



The Contribution of Islamic Religious Education Teachers to Student Character Development Through Guidance and Counseling Services: A Multi-Site Study in Public Elementary Schools

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Abstract:

Character education has become a central priority in Indonesia's national education system. This multi-site qualitative study aims to describe and compare the contribution of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to student character development through guidance and counseling services at two public elementary schools with different socio-cultural contexts: SDN Ibu Jenab 2 (urban area, Tangerang) and SDN Selagredang (rural area, Cianjur). Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that PAI teachers in both schools play strategic roles as educators, role models, counselors, and motivators. The integration of instructional materials, individual and group counseling, and habituation activities effectively internalizes Islamic character values. However, challenges persist, including limited instructional time, diverse family backgrounds, and insufficient synergy between schools and families. Comparative analysis shows that the urban school faces stronger negative influences from digital gadgets, while the rural school struggles more with limited facilities and parental economic constraints. The study concludes that PAI teachers' contributions are highly significant but depend fundamentally on strengthened collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Recommendations include enhancing PAI teachers' counseling competencies and establishing regular school-family partnership programs tailored to each local context.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Character education has become the main foundation in the formation of a generation of a nation with morals, integrity, and noble personalities (Dian Komalasari et al., 2025). (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, 2003) about the National Education System emphatically emphasizes that education functions to develop abilities and form a dignified character and civilization of the nation, with the aim of developing the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens (Article 3). This mandate emphasizes that national education should not only be oriented to the cognitive aspect, but must be balanced in developing affective aspects (attitudes and character) and psychomotor (skills).

However, the reality on the ground shows that there are serious challenges in maintaining moral and ethical values among the younger generation. Moral degradation phenomena such as bullying (*bullying*), dishonesty, lack of respect, and irresponsible misuse of digital media are increasingly worrying (Hilda et al., 2025). The digital age has significantly affected the behavior, values, and religious practices of primary school children, where increased exposure to digital technology presents risks such as moral decline, individualism, and weakening of religious and social values (Dian Komalasari et al., 2025). This challenge is a tough test for the world of education, especially at the elementary school level, which is a golden age (*golden age*) the formation of children's personalities (ages 6-12 years), in which children are in the stage of imitation and the formation of habits that will be carried over until they become adults (Khodijah & Utama, 2025)

In the context of this moral crisis, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is present as a subject that has a strategic role in strengthening the formation of students' character and morals (Selina et al., 2025). PAI teachers have dual responsibilities, namely as teachers in the classroom as well as supervisors who provide guidance and counseling (BK) services to students (Wahyu Ningsih et al., 2024). BK services are needed because each student has different characters, talents, interests, and personal problems.

Previous literature reviews show that research on the role of PAI teachers in character education has been quite developed, but most of them still focus on one location or have not integrated in-depth aspects of counseling guidance (Selina et al., 2025) found that PAI teachers play a significant role through example, moral teaching, and ongoing mentoring. (Dian Komalasari et al., 2025) revealed that PAI teachers function as moral role models, spiritual facilitators, and emotional mentors. (Hilda et al., 2025) report on the role of PAI teachers as educators, role models, facilitators, motivators, and evaluators. Meanwhile, (Khodijah & Utama, 2025) It shows that the integration of counseling guidance with character education includes curricular approaches, school culture development, and collaborative strategies.

The research gap lies in the lack of studies that specifically examine the contribution of PAI teachers through guidance and counseling services with a multi-site approach at the elementary school level, especially those that compare to the two regions. **The novelty of** this research lies in: (1) the simultaneous integration of the role of PAI teachers as agents of character education and implementers of BK services; (2) the use of multi-site designs in two SDNs with different geographical and socio-cultural characteristics; (3) comparative analysis of supporting and inhibiting factors in both contexts.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to: (1) describe and compare the forms of contribution of PAI teachers in fostering the character of students at SDN Ibu Jenab 2 and SDN Selagredang; (2) analyze the implementation of guidance and counseling services carried out by PAI teachers in both locations; and (3) identify specific supporting and inhibiting factors in each context.



