

The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Shaping Students' Religious Character in Facing Puberty

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Abstract

The onset of puberty in elementary school-aged children frequently precipitates psychological distress and emotional lability, which can result in ethical transgressions. The present study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in guiding students through puberty and its impact on the development of their religious character. A qualitative descriptive approach was utilized, involving eight informants: principals, religious teachers, students, and parents, using a purposive sampling technique. The data were collected through three methods: passive observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies. Then, the data were analyzed interactively using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model. The findings suggest that religious educators assume a dual role, functioning not only as moral guides but also as student counselors. This phenomenon arises due to the absence of formal guidance and counseling personnel. The efficacy of this pedagogical approach has been demonstrated in the enhancement of post-pubescent religious discipline and the cultivation of proper manners in children, both within the domestic sphere and the educational environment. However, the instruction of puberty-related subjects is not yet codified in a distinct curriculum and continues to be impeded by the absence of visual learning resources and students' social discomfort. Additionally, the development of character is found to be imbalanced due to disparities in children's cognitive abilities and the pervasive adverse impact of social media content. The present study posits that the provision of puberty education grounded in Islamic values has a tangible impact on the self-control of children. However, the efficacy of this intervention is contingent upon the provision of written study guides and the establishment of robust supervisory cooperation with parents in the domestic setting.

Keywords: Puberty, Religious Character, PAI Teachers, Elementary School, Morality.

1. Introduction

Puberty is a crucial transitional phase for children, marked by a surge of massive biological changes. These physical changes simultaneously influence shifts in attitudes, behavior, and even spiritual awareness. Although children physically grow rapidly toward adulthood, the reality on the ground shows a sociopsychological gap in the form of low sensitivity in students regarding maintaining modesty and self-respect in accordance with Islamic law. This problem extends to the dynamics of daily social etiquette. High curiosity and emotional attraction to the opposite sex trigger closer social interactions, but are not yet balanced by a clear understanding of Islamic ethics. At home, this pubertal turmoil triggers a decline in children's politeness towards parents

and teachers, as evidenced by increased emotional sensitivity and a decline in polite communication. This real-life situation reflects an imbalance between immature self-control and the fluctuations in children's emotional stability (Aisyah, 2021; Tarazi-Sahab et al., 2021).

The issue of moral instability during this transitional phase is the main focus of this article. The object of this research centers on the phenomenon of the development of religiosity and religious behavior of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students at Kartika Elementary School, Pematang Siantar, who are undergoing puberty. The context of this object is very relevant because the elementary school environment is the first place where children begin to experience signs of adulthood (*baligh*). At this stage, the formation of students' religious character faces significant challenges because spiritual values are not balanced. Religious problems that arise include fragility of faith, neglect of obligatory prayers, and a decline in manners after children experience puberty. In fact, referring to the standards of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), there are main indicators of religious character that must be met by students, namely the quality of human relations with God (*hablun minallah*) through disciplined worship, relationships with others (*hablun minannas*) through noble morals, and relationships with nature (*hablun minal 'alam*). When children reach the age of puberty as *mukalaf*, these indicators should become guidelines for behavior. However, children's still minimal mental readiness actually causes them to ignore the habituation of religious values. Therefore, intensive teaching assistance is needed through strengthening Islamic Religious Education learning in collaboration with schools and homes (Ali & Al-Otaibi, 2021; Ibrahim & Ismail, 2025).

The urgency of protecting morality aligns with the view of commentator (Al-Qurthubi, 2006) regarding the absolute obligation to cover the genitals. This theological assertion is reinforced by (Ibnu Katsir, 2004), who highlights the maintenance of personal purity to maintain a Muslim's dignity from an early age. A recent review of various literature positions Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as an important instrument in developing students' religious personalities. A study by (Ahsanulkhalaq, 2020) proves that educators contribute significantly to instilling moral values in children through gradual politeness material in the classroom, which aligns with the approach of orderly behavior in early adolescence (Hashim & Ahmad, 2023). On the other hand, Aisyah (2021) and Halstead (2018) emphasize that restructuring moral education is absolutely necessary during puberty to monitor students' physical changes and emotional turmoil so they do not deviate from religion. Furthermore, studies by Mashuri and Ummah (2022) and Yusuf and Rahman (2022) also confirm that the success of character development in children depends on strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as motivators, role models, and spiritual mentors for students in schools (Mashuri & Ummah, 2022; Yusuf & Rahman, 2022). However, current research approaches have been criticized for being largely trapped in macro-theoretical discussions (Ahsanulkhalaq, 2020; Halstead, 2018; Rahman, 2019) or focusing solely on secondary school-aged students.

