

The Role of PAI Teachers in Shaping Islamic Character Child with Autism at Mysarah Kindergarten Padang Serai, Malaysia

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Abstract: This research investigates how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning shapes Islamic character in children with autism. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative case study methodology. Data were obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation, and thematic analysis was used to test the results. This research aims to provide information for educators and policymakers on how to create more effective and responsive educational programs for autistic children by teaching Islamic Religious Education and also shaping the character of autistic children at Tadika Mysarah. The results of this study highlight the important role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in character development, strengthening Islamic principles, and offering spiritual guidance through an open and flexible approach. Islamic Education teachers are very important in instilling Islamic values in children with autism, especially by collaborating with parents and related experts to create child-friendly teaching methods. Research also shows that tailored learning can enhance a child's understanding of Islamic teachings, help them build self-confidence, and develop social skills. The teaching methods used include educational games, Islamic stories, and simple worship practices, which are designed to meet the special needs of autistic children.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; Character; Autistic Students.

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) membentuk karakter Islami pada anak-anak dengan autisme. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metodologi studi kasus secara deskriptif kualitatif. Data didapat melalui wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi, serta analisis tema digunakan untuk menguji hasilnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyediakan

informasi untuk pendidik dan pengambil kebijakan tentang bagaimana menciptakan program pendidikan yang lebih efektif dan responsif bagi anak autisme dengan mengajarkan tentang Pendidikan Agama Islam serta juga membentuk karakter anak autisme di Tadika Mysarah. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan peran penting guru PAI dalam pengembangan karakter, memperkuat prinsip-prinsip Islam, dan menawarkan bimbingan spiritual melalui pendekatan terbuka dan fleksibel. Guru PAI sangat penting dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai Islam pada anak dengan autisme, terutama dengan bekerja sama dengan orang tua dan tenaga ahli terkait untuk membuat metode pengajaran yang ramah anak. Penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran yang disesuaikan dapat meningkatkan pemahaman anak tentang ajaran Islam, membantu mereka membangun kepercayaan diri, dan membangun keterampilan sosial. Metode pengajaran yang digunakan meliputi permainan edukatif, cerita Islami, dan praktik ibadah sederhana, yang dirancang untuk memenuhi kebutuhan khusus anak autisme.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam; Karakter; Peserta Didik Autism.

A. Introduction

Teachers are key components of academic success. Therefore, teachers must be at the forefront of all educational advancements, especially in curriculum development and human resources. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role in every reform because they implement changes at the classroom level and are enthusiastic about progress. Due to their numerous responsibilities, Islamic Religious Education teachers can be said to be highly influential (Mutmainnah, 2011).

The transfer of knowledge, culture, and values from one generation to the next is known as education. A deliberate and planned effort to create an educational atmosphere and process that enables students to maximize their potential in spiritual religious strength, personality, self-control, noble character, intelligence, and skills for themselves, society, and the state is also known as education. According to Article 1 of Law Number 20 of 2003, one form of education that may be offered is Islamic Religious Education. According to Article 31, Paragraph 3 of the 1945 Constitution,

the state is obliged to organize education to enhance the nation's morality and foster a sense of faith and devotion to God. (Smp et al., 2023)

Religious character encompasses actions and beliefs that align with one's faith principles, respect different religious practices, and promote coexistence with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. Religious values are fundamental principles derived from one's spiritual teachings and reflected in daily behavior. Indeed, the values bestowed by God emerge from the religious principles students adhere to, influencing their thoughts, speech, and behavior. Teachers must deliver Islamic religious education to their students to instill religious principles comprehensively. Students become accustomed to acting in accordance with their religious teachings. Developing attitudes in students that align with Islamic faith is crucial. This religious character can be demonstrated through students' attitudes and actions, such as being friendly, greeting friends and teachers, and praying on time. Amid changes and moral degradation, religious character is essential for students. Recent events have led to the emergence of various irregularities that contradict religious laws and customs. Often, students exhibit inconsistent behavior, such as failing to complete school assignments, acting rudely, and engaging in other inappropriate actions (Smp et al., 2023).

Character development is a process that requires time and repetition. A person's innate character does not emerge overnight; instead, it develops over time. A strategic approach to Islamic Religious Education can be employed to achieve this goal. (Utari dkk, 2020) Because a child's personal characteristics are shaped by everything they encounter, whether it be sight, hearing, behavior, character, upbringing, and so on, and these characteristics will develop over time. Becoming an educator is a difficult task, so educators must be patient and meticulous when facing this situation. The duration that includes the period from conception to birth and up to more than 25 years, or until they finish school, is considered quite long due to the high costs and extended time. teaching children with developmental difficulties and autism in particular, and autistic children also requires special attention. Mutmainnah (2011).