Method (منهج)

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design (*multi-site study*). This design was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon of PAI teachers' contributions in character development in depth in two different contexts, then compare and synthesize the findings to produce more transferable conclusions (*transferability*) compared to a single case study (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). With the two sites, researchers were able to identify common patterns as well as local peculiarities that affect the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services.

This research was carried out in two public elementary schools with *maximum variation sampling* criteria to produce sharp contrast.

SDN Ibu Jenab 2 (Urban) is located in Limbangan Sari, Cianjur. The school has 601 students in 19 groups, an average of 30–36 students per class. There are 27 educators, including 3 PAI teachers, but without professional counselors. Relatively complete facilities: mosque, hall, multimedia room, library, science laboratory, and UKS. Indibizz internet access, 1300 watts of electricity, but clean water from PAM is not enough all the time. The majority of parents earn IDR 1-5 million/month (44.5%). Religious heterogeneity (598 Muslims, 3 non-Muslims). The main challenges: high exposure to gadgets, low parental supervision due to busy work.

SDN Selagredang (Rural) is located in Nagrak, Cianjur. The school has 181 students in 6 groups, an average of 29–36 students per class. There are 10 educators, only 1 PAI teacher who is also an informal counselor. Simple facilities: prayer room (6×2 m), library, 6 classrooms, UKS, and TU room. Indihome internet access, 1300 watts electricity, clean water from the pump is enough all year round. The majority of parents earn IDR 0.5–2 million/month (44.4% at IDR 1–2 million). All students are Muslims. The main challenge: low parental involvement due to economic factors (farmers/farm laborers) and long distances, but supported by Sundanese religious culture and the role of village religious leaders.

Rationale for selection: The two sites contrast in technological access, socio-economic heterogeneity, and environmental support, but have similar ratios of students per class, state status, and Merdeka curriculum. This comparison allows an analysis of how local contexts (urban vs. rural) affect the strategies, effectiveness, and barriers of PAI teachers in character development through guidance and counseling services. The researcher has obtained official permission and full access to the documents as well as the field.

Data Sources and Characteristics of Informants

The primary data sources in this study consisted of 22 informants who were selected purposively and developed through *snowball sampling techniques*. The details: two Islamic Religious Education Teachers (one from each site), two school principals, four homeroom teachers or teachers of other subjects (two per site), ten students in grades 4–6 (five per site), and six parents/guardians of students (three per site). This diversity of informants ensures the acquisition of a holistic perspective, starting from the main actors (PAI teachers), policy

supervisors (school principals), collaborators (other teachers), service recipients (students), to companion partners at home (parents). The secondary data sources include official school documents such as Learning Implementation Plans (RPP), syllabus, counseling notes, parent-teacher liaison books, and school profiles that contain vision-missions and flagship programs.

Sampling Techniques and Data Mining Principles

The determination of informants uses the *snowball sampling* technique started from PAI teachers as key informants. From PAI teachers, the researcher obtained recommendations for the next informant (principal, other teachers, students, parents) who were considered to have in-depth knowledge and availability to be interviewed. This process continues until it reaches the point of data *saturation*, which is when the information obtained from new informants no longer provides a significant addition to existing findings. To comprehensively dig into the data, the researcher applied the principle of 5W+1H (*What, Why, Who, When, Where, How*) in each interview session. This principle allows researchers to not only record the facts, but also understand the reasons behind the action (*why*), the actors involved (*who*), the context of space and time (*where, when*), and the implementation mechanism (*how*). This approach ensures that the data collected is rich, contextual, and able to answer research questions in depth.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is carried out through three complementary techniques. **First**, in-depth interviews were semi-structured with guidelines developed from the research indicators (role of PAI teachers, implementation of BK services, supporting and inhibiting factors). The interview was conducted face-to-face, recorded, and lasted 45–60 minutes per informant. **Second**, participatory observation which includes observation of PAI learning, habituation activities (joint prayer, congregational prayer, mutual cooperation), and daily interaction between PAI teachers and students. Observations were made at least three times per site on different days to capture behavioral variations. **Third**, a documentation study of learning tools (lesson plans, syllabus), counseling records (case books, development reports), and school archives (profiles, liaison books). Documentation functions to verify and complete interview and observation data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis follows an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014) which consists of three flows: data condensation (sorting, coding, and grouping of themes), data presentation (in the form of a comparison matrix between sites and descriptive narratives), and drawing conclusions/verification. The analysis is carried out in stages: first, *within-site analysis* for each site (SDN Ibu Jenab 2 and SDN Selagredang) to understand the internal dynamics of each location. Second, *cross-site analysis* to compare and synthesize the findings from the two sites, so that a general pattern as well as contextual peculiarities is obtained.