As a result, a research gap emerged in the form of a lack of real data regarding the decline in awareness of covering the genitals, the fragility of social relationships, and neglect of worship after puberty at the elementary school level. This is where this article contributes, which is present to fill this gap by presenting real-world conditions through a combination of child development theory with religious education based on a concrete approach and habituation. This study offers a new scientific basis for designing Islamic Religious Education curriculum intervention strategies that are easier to implement at the elementary level (Mashuri & Ummah, 2022; Salleh & Latif, 2020). Based on this research gap, this study clearly aims to analyze in depth the complexity of the problem of religious development experienced by children during puberty in elementary school.

The focus of this research is directed at mapping how changes in social, emotional, and physical aspects affect students' religious behavior, as well as presenting a realistic picture of their

awareness of worship and moral development. This effort is designed as a concrete step to support the implementation of national policies stipulated in the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs Number 183 of 2019 concerning the standardization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) directions (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Theoretically, this study is projected to enrich the literature on Islamic values-based puberty pedagogy, while practically it can serve as a tactical guide for teachers, parents, and schools in formulating effective student mentoring plans.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Education Teachers

Islamic Religious Education teachers play a strategic, multi-systemic role as *murabbi*, *mu'allim*, and *mu'addib*, not only transmitting cognitive knowledge but also instilling affective nobility and comprehensive psychomotor skills in students (Uno, 2016). In navigating the puberty transition phase of elementary school students, which is fraught with emotional turmoil, identity searches, and internal conflicts, PAI teachers act as spiritual guides who contextualize religious doctrine with biological dynamics and children's real-life experiences to foster moral perfection (Parhati et al., 2022; Sutarno et al., 2024). The direct contribution of educators through optimal mentoring and a personal, empathy-based approach is crucial for stimulating students' self-disclosure (Uno, 2021). The instructional scenario is tactically directed to engineer religious principles as a self-control system anchored in inner spiritual awareness, not merely a response to social pressure or external environmental contamination (Santrock, 2020).

In this context, role models are crucial. emphasizes that character is more effectively formed through concrete examples than mere instruction. The Quran states:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ
كَثِيرًا

"Indeed, there is in (the person of) the Messenger of Allah a good role model for you" (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21).

This verse demonstrates that exemplary behavior is at the heart of Islamic education. Islamic Religious Education teachers must not only convey values but also emulate them in their daily lives. This is crucial because students during puberty tend to imitate figures they deem significant. According to Al-Tabari, this verse emphasizes that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is an ideal example in all aspects of life, including worship, morality, and social interaction. Similarly, Ibn Kathir explains that the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary behavior encompasses patience, courage, and a commitment to truth, which Muslims must emulate (Ibnu Katsir, 2004). Therefore, it is understandable that the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is multidimensional, encompassing educational, moral, spiritual, and psychological functions. This role is key in helping students integrate biological changes with moral maturity, so that puberty is not only a phase of physical change but also a phase of religious character formation.

2.2. Islamic Religious Education Learning Strategies and Media in Teaching Puberty Material

The strategy for delivering puberty material at the elementary school level requires Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to formulate instructional activity patterns that are effective, efficient, and sensitive to the characteristics of early adolescence so as not to trigger feelings of awkwardness, anxiety, or taboos (Nata, 2020). To optimize students' breadth of insight regarding this sensitive topic, adopting contextual teaching strategies is vital because they are able to meaningfully link sharia doctrine with the reality of anatomical changes and

factual experiences that children are experiencing. Acceleration of students' cognitive understanding and attention is then intervened through educational multimedia visualizations, such as the use of Islamic videos, images of sharia anatomy, and narrative morality stories. The successful tactical integration between contextual methods and interactive media is ultimately inseparable from the determination of teacher behavior as a competent role model in the school environment (Usman, 2013).