Autistic behavior is divided into two categories: excessive behavior, which means excessive, and deficit behavior, which means lacking. Excessive behaviors,

known as tantrums, include biting, hitting, scratching, kicking, and screaming. One of the signs of behavioral deficits is inappropriate social behavior and speech disturbances. Being considered deaf, playing incorrectly, and showing inappropriate emotions such as uncontrollable crying, laughing, or daydreaming are further signs of sensory disturbances. Especially for children with autism or behavioral disorders, Islamic religious education teachers are responsible for promoting Islam and instilling morality. Behavior, from Y. Handojo's perspective, is any activity, big or small, that can be assessed and felt by oneself or those around them. Tadika Mysarah is similar to other general kindergartens, but it has autistic children who want to receive the same education as other children. This institution was established to provide education, especially Islamic education, to autistic children through behavioral therapy training and teaching management. Children with special needs cannot receive education compared to general education because their differences are distinct. Someone who is determined to educate autistic children and instill good behavior is greatly needed. (Mutmainnah, 2011)

Children at Tadika Mysarah who have special needs require a repetitive habituation process to develop their religious character. Therefore, teachers play an important role in this matter. Teachers are expected to inspire students' interest and willingness to embrace religious ideals. The role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in helping special needs students develop their religious character has not been extensively researched recently. However, none of the research, including this study, has involved a place at Tadika Mysarah. Therefore, this article is not the same as similar articles. In addition, this article can be used as a supplementary explanation for other studies that discuss the same theme. (Laila Fazida & Prayogi, 2024)

This research is motivated by the research gap in previous studies. Based on the research conducted by (Utari et al., 2020) who is researching "The Role of PAI Teachers in Nurturing the Morals of Autistic Students," This research can examine the methods and approaches used by PAI teachers in instilling Islamic values in children with autism.

Research conducted by (Fasya, 2022) which discusses the title "Researching the Role of PAI Teachers in Shaping Student Character at MI Unwanul Khairiyah Depok," this research can focus on how PAI teachers serve as role models in shaping Islamic character in students. Research has not yet extensively explored how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers shape Islamic character in students. Most of the existing research focuses on how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers build religious character in students as a whole.

B. Research Method

To identify problems or interesting phenomena in the world of education, this research uses a qualitative methodology, which is part of field research, and seeks data through observation and in-depth interviews. This research aims to gain an understanding of how the teachers at Tadika Mysarah shape their students' religious character through religious ideals. The purpose of the data collection interviews is to form integrity at Tadika, and the data analysis includes the processes of collection, reduction, presentation, and the final results of the research (Sinaga, 2023).

The pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and reporting phases constitute the research process. Data collection and analysis are part of the fieldwork stage, while proposal development and implementation preparation are part of the pre-fieldwork stage. Researchers present the results obtained in the field during the reporting stage. Data collection methods include documentation and interviews. To further understand the efforts of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in fostering Islamic morals in autistic students at Mysarah School, interviews are conducted. Observations are carried out to gain a comprehensive understanding of the activities performed by autistic students. Documentation is used to gather information to support the research (Aisa et al., 2021).

C. Results and discussion

1. The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers at Tadika Mysarah

The goal of Islamic education is to produce students who possess qualities such as faith, patience, honesty, discipline, piety, wisdom, justice, intelligence, and awareness of their responsibilities. To cultivate a Muslim personality with these traits, those who

undergo Islamic education strive to internalize the ideals present in Islamic teachings. Information, globalization, democracy, and human rights are characteristics of modern life. Life is becoming increasingly complex due to rapid population growth and scarcity of economic resources. Education faces such challenges, especially in Islamic religious education, to confront future challenges. (Sinaga, 2023)

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers may play a significant role in education. The concept of role refers to the way an individual is expected to behave. In this context, the teacher is responsible. Teachers are tasked with providing guidance, motivation, and direction in their students' learning activities. It is a challenge for anyone to assume the position of educator, particularly as an Islamic religious instructor, in the educational process. This holds even as learning technology rapidly evolves. Educators must shape the religious character of each student, especially those with special needs (Laila Fazida & Prayogi, 2024). The preschool years are the most crucial stage of a child's development and must be given attention because they can influence the development of a healthy personality in adulthood. Concepts related to cognitive, emotional, and social development are established and developed during childhood (Zuliana, Muhammad Qorib, Oktrigana Wirian, Qoree Butlam, 2024). Teachers not only impart knowledge, they also teach, guide, and educate. They must also function as mediators and learning partners. Teachers should not be authoritarian or always force their students to do what they want; instead, they should be able to offer guidance and direction. Islamic education teachers at Tadika Mysarah perform their duties as guides, meaning they not only educate but also serve as moral counselors. Teachers also play the role of a "bridge," fostering positive relationships between parents, school principals, educators, and students. Teachers who facilitate learning, such as Islamic religion teachers in secondary schools, or those who provide answers to student debates, are also referred to as mediators. (Laila Fazida & Prayogi, 2024)