Data Validity

The validity of the data is ensured through source triangulation (comparing information from PAI teachers, principals, other teachers, students, and parents) and technical triangulation (matching interview results with observations and documentation). In addition, researchers conducted an extension of participation in the field (at least one month per site) to build trust and detect bias. Finally, *member checking* is carried out by reconfirming findings and interpretations to key informants (especially PAI teachers and school principals) to ensure accuracy and suitability of meaning.

Results (نتائج) & Discussion (مناقشة)

Contribution of PAI Teachers in Character Development (Cross-Site Analysis)

The results showed that PAI teachers at both sites contributed significantly through five key roles, with some contextual differences.

1. Role as Educator and Value Internalizer

In both schools, PAI teachers relate the material to the reality of students' lives in a contextual manner. At SDN Ibu Jenab 2, teachers use contemporary issues such as the impact of gadgets and social media to instill honesty and responsibility. On the other hand, at SDN Selagredang, teachers emphasized the value of local religious Sundanese wisdom: *To love each other, to care for each other, to care for each other* (to love, guide, teach). These findings reinforce the argument (Pratami et al., 2025) that ethnopedagogical contextualization—the adjustment of values to the local culture—reinforces the internalization of character. Thus, the effectiveness of PAI learning does not only depend on methods, but also on the ability of teachers to translate universal values into everyday language and local wisdom that students are familiar with. This context-based approach makes character education more meaningful, easy to understand, and sustainable in student behavior.

"I always associate lessons with real events. For example, when someone cheats, I explain that it violates the mandate. Here, children are easier to understand if the example is close." (GP-SDG, interview, 2025)

2. Role as an Exemplar (*Uswah Hasanah*)

Examples (*uswah hasanah*) proved to be the most determining factor in character building on both sites. PAI teachers consistently show time discipline (arrive 15 minutes early), dress neatly and politely, speak softly, and perform congregational prayers. This real behavior is immediately imitated by students, both at school and at home. A striking difference is found in the social role model. At SDN Selagredang, PAI teachers are also actively involved in community mutual cooperation activities—cleaning irrigation canals, teaching prayers in village mosques, becoming imams to pray in the home environment. This involvement is highly appreciated by parents because it shows that Islamic values are not only taught in the classroom, but also practiced in community life. On the other hand, at SDN Ibu Jenab 2, the role of teachers is more limited to the school environment because of busyness and high mobility. These findings reinforce (Rahimah, 2026) that exemplary approaches to Islamic counseling—which include consistency of behavior in various settings—contribute positively to students' morals. Thus, the effectiveness of the exemplary PAI teacher is largely determined by the breadth and authenticity of his social role in society.