2.3. Formation of Religious Character and Awareness during Puberty

Religious character is a fundamental inner disposition in guiding individual moral actions, where its implementation is not merely transferring theoretical knowledge about goodness, but also training the habituation of ethical behavior in everyday reality. Internalization of this spiritual dimension holds crucial urgency during the transition phase of puberty to anticipate the escalation of emotional instability and vulnerability to deviant behavior due to hormonal surges in children. As a solution, character formation based on Islamic values is engineered as an internal control system (self-control) that guides students' moral awareness in making decisions amidst strong pressures from the social environment (Santrock, 2020). Moral constructs such as shame (*haya'*) and the ability to maintain personal purity are positioned as the main theological bulwarks to ward off the degradation of contemporary morality (Al-Ghazali, 2011; Ali & Al-Otaibi, 2021). This obligation of spiritual protection aligns with Al-Qurthubi's (2006) doctrine regarding the absolute responsibility of educating and instilling religious values within the family, which is reinforced by Al-Ghazali's (2011) postulate that early moral education is an essential shield for the younger generation against behavioral deviations. Consequently, the integration of the Islamic puberty curriculum acts as a bridge between the biological maturity and moral readiness of elementary school students. Through the orchestration of contextual teaching strategies, optimization of multimedia, and strengthening the role models of Islamic Religious Education teachers, this synergy has proven effective in elevating moral awareness and shaping students' accountable religious character in facing puberty.

3. Methods

The data for this descriptive qualitative research were collected directly from Kartika Elementary School in Pematang Siantar using a purposive sampling technique. Eight informants were recruited: one principal, one Islamic Religious Education teacher, three fourth- to sixth-grade students undergoing puberty, and three parents to corroborate data on children's behavior at home. Data collection was conducted through three methods: passive observation of students' religious activities, in-depth interviews, and document studies such as archives of religious activities and student assignments.

After the raw data were collected, the researchers preprocessed the data by filtering important information, discarding irrelevant data, and combining all interview results into a theme chart. The validity of this qualitative data was tested using source triangulation techniques to compare testimonies from children, teachers, and parents, method triangulation to cross-reference observations with interviews, and member checking with informants to ensure data accuracy.

Data analysis in this research was carried out iteratively using an interactive model from Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The first step is data condensation by summarizing the text data to focus on the themes of the teacher's role and students' religious character. The second step is data presentation by organizing the information into a coherent written narrative. The third step is drawing conclusions, which is done gradually by examining cause-and-effect relationships until the data is deemed saturated or there are no new findings (Miles et al., 2014). The sequence of the analysis process is visually depicted in Figures 1.

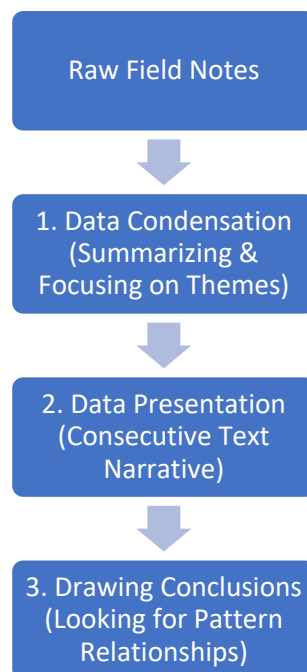


Figure 1. Qualitative Data Analysis Flowchart of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana Model.

The credibility of this method was evaluated through a dependability test conducted by the supervising lecturer, a transferability test to ensure the research results could be applied to similar elementary schools, and a confirmability test to ensure the report's results were purely based on field data. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, assisted by an interview guide regarding signs of puberty, worship, and children's manners. This research was conducted in accordance with scientific research ethics, where the researcher obtained written informed consent from the school and parents.

The privacy rights of all informants were fully protected by obscuring their true identities using a special code. All digital documents were also securely stored in encrypted storage to prevent leakage. Because this research used a purely qualitative approach to explore the meaning of social action, the researcher did not apply statistical regression analysis, quantitative formulas, or statistical numerical software.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

a. The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Internalizing Islamic Value-Based Puberty Material

Field data shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers at Kartika Elementary School in Pematang Siantar have a dual role. In addition to teaching, they serve as a resource for students to consult on personal issues. The school lacks a Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher, so the burden of providing psychological guidance to students falls on the religious education teacher. The principal explained this situation:

"The role of teachers, especially religious education teachers, is crucial because they are the spearheads in shaping students' religious character. PAI teachers not only convey material from textbooks but also guide students in understanding self-change... because

schools don't have counselors, students often report their problems to religious education teachers."

In terms of the curriculum, lessons on puberty or puberty are not allocated to a specific chapter. The material is embedded indirectly in discussions about purification (*thaharah*), the boundaries of private parts (*awrah*), and social etiquette. The Islamic Religious Education teacher explains how this is delivered:

"Puberty material actually exists and is presented in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons, but it's usually not included in a dedicated chapter. It's embedded within several topics, such as Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) in the chapter on purification (tharah), aurat (awrah), and social etiquette."