In the book *Sociology of Islamic Education*, Khoiriyah quotes Gross, Mason, and Mc Eachern who state that a role is a set of expectations given to individuals occupying certain social positions in relation to their work and responsibilities in that work. In

Novan Ardy Wiyani's book, Zakiyah Daradjat mentions that the function of PAI teachers is:

- a. Islamic religious education teacher as an educator.
The task of PAI teachers is to instill knowledge, attitudes, and skills.
- b. Islamic religious education teacher as a guide.
The task of PAI teachers is to instill knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Study advice and advice on attitude or behavior formation are examples of guidance. Therefore, the purpose of guidance is to inform all students about their learning abilities and attitudes. Students should not consider their ability to learn as low, nor their ability to behave or act according to Islamic law.
- c. The Islamic religious teacher must lead the class.
Teachers also have to manage, namely managing the teaching-learning interaction or managing the classroom. Two managerial issues that need to be the focus of PAI teachers are fostering the personal and collective development of students and maintaining the learning environment as best as possible both inside and outside the classroom (Sudarta, 2022).

2. The efforts of Islamic Religious Education teachers to instill Islamic character in autistic children at Tadika Mysarah

According to the Indonesian Dictionary (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), "membentuk" refers to an action, method, or approach that creates something. Furthermore, "pembentukan" refers to the process of directing, teaching, and guiding thoughts, personality, character, and so on. The Latin words "karakter," "kharassein," "kharax," and "charassein" mean "to carve, paint, break, or engrave." According to the KBBI, character refers to personality, behavior, traits, habits, or characteristics that differentiate one from another. Therefore, a "person with character" is defined as someone who possesses a personality, behavior, traits, disposition, or qualities. (Nashrullah, 2021) Religious character, according to Heri Gunawan, is defined as values that encompass a person's relationship with God. The attitude and behavior of someone who firmly adheres to the principles of their religion, both in their relationship

with God, others, and their environment, is referred to as religious character. Islamic religious education teachers not only impart knowledge; they also have to teach and guide students to develop good morals and character. There are various ways to achieve this goal. (Solihah & Syamsul, 2023) Character can be applied to both normal children and those with learning difficulties. Because there are special guidance teachers for children with special needs, these teachers are responsible for guiding and understanding what is not yet clear. Like self-discipline that must be practiced. Students are encouraged to engage in spiritual activities and pray for one another. Teachers also always pray for their students' safety and that they are blessed with the knowledge they are taught (Khaerudin et al., 2021).

Character development can take place anywhere. Islamic education can have an impact on character development. Islamic character can be developed in several stages. (1) Knowledge Stage: Knowledge, which includes all lessons, constructive activities, or positive behaviors in daily life, can be used to instill Islamic character. (2) Implementation Stage: The formation of Islamic character can occur anytime and anywhere. In schools, character building can be done before the learning activities begin. Discipline is a habit instilled in students, such as following school rules and managing time. To instill responsibility, one can teach duties according to schedule and be accountable for the tasks done. By greeting teachers when meeting them, students can build self-confidence. There are three stages of habituation: Islamic character must not only be instilled through knowledge and application but also through habituation. From this explanation, some stages of character formation, such as the knowledge stage, implementation stage, and habituation stage, are examples (Nashrullah, 2021).

Communication skills, creativity in teaching, continuous practice, and intensive mentoring are some important factors to remember when learning character education. Autistic students must be given exercises, particularly to reinforce the material taught. Specifically, tasks related to students' reading, writing, and thinking skills are provided through practical activities. Mentoring is an important strategy in character education for autistic students, in addition to other strategies used during the learning process. Mentoring is meant to make students feel close and comfortable during the learning

process. Children with special needs are known to have limitations in their understanding, communication, and behavior. Students will feel protected and cared for if they receive proper mentoring (Teknologi & Desain, 1805).