3. Role as a Supervisor (Informal Counselor)

On both sites, PAI teachers function as informal counselors who are the main place for students to vent. The approach used is familial and religious: listening with empathy, inviting istighfar, and praying together. At SDN Ibu Jenab 2, students' problems are more diverse and complex, such as addiction *game online*, cyberbullying (*cyberbullying*), as well as psychological

distress due to parental divorce. On the other hand, at SDN Selagredang, the problems faced tended to be simple: learning difficulties due to limited access to books, minor quarrels between friends, and excessive shyness that hindered active participation. Although the complexity of the problem is different, both sites have the same structural weakness: the absence of certified professional counselors. As a result, the entire burden of counseling—from problem identification, mentoring, case recording, to coordination with parents—falls entirely on PAI teachers. This leads to a very heavy double workload, reduces time for learning preparation, and risks causing emotional exhaustion (*Burnout*). These findings confirm (Khodijah & Utama, 2025) that the absence of professional counselors in elementary schools is a serious obstacle to the effectiveness of integrated counseling guidance.

4. Role as a Motivator

PAI teachers in both schools routinely provide spiritual motivation by associating merit, heaven, and the story of the prophet. However, the local context colors the emphasis on motivation. At SDN Ibu Jenab 2, motivation is directed to ward off the negative influence of gadgets and social media. On the other hand, at SDN Selagredang, motivation is more focused on arousing the spirit of learning and strengthening the sense of togetherness in the midst of limited facilities. This difference shows that the effectiveness of the spiritual motivation of PAI teachers is largely determined by their ability to read the contextual needs of students.

Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services

1. Integrated Guidance in Learning

On both sites, each PAI learning begins with a joint prayer, a short letter reading, and a short *tausiyah*. PAI teachers actively use reflective questions such as, "Does God like your deeds?" to foster intrinsic moral awareness, as well as spiritual rebukes that are non-judgmental but direct students to divine values. The striking difference lies in the dominant challenges faced. At SDN Ibu Jenab 2, PAI teachers are more often confronted with students who are addicted to gadgets and imitate abusive language from digital content. Therefore, spiritual rebukes are explicitly associated with the negative impact of the media, for example: "God does not like it when our mouths speak foul words like in a video game." On the other hand, at SDN Selagredang, the main obstacle is fundamental: many students still have difficulty reading the Qur'an correctly and have low learning motivation due to their parents' economic limitations (e.g. fatigue in helping their parents in the rice fields). As a result, spiritual rebukes are more directed at patience in learning and the virtue of seeking knowledge even in difficulties. Thus, the local context determines the form and focus of integrated guidance, but the basic principle—making religion the consciousness of the heart—remains the same.

2. Individual and Group Counseling

The two PAI teachers provide counseling time outside of class hours, both during breaks and after school, to provide a private space for students who experience problems. The approach used is structured but humane: actively listening without judgment, exploring the root cause of the problem, providing solutions based on religious values (e.g. the encouragement to forgive or *istighfar*), and involving parents if necessary to ensure sustainable treatment. The types of cases that arise reflect the social context of each site. At SDN Ibu Jenab 2, the dominant problems include the habit of lying, taking friends' belongings without permission, and aggressive behavior imitated from violent spectacles on gadgets. On the other hand, at SDN Selagredang,

the cases that are often faced are simpler but no less important: laziness in studying, indiscipline in doing homework, and low confidence due to limited family support. This difference confirms that counselling services must be contextualized.

"I have dealt with students who were quiet and often cried. It turned out that his parents had just divorced. I invited istighfar and prayed, then coordinated with the homeroom teacher and the student's mother. Alhamdulillah, now he is starting to be cheerful." (GP-IJ, interview, 2025)

3. Service through Habituation Activities

Habituation activities in both schools include joint prayer, congregational Duha and Zuhur prayers, greeting culture, mutual cooperation, and reading the Qur'an. At SDN Selagredang, this activity took place more intensively because it was supported by the religious culture of the community and the active role of village religious leaders. On the other hand, at SDN Ibu Jenab 2, the challenges faced are much greater: many students are used to using gadgets and parents are generally busy working, so habituation at school has to be extra hard to instill character values.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors (Comparative Analysis)

