

## Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Strengthening Students' Religious Character and Soft Skills at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping the religious environment of madrasahs and strengthening students' character. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed through data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that PAI teachers' professionalism is evident in discipline, example, consistency in guiding religious activities, and active involvement in building the madrasah's religious culture. Religious programs such as Qur'an tadarus, congregational prayers, and Friday alms are effective habituation media in instilling religious values, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and social concern in students. Madrasah policy support, parental involvement, and teacher motivation are supporting factors, while limited facilities, administrative burden, and uneven student discipline are inhibiting factors. This study confirms that the professionalism of PAI teachers is not only about teaching, but also about guiding, setting an example, and sustainably advancing religious culture. Thus, the formation of students' religious character requires synergy between teachers, madrasahs, families, and a consistent religious culture.

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### Introduction

The current trend of modernization and globalization has presented serious challenges for the world of education, particularly moral deterioration, rising individualism, weakening social concerns, and the erosion of students' religious identities. This condition requires educational institutions to be not only oriented towards academic achievement, but also towards the formation of character, spirituality, discipline, responsibility, and social skills of students (Herlina et al., 2024; Saepudin, 2022). In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic position because it not only functions as a medium for the transfer of religious knowledge, but also as a means of internalizing spiritual, moral, and social values that shape the personality of students as a whole (Amin, 2025). Therefore, PAI learning should be directed toward strengthening religious character while building students' soft skills, such as discipline, empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and concern for others.

The role of PAI teachers is very important in this process. PAI teachers are not only tasked with delivering teaching materials, but also act as moral role models, spiritual guides, agents

of value transformation, and drivers of religious culture in the madrasah environment. The professionalism of PAI teachers is reflected in their ability to plan lessons, manage classes, integrate Islamic values into learning activities, provide examples, and familiarize students with consistent religious practices (Karimah, 2025). In the madrasah environment, the professionalism of PAI teachers is also evident in their active involvement in fostering a religious climate, including greetings, joint prayers, Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, socio-religious activities, and the moral development of students in daily life.

Some previous research has shown that the professional identity of PAI teachers and religious values have a great influence on learning practices. Succarie (2024) found that professional education rooted in Islamic identity can strengthen teachers' professionalism grounded in Islamic values. In line with that, Nelson (2023) It shows that teachers' religious beliefs affect teaching practices, pedagogical relationships, and the way they build classroom atmosphere. In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Abdullah (2023) Prove that the professionalism of PAI teachers, supported by motivation, spiritual habituation, reading the Qur'an, congregational prayers, and social activities, contributes to the formation of students' religious character. Meanwhile, Solikah (2020) emphasized that although the professionalism of PAI teachers in the planning and implementation of learning has gone quite well, strengthening through example, habituation, and integration of religious extracurricular activities still needs to be developed.

However, most studies still focus more on aspects of teachers' professional identities, learning strategies, or teaching methods in isolation. Studies that specifically link the professionalism of PAI teachers with the strengthening of religious character and soft skills of students in madrasah culture are still relatively limited. In fact, the formation of religious character cannot be achieved solely through classroom learning; it also requires the example of teachers, religious habits, a religious school climate, and a supportive madrasah organizational culture. This gap is an important basis for conducting research at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the professionalism of PAI teachers in strengthening students' religious character and soft skills at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari. This study also aims to identify the factors that support and hinder the professionalism of PAI teachers in building religious culture in madrasas, and to analyze their implications for the formation of students' character, especially in the areas of discipline, empathy, responsibility, and social concern. Thus, this research not only places PAI teachers as teachers, but also as the main actors in the formation of religious culture and the strengthening of students' social competence.

The formulation of the problem in this study is: first, how is professionalism among PAI teachers implemented to strengthen students' religious character and soft skills at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari? Second, what are the supporting and inhibiting factors for the professionalism of PAI teachers in building religious culture in madrasas? Third, what are the implications of the professionalism of PAI teachers on the formation of religious character, discipline, empathy, responsibility, and social concern of students?

This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of Islamic pedagogy regarding the professionalism of PAI teachers in relation to the formation of religious culture and the strengthening of students' soft skills. This research also relates teacher professionalism, for example, religious habituation, and character formation, with Lickona's theory of character education, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, and Bandura's theory of social example. In practice, this research is expected to provide recommendations for madrasas, teachers, and policymakers on developing programs to improve the professionalism of PAI teachers, designing applicable religious practices, and strengthening the synergy between madrasas and families in shaping students' religious character. Thus, this research is highly relevant to the development of Islamic education, which not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect but also shapes learners' religious personality, social

skills, and moral responsibility.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand in depth the professional practices of PAI teachers, students' involvement in religious activities, and the religious culture that develops in madrasas. The design of the case study is used to examine phenomena in a contextual, holistic, and in-depth manner according to the reality that occurs in the field (Creswell, J.W., & Poth, 2020; John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2023). Through this design, the research not only describes teachers' instructional practices but also examines how examples, habituation, and social interaction in madrasas contribute to the formation of students' religious character and soft skills.