Religious education is the process of instilling faith and piety in each individual, as well as developing human character to become a person of noble character by Islamic teachings. Success in character education depends on an inclusive teacher who teaches children with developmental delays. Therefore, the teacher involved must be skilled in pedagogy, personal development, professionalism, and social skills. These abilities also affect how methods and strategies are applied during the learning process. In general, children with autism are expected to achieve at least a minimum level of development. (Teknologi & Desain, 1805) Similarly, Siraj found that students who engaged in value-based learning, including Islamic values, demonstrated stronger social-emotional skills, such as empathy and teamwork. These results support the idea that integrating Islamic values into early childhood education is an effective method for nurturing well-rounded individuals (Studies, 2024).

The teaching that encourages students to be obedient and to believe that Allah SWT is the One and Only God, and the Creator of the universe, is an integral part of the efforts made by educators in developing Islamic character. To shape Islamic character in autistic students at Tadika Mysarah, religious activities are carried out throughout the class, starting with a prayer at the beginning, followed by the lesson, and ending with a prayer. Students are educated on additional activities such as congregational prayers, reading Iqra', fasting, and others to inform them about their duties as Muslims. Developing Islamic character in autistic students can be achieved through the implementation of routine habits, such as reciting prayers every morning, reading Iqra', and memorizing short surahs after school (Ma'rifah et al., 2023).

Before shaping Islamic character in autistic children, teachers must review each student's personal record. This record should include their religion, family background, type of autism, and psychological condition. Personal records are useful for understanding the challenges students face when learning Islamic educational values. Role modeling must be used to build Islamic character in children with special needs.

Religious role modeling means that teachers should always encourage their students to perform Muslim duties such as prayer, fasting, reading Iqra', and others. These habits are beneficial for training students in the principles being taught (ISMA, 2021). According to Article 3 of the National Education System Law of 2003, the goal of national education is to nurture students' potential to become individuals who are pious, moral, and religious. Since teachers must always provide moral support to all their students, character education must be implemented appropriately through activities that promote good faith and morals (Muhammad Iqbal M & Rizka Harfiani, 2024).

3. Factors Supporting and Hindering Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Creating Islamic Character in Children with Autism at Tadika Mysarah

External factors that shape students' personalities include good teachers, good school regulations, and creativity in learning (Sinaga, 2023) .

There are several factors that assist the Islamic religious education teachers at Tadika Mysarah in fulfilling their responsibility to shape Islamic character in autistic teenagers. These factors include:

- a. Teacher-Parent Cooperation. Essentially, both teachers and parents want to educate, guide, nurture, and lead their children to become good individuals. To achieve this goal, parents and teachers must cooperate effectively. The goal will be accomplished if everyone works together harmoniously. For religious activities in school to succeed, parental support is crucial. A child's religious character will develop through the religious activities they participate in at school if their parents encourage them at home. The formation of religious character will be difficult if religious activities at school do not support character development. Cooperation between parents and teachers works well at Tadika Mysarah. All activities carried out there receive full support from parents. This includes religious activities, cultural practices, and celebrations of Islamic holidays.
- b. Adequate educational infrastructure and facilities, along with efficient management and utilization strategies, have a significant impact on the

effectiveness of educational programs. All the facilities required in the educational process to achieve educational goals collectively are referred to as educational infrastructure. Locations that subtly assist student learning, such as school gardens, playgrounds, and yards, are also part of this infrastructure. (Laila Fazida & Prayogi, 2024).

The following issues hinder the ability of Islamic Religious Education teachers at Tadika Mysarah in helping autistic students develop Islamic character: Factors Related to Special Needs Students. Children with special needs differ from regular students in terms of learning. Both physical and non-physical conditions fall into this category. Teachers must repeat the material to ensure that autistic students understand the content being taught. Autistic students often face difficulties in learning, as well as challenges in controlling their actions and communication, which hinder the performance of the Islamic Religious Education teacher (Laila Fazida & Prayogi, 2024).

D. Conclusion

After conducting research on the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping the Islamic character of autistic children at Tadika Mysarah, there is a need to improve the methods used by teachers to build the Islamic character of autistic students. This is especially true for the ways in which students socialize and internalize good moral principles, such as responsibility, independence, decency, care for their environment and themselves, and socializing. Along with the development of the autistic children's character, many complex issues arise. However, this is certainly not a reason for parents and teachers to neglect children with autism. In the future, it is hoped that teachers can do more to help autistic children become better individuals.

Teachers always strive to be role models for their students during the process of shaping Islamic character. Teachers must be patient, as methods such as simulations, definitions, and drills provide a good understanding. Moreover, the process of shaping Islamic character requires a great deal of support and assistance from parents, teachers, and the student's environment. The teachers at Tadika Mysarah shape Islamic character by praying before events, greeting with peace, showing respect, and participating in

positive activities with students in their environment. This character development is carried out so that students can possess religious, polite, and friendly traits.

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