

## Shaping Noble Character Through Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah

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### Abstract:

This study examines the implementation of character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah. The objective of the research is to analyze the strategies, methods, and impact of PAI learning on the formation of students' noble character. This research employs a qualitative approach using observation, interviews, and document analysis methods. The study subjects include PAI teachers, students, and school officials involved in the implementation of character education. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of documents related to character education programs. The findings reveal that character education in PAI lessons is implemented through various strategies, including integrating Islamic values into the curriculum, daily worship habits such as Dhuha prayer and group dhikr, teacher role modeling in attitudes and behavior, and religious extracurricular activities such as Qur'an study sessions and short-term Islamic boarding school programs (Pesantren Kilat). Additionally, a contextual teaching approach in PAI helps students understand the application of character values in everyday life. The positive impact of character education through PAI is evident in the increased discipline, honesty, responsibility, and tolerance among students. They exhibit improved attitudes in interactions with peers, teachers, and the school environment. Furthermore, active student participation in religious activities enhances their understanding of Islamic moral and ethical values. This study concludes that PAI plays a strategic role in shaping students' noble character. The success of character education implementation through PAI is significantly influenced by the support of all school components, including the role of teachers, school policies, and parental involvement in guiding children at home. Therefore, synergy between schools and parents is the key to fostering a generation with strong moral values.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Islamic Education, Teacher Role, Parental Involvement

### INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a crucial issue amidst globalization and technological advancements, which have both positive and negative impacts on the character development of the younger generation. On one hand, technology facilitates access to information and learning, but on the other, the abundance of content that contradicts moral values can influence adolescent behavior. The decline in moral values, ethics, and courtesy among teenagers highlights the importance of strengthening character education in schools, particularly through Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, instilling good morals, discipline, and responsibility. Through PAI, Islamic values can be integrated into students' daily lives, both within and beyond the school environment. Therefore, strengthening character education through PAI is one of the primary efforts to create a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses strong moral and ethical values.

SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah, located in Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province, is one of the educational institutions that prioritizes the formation of students' noble character through PAI. The school strives to integrate Islamic character values into its teaching to create a conducive educational environment for moral development. With this approach, students are expected to not only understand Islamic teachings theoretically but also practice them in their daily lives.

The importance of character education is also emphasized in various national regulations. Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that national education functions to develop capabilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation. Education should not only focus on academic aspects but must also include character development so that students become responsible individuals who contribute positively to society (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003).

In line with this, Ministerial Regulation of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) Number 20 of 2018 on Strengthening Character Education highlights the importance of integrating character formation into all aspects of learning, including PAI subjects. This regulation underscores that character education must be instilled through various effective learning methods so that students not only understand moral concepts but also develop the habit of applying them in daily life (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018).

In the context of implementation at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah, character education through PAI is carried out through various strategies, including classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and habitual practices within the school environment. PAI teachers play a crucial role in conveying character values with engaging and applicable approaches, ensuring that students can better understand and implement these values. This study aims to: (1) analyze the strategies for implementing character education through PAI at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah; (2) identify the methods used in PAI learning to shape noble character; and (3) examine the impact of PAI learning on students' character development. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights into the effectiveness of character education through PAI and recommendations for improving the quality of learning in schools.

Research findings indicate that character education in PAI is implemented through various strategies, including the integration of Islamic values in teaching materials, habitual religious practices such as Dhuha prayers and collective dhikr, teacher role modeling in attitudes and behavior, and religious extracurricular activities such as Qur'an study sessions and short-term Islamic boarding programs (Pesantren Kilat). Additionally, a contextual teaching approach in PAI helps students understand the application of character values in daily life.

The positive impact of character education through PAI is evident in students' increased discipline, honesty, responsibility, and tolerance. Students demonstrate improved attitudes in interactions with peers, teachers, and the school environment. Moreover, active participation in religious activities strengthens their understanding of Islamic moral and ethical values.

