also practiced in real life through school culture, social interactions, and students' daily experiences. In this context, teacher role models are a dominant factor in the process of internalizing character values because elementary school students have a strong tendency to imitate the behavior of teachers they consider authoritative figures and role models in the school environment. In addition, the existence of a school religious culture, realized through religious habituation programs, congregational worship activities, moral development, and Islamic social interactions, also strengthens the consistent and sustainable formation of students' character. On the other hand, this study also found that the success of student character development is influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors originating from the school environment, family, and modern social developments. A religious school environment, positive emotional relationships between teachers and students, and school institutional support for character education programs are the main factors supporting the effectiveness of student character development. However, the development of digital technology, the influence of social media, the lack of parental supervision at home, and differences in family backgrounds and student psychological conditions pose significant challenges to the character development process. Despite these obstacles, Islamic Religious Education teachers continue to strive to fulfill their roles optimally through a humanistic approach, persuasive moral development, strengthening religious habits, and building a conducive school culture. Therefore, this study confirms that student character development is a multidimensional process that does not depend solely on formal learning but also requires synergy among teachers, schools, families, and the broader social environment. Therefore, strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in character education is crucial in shaping a generation that not only excels academically but also possesses moral integrity, spiritual awareness, social responsibility, and noble character in facing the dynamics of modern life.

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Author's Contributions

All authors contribute equally to the publication of this paper, all authors read and agree to this paper, and all authors declare no conflict of interest.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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