
The Urgency of Character Education for Islamic Religious Education Teachers

Indah Fujianti¹

¹STAI Haji Agus Salim Cikarang, Indonesia

* Correspondence e-mail; indahfuji1207@gmail.com

Article history

Submitted: 2026/03/13; Revised: 2026/04/20; Accepted: 2026/05/06

Abstract

Character education has become a central concern in global educational discourse due to increasing moral degradation, social fragmentation, and ethical crises among younger generations. This study aims to analyze the urgency of character education for Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' moral and ethical development in the modern era. The research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant scholarly literature from various academic databases such as Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The selected studies were analyzed using inclusion and exclusion criteria focusing on publications related to character education, Islamic education, and teacher roles. The findings indicate that character education in Islamic Religious Education is fundamentally grounded in the integration of faith, knowledge, and moral values, where teachers play a central role as moral models in students' character formation. However, its implementation faces significant challenges, including digital disruption, limited instructional time, curriculum constraints, and inadequate teacher preparedness. Despite these challenges, effective strategies such as value integration across curricula, contextual learning approaches, and collaboration between schools, families, and communities can enhance the effectiveness of character education. The study concludes that strengthening Islamic Religious Education teachers' competence and commitment is essential to ensuring sustainable character development in students within contemporary educational contexts

Keywords

character education; education teachers; islamic religious; urgency.



© 2026 by the authors. This is an open-access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY SA) license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in global educational discourse due to increasing moral degradation, social fragmentation, and ethical crises among younger generations. Schools are no longer seen merely as institutions for cognitive development, but also as spaces for forming integrity, responsibility, and ethical behavior. According to Lickona, character education is essential because it integrates moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which collectively shape students' personality and behavior in society. In many

educational systems, the weakening of character values has been linked to rising cases of dishonesty, violence, and lack of empathy among students, indicating that knowledge alone is insufficient without moral grounding. Therefore, the urgency of embedding character education within all levels of schooling, including religious education, has become increasingly evident as societies aim to rebuild ethical foundations in education systems (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), teachers hold a strategic role not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as moral exemplars who embody Islamic values in daily practice. Islamic education emphasizes the holistic development of human beings (*insan kamil*), integrating spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions. Al-Attas highlights that education in Islam is fundamentally a process of instilling *adab*, which refers to proper conduct and recognition of one's place in relation to God, society, and self. This places Islamic Religious Education teachers at the forefront of character formation, as they are expected to translate theological teachings into lived ethical behavior for students. Moreover, the effectiveness of character education largely depends on the teacher's ability to model values such as honesty, patience, compassion, and justice, which are central to Islamic teachings. Without strong character education practices, Islamic education risks becoming overly theoretical and detached from moral transformation (Al-Attas, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

However, contemporary educational challenges have complicated the role of teachers in shaping student character. The rapid advancement of digital technology, globalization, and social media exposure has significantly influenced students' moral and behavioral development. Many students are increasingly exposed to conflicting values that may weaken traditional ethical and religious norms. Narvaez argues that modern environments often reduce opportunities for moral reflection and empathy development, which are crucial components of character formation. In addition, teachers face challenges such as limited instructional time, curriculum pressures, and inconsistent support systems in implementing character education effectively. Islamic Religious Education teachers, in particular, must navigate between maintaining doctrinal integrity and addressing contemporary moral issues faced by students. This complexity requires a more adaptive and reflective pedagogical approach that integrates both religious values and real-life moral dilemmas encountered by students in the digital era (Narvaez, 2006; Halstead, 2007).

Therefore, the urgency of character education for Islamic Religious Education teachers lies in their dual responsibility as educators and moral guides. Effective character education requires intentional integration of values into teaching practices, curriculum design, and school culture. Lickona emphasizes that successful character education must be comprehensive, involving the collaboration of teachers, schools, families, and communities to create a consistent moral environment. For Islamic Religious Education, this integration becomes even more critical, as it aligns with the core objectives of Islamic pedagogy that seek to cultivate righteous individuals who contribute positively to society. Strengthening teacher competence in character education, providing institutional support, and reinforcing value-based learning strategies are essential

steps toward addressing current moral challenges in education. Ultimately, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is pivotal in shaping a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also morally grounded and ethically responsible (Lickona, 2004; Halstead, 2007).