This study concludes that PAI plays a strategic role in shaping students' noble character. The success of character education implementation through PAI is significantly influenced by the support of all school components, including the role of teachers, school policies, and parental involvement in guiding children at home. Therefore, synergy between schools and parents is the key to fostering a generation with strong moral values.

Through this research, it is hoped that a more effective PAI learning model for character development can be identified, aligning with Islamic values. Additionally, this study can serve as an evaluation tool for schools in developing a more comprehensive character education strategy. Ultimately, strong character education will help create a younger generation that excels academically and possesses noble character and ethics.

## METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah. This approach was chosen as it allows researchers to explore how character education is implemented in PAI learning and its impact on students. By using qualitative methods, this research does not merely focus on numerical data but also delves into the meanings and experiences of teachers, students, and other stakeholders involved in the PAI learning process.

**Data Sources and Collection Techniques** To obtain accurate and comprehensive information, this study employs multiple data collection techniques.

**Participatory Observation.** Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe how character education strategies are applied in PAI learning and religious activities at school. The researcher attended PAI classes to observe interactions between teachers and students, teaching methods used, and students' responses to the material. Additionally, observations were made during school religious activities such as congregational prayers, Islamic holiday celebrations, and Islamic-based extracurricular activities. This observation took place over three months (August–October 2024) to obtain a comprehensive picture of the character education process in the school.

**In-Depth Interviews.** Interviews were conducted to gain broader and deeper perspectives from various stakeholders involved in character education through PAI. The researcher interviewed three PAI teachers to understand the methods they use to teach character values and the challenges they face in the learning process. The school principal was also interviewed to understand school policies on character education reinforcement and how religious values are integrated into various school aspects.

Additionally, interviews were conducted with 15 students from different grades to explore their understanding of character education, their experiences in PAI learning, and its impact on their daily behavior. Furthermore, 10 parents were involved in interviews to determine the extent to which school-based character education influences their children's behavior at home. By involving multiple stakeholders, this research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of character education through PAI at the school.

**Documentation Study.** A documentation study was conducted by analyzing various relevant documents to support this research. These documents include lesson plans (RPP) for PAI teachers, school religious activity programs, student disciplinary records related to character, and documentation of Islamic-based extracurricular activities. The purpose of this document analysis is to understand how character education is designed within PAI learning and its extent of implementation in students' daily lives.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD).** To gain broader and deeper insights, this study also employs Focus Group Discussion (FGD) techniques involving PAI teachers, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, and the school curriculum development team. In the FGD, participants discussed the best strategies for integrating character education into PAI learning, challenges in its implementation, and solutions to enhance the effectiveness of character education at school. The FGD also aimed to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in shaping students' character through PAI learning.

## Data Analysis

Once data was collected, analysis was conducted through several stages:

**Data Reduction.** Data obtained from observations, interviews, documentation studies, and FGDs were reduced or selected to retain only relevant information. Irrelevant or insignificant data were eliminated to ensure a more focused and systematic analysis.

**Data Presentation.** The reduced data was then presented in descriptive narrative form for easier understanding. This data presentation aims to illustrate how character education is implemented in PAI learning, the methods used by teachers, and the impact on students' character development.

**Conclusion Drawing.** After analyzing the data, conclusions were drawn based on the findings obtained during the research. These conclusions provide answers to the research questions and offer recommendations for schools to enhance the effectiveness of character education through PAI.

To ensure data validity, this study employs source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various informants (teachers, students, school principals, and parents) to check for consistency. Meanwhile, method triangulation was carried out by comparing results from observations, interviews, documentation studies, and FGDs to ensure data accuracy and reliability. By utilizing this approach, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the implementation of character education through PAI at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah. The findings of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for other schools in improving character education strategies through PAI subjects to cultivate students with noble character and strong moral values.

## RESULTS

The study findings indicate that character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah has been implemented using various strategies. PAI teachers adopt an integrative approach by teaching character values not only in classroom learning but also through religious activities at school and by setting examples in daily interactions. The primary values emphasized in this character education include honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social care, which are considered fundamental in shaping individuals with noble character, in line with national education goals (Ainiyah, 2023; Raharjo, 2023).