However, classroom observations indicate that explanations of puberty are still very general and in-depth. Teachers struggle to deliver the material in an engaging manner due to limited school facilities, which force them to rely solely on oral explanations. Furthermore, students often feel embarrassed. A religious education teacher confirmed this.

"The obstacle I often face is that students feel embarrassed, reluctant to open up or awkward when discussing the topic of puberty."

b. Religious Character Construction and Students' Psychological Responses

Religious studies have been shown to positively impact self-control in students entering puberty. Through Islamic Religious Studies classes, students understand the consequences of religious practices that they must face independently as adults. This is evident in one student's response:

"You know, after puberty, there are rules regarding worship. For example, if you're menstruating, you can't pray or study the Koran. You have to wait until it's over before you can worship again. Besides that, you also have to be more diligent in your worship."

This awareness also changes students' daily habits to be more polite and caring, both at home and at school. Interviews revealed significant behavioral changes:

"I used to rarely help my parents at home, like cleaning the house. Now I'm more diligent, sometimes helping sweep or tidy things up. At school... I try to maintain good manners, like being polite. Teachers always greet and say hello."

However, this behavioral change hasn't occurred in all children. Observations show that some students are still disorganized and unfocused during their studies. The principal confirmed that children at this age are still emotionally unstable due to the transition:

"However, because they are in the transition phase to adolescence, there are still some students whose attitudes are not yet stable, such as sometimes lacking focus, easily getting carried away by friends, and lacking discipline."

c. Implementation of Islamic Education Learning Strategy and Media Diversification

To navigate the topic of reproduction, which is considered taboo or sensitive for elementary school children, Islamic Religious Education teachers try to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere. They use a personal approach through small talk and sharing sessions. The Islamic Religious Education teacher shared her experience:

"For my methods, I usually use a relaxed and less formal approach, such as a light lecture followed by questions and answers. Sometimes I also try to open up simple discussions, like a brainstorming session, with students to encourage them to express their understanding..."

Although this method was designed to lighten the mood, observations showed that verbal explanations still didn't engage all students. Many students chose to remain silent due to

embarrassment. This problem was exacerbated by the noisy classroom environment, which students admitted significantly disrupted their concentration:

"Usually the teacher explains from the textbook, sometimes I understand, but sometimes I don't really understand, especially if the class is noisy or there are friends talking while the teacher is explaining."

Limited school facilities also mean teachers rarely use visual media. Islamic Religious Education teachers admit,

"Due to limited facilities, I mostly use verbal explanations."

This raises the hope from students that teachers will change their teaching methods:

"I wish the teacher would give me more notes, because I understand better if I take notes."

d. Significance of Intervention and Variance of Students' Religious Attitudes

Islamic values-based puberty education has yielded tangible results, but it has created character differences among students. On the one hand, Islamic Religious Education teachers have observed several positive changes in children, as reflected in the following quote:

"In my experience, there have been several changes in students after being given this understanding. For example, some students have become more diligent in their religious practices, are more mindful of their behavior, and are more cautious in their interactions with the opposite sex."

On the other hand, the daily habituation programs implemented by schools (such as praying and shaking hands) are merely physical habits, not yet deeply ingrained in the heart. Islamic Religious Education teachers emphasized this gap in results:

"However, not all students experience the same changes; some still need continuous guidance because each child has a different level of understanding and family background."

4.2 Discussion

a. Analysis of the Role of Religious Teachers and Curriculum Issues in Schools

The role of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher at Kartika Elementary School as a moral guide is crucial because the school lacks a formal guidance counselor. This finding reinforces the theory of Hamzah (Ibrahim & Ismail, 2025; Uno, 2016), who stated that teachers must balance knowledge and the development of children's attitudes. A compassionate approach from teachers has been shown to encourage students to speak up (Uno, 2021). However, when compared to previous research on the curriculum, the results of puberty teaching at this school are lower or less optimal due to its unstructured nature. This material is only briefly included in the chapters on purification and etiquette, resulting in lack of in-depth student understanding. The main contributing factor to this problem is the lack of a dedicated guidebook, resulting in the instillation of religious values in the classroom by chance and lack of planning.

b. Student Personality Development: Child Emotional Factors and External Influences