METHODS

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to examine the urgency of character education for Islamic Religious Education teachers. The SLR approach is used to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant scholarly literature in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic based on existing empirical and theoretical studies. Following the procedure proposed by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart, the review process includes three main stages: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the findings. In the planning stage, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and credible publications related to character education, Islamic education, and teacher roles published in recent years. In the second stage, relevant studies were collected from academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC using keywords such as “character education,” “Islamic Religious Education,” and “teacher professionalism.” The selected literature was then critically analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and gaps in existing research. In the final stage, the synthesized findings were organized to construct a coherent understanding of how character education is conceptualized and implemented within Islamic Religious Education contexts. According to Snyder, SLR is a rigorous method that enhances transparency, reduces bias, and ensures replicability in literature-based research, making it highly suitable for educational studies that aim to build conceptual frameworks from existing knowledge (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Conceptual Foundation of Character Education in Islamic Education

The conceptual foundation of character education in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is deeply rooted in the Islamic worldview that integrates faith (iman), knowledge (ilm), and righteous action (amal). Unlike secular approaches that often separate moral education from religious or spiritual dimensions, Islamic education positions character formation as the core objective of learning. The ultimate goal is to develop insan kamil (the ideal human being), who demonstrates balance between intellectual competence and moral integrity. This holistic perspective emphasizes that education is not merely about cognitive achievement but about shaping the soul and behavior in accordance with divine guidance. In this regard, character education is inseparable from Islamic teachings that emphasize akhlaq karimah (noble character), which serve as the foundation of personal and social life.

From a theoretical perspective, Islamic scholars such as Al-Attas emphasize that education in Islam is fundamentally a process of ta’dib, meaning the instillation of proper adab or ethical discipline in human conduct. This concept goes beyond moral instruction and involves the internalization of values that regulate one’s relationship with God, self, and

society. In this sense, character education is not an additional component of Islamic education but rather its essence. The integration of spiritual and ethical dimensions ensures that learners develop not only intellectual capacity but also moral awareness and accountability. Similarly, modern educational theorists such as Lickona reinforce this idea by defining character education as the deliberate effort to cultivate virtues such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion through consistent practice and reflection in educational settings (Al-Attas, 1991; Lickona, 2004).

Furthermore, the conceptual framework of character education in Islamic education is strongly influenced by the Qur'anic and Prophetic traditions, which serve as the primary sources of moral guidance. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is regarded as the best example of moral excellence, as stated in the Qur'an that he embodies the highest standard of character. This prophetic model provides a practical framework for teachers and learners to understand how values are translated into behavior. In educational practice, this means that character education must be experiential and contextual, allowing students to observe, reflect, and practice moral values in real-life situations. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education should not only transmit knowledge about ethics but also facilitate the formation of habits that align with Islamic moral principles.

In addition, the conceptualization of character education in Islamic education highlights the importance of continuity between knowledge and practice. Knowledge without action is considered incomplete, and action without knowledge may lead to deviation. This principle underscores the necessity of integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains in the learning process. Teachers play a critical role in bridging this integration by designing learning experiences that encourage moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. According to Nucci and Narvaez, moral education must engage students in reflective thinking and moral dialogue to develop deeper ethical understanding and internalization of values. This aligns with the Islamic educational principle that emphasizes reflection (*tafakkur*) as a means of strengthening faith and moral awareness (Narvaez, 2006; Nucci, 2001).

Moreover, the conceptual foundation of character education in Islamic education also recognizes the importance of social and environmental context in shaping moral behavior. Education does not occur in isolation but is influenced by family, community, and cultural values. Therefore, character formation requires a supportive ecosystem that reinforces consistent moral messages across different environments. Without such integration, students may experience value conflicts that hinder their moral development. Berkowitz and Bier emphasize that character education is most effective when it is embedded in a comprehensive system that includes school culture, teacher modeling, and community involvement. In Islamic education, this systemic approach is particularly relevant because moral values are expected to permeate all aspects of life, not just formal learning environments (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

In conclusion, the conceptual foundation of character education in Islamic Religious Education is built upon a holistic integration of spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social

dimensions. It emphasizes that education is a transformative process aimed at developing individuals who embody Islamic values in thought and action. This foundation highlights the centrality of teachers, curriculum, and environment in shaping character formation. By aligning Islamic principles with contemporary educational theories, character education in IRE becomes a comprehensive framework for nurturing morally responsible individuals in an increasingly complex modern world (Al-Attas, 1991; Lickona, 2004; Narvaez, 2006).

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Moral Models

The role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers as moral models is a critical dimension in the implementation of character education. In Islamic pedagogy, teachers are not only conveyors of knowledge but also living examples of ethical behavior that students observe and emulate in their daily lives. This dual function positions teachers as central figures in shaping students' moral and spiritual development. The effectiveness of character education is highly dependent on the extent to which teachers embody the values they teach, such as honesty, discipline, compassion, and responsibility. In this sense, the teacher becomes a "curriculum in action," where values are not only taught but also demonstrated through consistent behavior in and outside the classroom.