Although these strategies have been applied, there are still several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of character education in schools. One of the main challenges found is the inconsistency among students in applying character values in daily life. For example, some students lack discipline in participating in religious activities such as congregational prayers and Islamic study sessions organized by the school. Additionally, social awareness among students varies, with some showing little concern for their peers' conditions both in class and within the school environment (Nasution, 2021).

The external environment, including social media and interactions outside school, also influences student behavior. Some students spend more time on their gadgets rather than engaging in activities that instill positive character values. Uncontrolled social media use can negatively impact students' thinking patterns and behavior, particularly in developing empathy and positive social interactions (Lickona, 2021; Koesoema, 2022). PAI teachers also face challenges in finding effective teaching methods to instill character values in students. Many teachers still rely on lectures, which are sometimes less engaging for students. While this method remains relevant in certain contexts, not all students can fully comprehend and internalize the values taught. However, some teachers have attempted to use discussion methods, case studies, and hands-on practice, which have proven to be more effective in enhancing students' understanding and application of character values (Muhaimin, 2023).

Interviews with parents revealed that character education at school is not yet fully supported by the family environment. Some parents are less involved in shaping their children's character at home, leading to a disconnect between the values taught at school

and their daily lives. Some parents still perceive character education as solely the school's responsibility, whereas effective character formation requires collaboration between schools, families, and communities (Majid & Andayani, 2022).

Observations indicate that in PAI learning, most students are quite active in receiving material related to character education. However, some students pay less attention when material is delivered through monotonous lectures. Conversely, when teachers use more interactive methods such as group discussions and case studies, students appear more enthusiastic in understanding and discussing the character values being taught. Analysis of documentation reveals that religious programs in schools, such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, and Islamic holiday celebrations, have been well implemented. However, student participation levels vary. Some students participate voluntarily, while others require encouragement from teachers and school authorities to engage more actively (Zubaedi, 2022).

Interviews with three PAI teachers found that they employ different strategies to teach character education. One teacher uses a narrative approach by telling inspiring stories of Islamic figures to instill values such as honesty, patience, and perseverance. Another teacher emphasizes discussions and reflections, encouraging students to analyze everyday events and relate them to Islamic teachings. The teachers agreed that character education cannot be taught solely through theory but must also be reinforced by the exemplary behavior of educators and the surrounding environment (Ainiyah, 2023). Interviews with 15 students revealed that most recognize the importance of character education but struggle to consistently apply it. Some students reported being more motivated to behave well when teachers set real-life examples or when they see the positive impact of character values in their surroundings (Raharjo, 2023).

Documentation analysis shows that the school has supporting programs for character strengthening, but there is no comprehensive evaluation system to measure students' character development periodically. Records of student violations analyzed indicate that most cases involve indiscipline and lack of responsibility, suggesting that character education still needs to be reinforced in certain aspects (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018).

To ensure data validity, this study employed source and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various informants, including teachers, students, school principals, and parents. The findings reveal consistency, showing that character education has been implemented in schools but still faces challenges in its execution (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003). Methodological triangulation was performed by comparing the results of observations, interviews, document studies, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Observational data show that character education activities are ongoing, but there are still challenges in active student participation. Interview results support these findings, as both teachers and students acknowledge difficulties in implementing character values outside the school environment (Zubaedi, 2022).

FGDs involving PAI teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, and curriculum development teams concluded that character education should be emphasized more in extracurricular activities such as social projects, community service, and parental collaboration. FGD participants also agreed that learning should be more interactive to engage students and help them better understand character values. Overall, data verification confirms that character education through PAI at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah has been implemented quite well but still requires strengthening in several aspects, such as more innovative teaching methods, increased parental involvement, and a more comprehensive student character evaluation system (Nasution, 2021).