The success of instilling Islamic values in improving students' religious discipline and politeness supports Lickona's (2019) theory on character formation. Changes in student behavior, such as diligently helping parents and respecting teachers, are evidence that early religious teachings can serve as a behavioral compass. Conversely, the cause of differences in character between students is influenced by the limits of children's thinking abilities. According to Jean Piaget, children in grades IV-VI of elementary school are at the beginning of the abstract thinking period (formal operational), where their emotions are still unstable and easily changed due to the turmoil of puberty (Santrock, 2019). This condition explains why religious activities in schools are

only limited to daily physical habits (*habitus*), not yet based on conscious intentions from the heart (HR. Bukhari & Muslim). As a result, students' good character is still easily shaken by negative environmental influences.

c. Assessment of Teacher Teaching Methods and Learning Facilities Issues

The passive and shy attitudes shown by students when discussing puberty material are very suitable with Erik Erikson's theory regarding the crisis of adolescents who are searching for identity (identity vs. role confusion). The teacher's teaching method with small talk and sharing sessions actually applies the method of good advice (*mau'izah hasanah*) according to the content of Surah An-Nahl verse 125 (Al-Qurthubi, 2006; Ibnu Katsir, 2004). This gentle method also imitates the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad to facilitate religious matters (An-Nawawi, 2010). However, research analysis proves that this oral explanation method is less effective than modern teaching methods. The main factors causing students to not understand are problems with learning facilities and a noisy classroom atmosphere. Teaching only with textbooks has been proven to fail to attract children's attention (Nata, 2020; Oraby, 2024). These findings support Jonson's theory (2014) regarding the importance of changing the classroom atmosphere by creating small discussion groups and fulfilling students' requests for structured written notes.

d . The Influence of Religious Teachings and the Validity of Journal Research Methods

The differences in student characteristics demonstrate a strong clash between religious teachings at school and the external environment. Positive changes in students who have begun to maintain distance from the opposite sex demonstrate the strength of their understanding of the importance of self-protection (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21). However, the strong influence of social media viewing and peer interaction is the main reason for the damage to students' politeness values (Ibnu Katsir, 2004). To address this problem, these findings strengthen scientific evidence that character formation must combine three roles: good examples from teachers at school, environmental supervision, and parental education at home according to Surah At-Tahrim verse 6. In terms of journal research methods, the reason why the data seems shallow is because this research only uses passive observation from a distance. Sensitive issues such as menstruation or wet dreams cannot be explored accurately without direct interaction. For subsequent journal research, the determining factor for more valid data on sensitive topics is to use closed focus group discussions and active participant observation in the field.

5. Conclusions

This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in guiding students through puberty and its impact on the formation of religious character at Kartika Elementary School in Pematang Siantar. The results show that PAI teachers play a dual role as moral mentors and counselors for students because the school does not have official Guidance and Counseling (BK) personnel. The teachers' personal approach has been proven to improve students' understanding of the rules of worship after puberty and trigger positive behavioral changes, such as children being diligent in helping parents at home and being polite to teachers at school.

However, the teaching of this puberty material is not yet structured in an official lesson plan and is still hampered by a lack of visual facilities and students' feelings of shame. Furthermore, character changes have not occurred evenly across all students due to differences in children's thinking abilities and the strong negative influence of social media viewing. The implications of these findings emphasize that instilling religious values from an early age is crucial for fortifying children's morals during puberty. The unique contribution of this study is proving that adolescent character formation cannot be successful if it only relies on physical habituation programs at school, but must also touch the awareness of the intentions in the child's heart. This study was

limited by its use of passive, distant observation, which prevented it from delving deeply into students' feelings of awkwardness around the personal topic of reproduction. Therefore, recommendations for further research include closed-door focus group discussions (FGDs) and active observation to obtain more in-depth data. In conclusion, Islamic values-based puberty education has been shown to have a positive impact on students' religious discipline. However, its success requires a dedicated school guidebook and strong collaboration with parental supervision at home.

6. CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Widya Gustriana (Main Author): Fully responsible for the technical work in the field, starting from searching for data, compiling interview transcripts, analyzing qualitative data using the Miles & Huberman model, to writing the initial draft (original draft) of the article. **Mohammad Al Farabi** (Supervisor): Responsible for providing direction on the theoretical structure, conducting supervision, validating the validity of scientific data, as well as checking and editing the written results (review & editing).

7. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known conflicting financial interests or personal relationships that could be construed to influence the work or writing reported in this article.

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9. Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

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