From a theoretical perspective, Bandura's social learning theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the influence of teachers as role models. According to this theory, individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling of significant figures in their environment. In the school context, teachers represent authoritative figures whose actions are closely observed by students. When Islamic Religious Education teachers demonstrate positive moral conduct, students are more likely to internalize and replicate those behaviors in their own lives. Conversely, inconsistencies between teaching and behavior can weaken the credibility of moral instruction and reduce its impact. Therefore, moral modeling becomes a fundamental pedagogical strategy in character education, especially in religious contexts where values are central to learning (Bandura, 1977; Lickona, 2004).

Furthermore, Islamic educational philosophy places strong emphasis on the concept of *uswah hasanah* (a good example), which refers to the Prophet Muhammad as the ideal moral model for humanity. Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to reflect this prophetic example in their teaching practice. This includes demonstrating sincerity, humility, patience, and justice in their interactions with students. According to Halstead, the moral authority of teachers in Islamic education is derived not only from their academic qualifications but also from their personal integrity and ethical conduct. This reinforces the idea that character education in Islamic schools is deeply personal and relational, rather than purely instructional. Teachers must therefore integrate ethical awareness into all aspects of their professional role to effectively influence student character formation (Halstead, 2007).

In addition, the role of teachers as moral models extends beyond individual behavior to include their engagement in creating a positive classroom environment. A supportive and value-rich learning atmosphere enhances students' moral development by providing

consistent exposure to ethical norms and practices. Teachers who cultivate respect, fairness, and empathy in classroom interactions contribute to the formation of a moral community within the school. According to Sanger and Osguthorpe, students are more likely to develop strong moral identities when they experience consistent ethical behavior from teachers and school staff. This highlights the importance of coherence between school policies, teacher conduct, and instructional practices in supporting character education (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

However, the effectiveness of teachers as moral models is often challenged by various contextual factors. Increasing administrative workloads, standardized testing pressures, and limited professional development opportunities can reduce teachers' capacity to focus on character education. In some cases, teachers may prioritize academic achievement over moral development due to institutional demands. Additionally, societal changes and digital influences may create gaps between traditional moral values and students' lived experiences. Narvaez argues that such challenges require educators to adopt more reflective and intentional approaches to moral teaching, ensuring that ethical development remains a central priority in education despite external pressures (Narvaez, 2006; Lickona, 2004).

Moreover, the professional development of Islamic Religious Education teachers plays a crucial role in strengthening their capacity as moral models. Continuous training in pedagogical skills, ethical reflection, and character education strategies can enhance their effectiveness in guiding students' moral growth. Teachers must also engage in self-reflection to align their personal values with the moral principles they teach. This process of self-development is essential in maintaining authenticity and integrity in their professional role. According to Nucci, moral education is most effective when educators themselves are committed to ongoing moral reasoning and ethical growth, as students are highly sensitive to inconsistencies between words and actions (Nucci, 2001; Halstead, 2007).

In conclusion, Islamic Religious Education teachers serve as pivotal moral models in the process of character education. Their influence extends beyond instructional content to encompass behavior, relationships, and the overall moral climate of the school. Grounded in both Islamic principles and social learning theory, their role is essential in shaping students' ethical identities. Strengthening teachers' moral integrity, professional competence, and reflective practice is therefore crucial to ensuring the success of character education in Islamic educational settings (Bandura, 1977; Halstead, 2007; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013).

Challenges and Implementation Strategies of Character Education in the Modern Era

The implementation of character education in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) faces increasingly complex challenges in the modern era, particularly due to rapid technological advancement, globalization, and shifting moral values. These developments have significantly influenced students' behavior, worldview, and value systems. Digital media and social networking platforms expose learners to diverse ideological and cultural perspectives, many of which may conflict with Islamic ethical principles. As a result, teachers are required to navigate a dynamic educational environment where traditional moral teachings must compete

with powerful external influences. This situation creates a gap between ideal character formation goals and the realities of students' lived experiences, making character education more difficult to implement effectively in contemporary classrooms.

One of the major challenges is the dominance of digital technology in students' daily lives. While technology offers opportunities for learning, it also presents risks such as cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and reduced face-to-face moral interaction. According to Prensky, today's learners are "digital natives" who process information differently from previous generations, requiring educators to adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. In Islamic education contexts, this means that character education must be reinterpreted in ways that are relevant to digital environments while maintaining core Islamic values. Teachers must therefore integrate digital literacy with moral education to ensure that students are capable of critically evaluating online content from an ethical perspective (Prensky, 2001; Narvaez, 2006).