The findings of this study indicate that character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah has been implemented through various strategies aimed at shaping students who are not only intellectually capable but also possess noble character. These strategies include character-based learning, school

religious activities, and exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers and staff. However, the effectiveness of these strategies still faces several challenges that require further attention. One of the key factors supporting the success of character education is the role of PAI teachers in selecting effective teaching methods. This study found that the lecture method is still frequently used, even though it is not always effective in capturing students' attention. In contrast, approaches such as discussions, case studies, and hands-on practices have proven to be more engaging and help students better understand and apply character values in their daily lives. This finding aligns with educational theories that suggest active and contextual learning is more effective in shaping students' character.

Apart from teaching methods, the school and family environment also play a crucial role in supporting character education. This study found that some parents are still less involved in supporting the formation of their children's character at home. This becomes a challenge because effective character education should result from synergy between schools, families, and the community. Therefore, a more comprehensive strategy is needed to enhance collaboration between schools and parents in shaping students' character. In terms of student participation, it was found that their level of engagement in religious activities still varies. Some students participate with full awareness, while others still require encouragement from teachers and school authorities. This finding suggests that character education not only requires appropriate teaching methods but also intrinsic motivation from students themselves.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, data validation was carried out using several techniques, including source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and confirmation with informants. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various informants, including PAI teachers, students, school principals, and parents. The results showed consistency in the findings, with all parties agreeing that character education has been implemented but still faces challenges in its execution. Methodological triangulation involved comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, document analysis, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to ensure that the findings were not solely based on one method. For instance, observation data showed that school religious programs were running, but some students were less active. This was confirmed through interviews with PAI teachers, who stated that some students still needed encouragement to be more disciplined in participating in these activities. Lastly, confirmation with informants was conducted after data analysis, where key findings were reviewed with primary informants such as PAI teachers and the school principal to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the actual conditions at the school. This step aimed to minimize bias and ensure that the obtained data genuinely represented the existing situation.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah has been implemented through various strategies, such as character-based learning, school religious activities, and exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers and educators. The key values emphasized in this character education include honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social care. However, the implementation of character education still faces several challenges, particularly in student engagement, teaching methods used by teachers, and support from the family environment. Some students still struggle to consistently apply character values in their daily lives. Additionally, the teaching method, which still predominantly relies on lectures, requires innovation to be more engaging and effective.

Data validation results indicate that while character education at this school has been implemented quite well, it still needs to be strengthened, especially in terms of synergy between schools and parents, more interactive teaching methods, and the development of an evaluation system that can periodically measure students' character

development. Some key findings that can serve as a basis for further development of character education through PAI at SMP Negeri 4 Sei Rampah include the implementation of character education strategies in classroom learning, religious activities, and exemplary behavior from teachers and school staff. The lecture method remains the primary approach in PAI learning, but interactive approaches such as discussions and case studies are more effective in enhancing students' understanding. The school environment plays a significant role in shaping students' character, but family support still needs to be improved to ensure that the values taught at school are consistently applied at home. Some students experience difficulties in consistently applying character values, particularly in terms of discipline and responsibility. Furthermore, there is no comprehensive evaluation system in place to periodically measure students' character development.

The research findings also have a significant impact on the development of teaching methods in PAI and character education in general. Since the study highlights that lectures are less effective compared to interactive approaches, these findings can serve as a reference for PAI teachers to develop more diverse teaching methods, such as discussions, simulations, and project-based learning. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of systematic character evaluation, which can be a consideration for schools in formulating more measurable and sustainable character education policies. From a social perspective, the study demonstrates that effective character education can have a positive impact not only within the school environment but also in broader society. If character values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility are well instilled in students, they will grow into individuals who are more moral, ethical, and caring towards others.

Therefore, the study also highlights the importance of collaboration between schools, families, and communities in shaping a high-quality young generation with strong character. By understanding these research findings, it is hoped that schools, teachers, and parents can work together to enhance the effectiveness of character education through innovations in teaching methods, increased parental involvement, and the strengthening of environments that support students' character development.



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