The following table summarizes the supporting and inhibiting factors at both sites:

Factors	SDN Ibu Jenab 2	SDN Selagredang
Internal Support	Teachers' commitment is very high (10/10); 18 years of teaching experience; Creativity of Methods (Wisdom Message Boxes, Charity Trail Projects).	Commitment of higher education (9/10); 12 years of experience; Skills of a Sundanese culture-based approach to family.
External Support	Principal support (SK, allocation of 2 hours of BK/week); good teacher cooperation; communication with parents via WA group.	Principal support (similar policy); support of religious leaders and village committees; natural religious environment.
Internal Inhibitors	Heavy teaching load (24 hours/week); limitations in crisis counseling competence; fatigue.	The teaching load is also dense; Lack of Understanding of Psychological Assessment; Lack of formal training.
External Inhibitors	The influence of gadgets and social media is very strong (the impact is seen almost every day); parents are busy working; The counseling room is not private.	Parents' economic condition is low (it is difficult to attend school); limited internet access (slow communication); lack of adequate means of worship; There is no counseling room yet.

The most crucial inhibiting factor at SDN Ibu Jenab 2 is exposure to unaccompanied gadgets, while at SDN Selagredang is the low involvement of parents due to economic factors and distance. Both sites do not have professional counselors, so PAI teachers concurrently have a double burden of counseling.

Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study provide empirical confirmation of the Islamic education theory of the formation of *human perfection* (human beings with noble character) as well as enriching the integrative framework between character education, counseling guidance, and Islamic religious education at the elementary school level. The results of the cross-site analysis show that **The local context greatly influences the strategy and effectiveness of character development**. In urban areas, the main challenges are digitalization and individualism; The main challenge is limited access and socio-economic conditions. However, the core of success remains the same: **Golden Triangle Synergy** (school, family, community) that go hand in hand and reinforce each other (Selina et al., 2025).

The study also confirms that PAI teachers serve as an "organic bridge" between religious values and students' real behaviors, but their effectiveness is highly dependent on systemic support: principal's policies, ongoing training, and consistent parental involvement.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

Based on the results of multi-site research at SDN Ibu Jenab 2 and SDN Selagredang, it can be concluded that the contribution of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in fostering the character of students through guidance and counseling services is very significant and strategic. This contribution is realized through the dual role of value educators, role models (*uswah hasanah*), spiritual motivators, and informal counselors who use family and religious approaches.

The implementation of guidance and counseling services at both sites is carried out through integration in learning (tausiyah, prayer, reflective questions), individual and group counseling, as well as daily habituation activities (congregational prayers, mutual cooperation, reading the Qur'an). This approach has been shown to be effective in turning negative behaviors into positives, but with different intensities and focuses according to the local context.

The main supporting factors at both sites are teacher commitment, principal support, and cooperation between teachers. The biggest inhibiting factors are the discontinuity of values between school and family, environmental influences (urban gadgets), economy, limited learning time, and the absence of professional counselors. The success of character development cannot be attributed only to PAI teachers, but is highly dependent on programmatic cooperation between schools, families, and communities that are tailored to the characteristics of each context.

Acknowledgments (شكر وتقدير)

1. **For PAI Teachers:** Improve the competence of counseling guidance through formal training (crisis counseling, simple psychological assessment) and continue to develop contextual creative methods
2. **For school principals:** Strengthen cooperation with parents through *flexible parenting class* programs (in urban areas it can be online, in rural areas it can be meeting at night after harvest). Provide a private counseling room and schedule BK services regularly.
3. **For the Education Office:** Hold Islamic value-based counseling guidance training for PAI teachers in all elementary schools, as well as facilitate assistance programs for worship facilities and character assistance books for schools in disadvantaged areas.

4. **For the Next Researcher:** Conduct classroom action research (PTK) to test the effectiveness of the PAI integrated counseling guidance model in each context, as well as longitudinal research to measure the sustainability of students' character up to the junior high school level.



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