Another significant challenge lies in institutional constraints within educational systems. Many Islamic Religious Education teachers face limited instructional time due to curriculum overload and administrative responsibilities. This reduces opportunities for in-depth moral discussion and reflective learning activities. Furthermore, standardized assessment systems often prioritize cognitive achievement over affective and behavioral outcomes, thereby marginalizing character education. Berkowitz and Bier emphasize that effective character education requires systemic support from school leadership, curriculum design, and policy frameworks that prioritize moral development alongside academic success. Without such support, teachers may struggle to implement character education in a meaningful and sustained manner (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, 2004).

In addition, inconsistencies in teacher preparedness and training also pose a challenge. Not all Islamic Religious Education teachers receive adequate professional development in character education methodologies. Some may lack pedagogical strategies for integrating values into lesson plans or for addressing moral dilemmas in classroom discussions. This can lead to superficial implementation of character education, where values are taught theoretically but not practiced experientially. According to Nucci, effective moral education requires educators who are capable of facilitating moral reasoning and encouraging students to engage in ethical reflection. Therefore, continuous teacher training and capacity building are essential to enhance the quality of character education delivery (Nucci, 2001; Halstead, 2007).

Despite these challenges, several implementation strategies can strengthen character education in Islamic Religious Education. One key strategy is the integration of values-based learning across all subjects and school activities. Character education should not be treated as a separate subject but rather embedded within daily teaching practices, school culture, and extracurricular programs. This holistic approach ensures that students are consistently exposed to moral values in various contexts. Lickona emphasizes that successful character education requires a comprehensive strategy involving school-wide commitment, teacher

modeling, and community engagement to create a coherent moral environment for students (Lickona, 2004; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Another important strategy is the use of contextual and experiential learning approaches. Teachers can design learning activities that connect Islamic moral teachings with real-life situations faced by students. For example, discussions on honesty, responsibility, and empathy can be linked to everyday experiences such as social media use, peer relationships, and community interaction. This approach allows students to internalize values through reflection and practice rather than rote memorization. In Islamic pedagogy, this aligns with the concept of *tarbiyah*, which emphasizes gradual moral development through continuous guidance and experience. Such methods enhance students' ability to apply ethical principles in diverse situations.

Finally, collaboration between schools, families, and communities is essential for effective character education. Moral development cannot be achieved solely within the classroom but requires reinforcement from the home and social environment. Parents and community leaders play a crucial role in supporting the values taught at school. According to Epstein, strong school-family-community partnerships significantly improve students' academic and moral outcomes. In the context of Islamic education, this collaboration ensures consistency in moral messaging and strengthens the overall impact of character education initiatives (Epstein, 2011; Narvaez, 2006).

In conclusion, while character education in Islamic Religious Education faces significant challenges in the modern era, including technological disruption, institutional limitations, and teacher preparedness issues, these challenges can be addressed through integrated, contextual, and collaborative strategies. Strengthening systemic support, enhancing teacher competence, and fostering holistic learning environments are essential to ensuring the effective implementation of character education in contemporary Islamic educational settings (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, 2004; Narvaez, 2006).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the three sub-discussions highlights that character education in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a fundamental and urgent aspect of contemporary educational practice. First, the conceptual foundation shows that character education in Islam is deeply rooted in the integration of *iman*, *ilm*, and *akhlaq*, aiming to form *insan kamil* who embody moral and spiritual excellence in accordance with Islamic teachings. Second, Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role as moral models whose behavior, attitudes, and interactions significantly influence students' character development through processes of observation and imitation, as emphasized in social learning theory. Third, despite its importance, the implementation of character education faces various modern challenges such as digital disruption, limited institutional support, curriculum pressure, and inadequate teacher preparedness, which require adaptive and contextual strategies. Therefore, strengthening teacher competence, integrating values across learning environments, and

fostering collaboration between schools, families, and communities are essential to ensure the effectiveness of character education. Overall, character education in Islamic Religious Education must be understood as a holistic and continuous process that unites knowledge, values, and practice to develop morally responsible individuals in a rapidly changing world.

REFERENCES

- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1991). *The concept of education in Islam: A framework for an Islamic philosophy of education*. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2005). *What works in character education: A research-driven guide for educators*. Character Education Partnership.
- Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Halstead, J. M. (2007). Islamic values: A distinctive framework for moral education? *Journal of Moral Education*, 36(3), 283–296.
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Lickona, T. (2004). *Character matters: How to help our children develop good judgment, integrity, and other essential virtues*. Simon & Schuster.
- Narvaez, D. (2006). Integrative ethical education. *Handbook of Moral Development*, 703–733.
- Nucci, L. P. (2001). *Education in the moral domain*. Cambridge University Press.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.
- Sanger, M. N., & Osguthorpe, R. D. (2013). Making sense of approaches to moral education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 42(1), 66–83.
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339.
- Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge. *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), 207–222.