The research subjects consisted of PAI teachers, madrasah heads, and students of MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari. Informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of informants based on their direct involvement in PAI learning and religious activities in madrasas. PAI teachers are chosen because they play a major role in religious learning and development; madrasah heads are chosen because they understand the madrasah's religious policies and culture; and students are chosen because they are parties who directly experience the process of religious character development. Purposive selection of informants allows researchers to obtain relevant, in-depth data, and in accordance with the research focus (Flick, 2022; Moleong, 2020).

Research data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with PAI teachers, madrasah heads, and students to explore professionalism, the integration of Islamic values into learning, the implementation of religious activities, and their impact on students' discipline, empathy, responsibility, and social concern. Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner with open-ended questions so that informants can explain their experiences, views, and practices more freely and in depth. This technique is relevant to use in qualitative research because it can reveal subjective experiences and meanings given by informants to a phenomenon (John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2023; Motulsky, 2021).

Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe PAI learning activities, teacher-student interactions, teacher examples, and student involvement in madrasah religious activities. Participatory observation was chosen because it allows researchers to understand behavior, social interaction, and natural atmosphere in the context of students' daily lives in madrasas (Ayton, 2023; Creswell, J.W., & Poth, 2020). Documentation is used to complete interview and observation data by studying activity photos, religious habituation schedules, records of madrasah activities, program reports, and other relevant documents. The use of documents in qualitative research is important because it can reinforce, compare, and verify data obtained through interviews and observations (Busetto et al., 2020; Morgan, 2022). The research instruments include interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists compiled based on indicators of PAI teachers' professionalism, madrasah religious culture, students' religious character, and supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of religious programs.

The validity of the data in this study was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, time triangulation, and *member checking*. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from PAI teachers, madrasah heads, and students, while technical triangulation was achieved by matching the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Time triangulation is done by collecting data at different times to see the consistency of information. The three forms of triangulation are used to strengthen the credibility of the findings by examining the suitability of data from various sources, methods, and data collection contexts (Ahmed, 2024; Stahl & King, 2020). In addition, *member checking* is carried out by presenting the interview summary to the informant to ensure the data align

with their intentions, experiences, and perspectives. This process is important to ensure that the data is not only administratively accurate but also meaningfully accurate according to the informant's experience (Lloyd & Gifford, 2024; McKim, 2023).

The data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing. (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014; Miles et al., 2020). In the data condensation stage, the researcher selects, simplifies, and groups important data from interviews, observations, and documentation results. At the data presentation stage, the categorized information is presented in a descriptive narrative and a thematic matrix to facilitate interpretation. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn in stages during the research process by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings related to the professionalism of PAI teachers, the religious culture of the madrasah, and the strengthening of religious character and soft skills of students.

This research also pays attention to the ethical principles of research. Before data collection, informants are informed of the research's purpose, data collection procedures, participants' rights, and confidentiality guarantees. The informant's consent is obtained voluntarily. The identity of the informant is disguised to maintain privacy, and all data is used only for academic purposes. This ethical principle is important in qualitative educational research because it emphasizes participant consent, respect for the rights of informants, data confidentiality, and honesty in the presentation of research results (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick, 2022).

## Results and Discussion

### Result

#### 1. Professionalism of PAI Teachers in Shaping the Madrasah Religious Environment

The results of the study show that the professionalism of PAI teachers at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari is evident in discipline, example-setting, consistency in guiding religious activities, and active involvement in building the madrasah's religious culture. PAI teachers not only deliver subject matter but also serve as role models who guide students through real practice. The example of teachers can be seen in their habit of attending early, leading prayers, reminding students to maintain worship, and accompanying the madrasah's religious activities.

One of the students explained:

"Ustadz usually comes earlier than us, leads prayers before studying, and always reminds us to pray diligently. If he invites us, we feel we have to join." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

This statement shows that the discipline of PAI teachers has a direct influence on student behavior. When teachers serve as role models, students feel encouraged to adopt the good habits they exemplify. Other students also shared similar experiences:

"PAI teachers not only teach lessons, but also guide us to get used to discipline and maintain worship. If he sets an example, we will be more enthusiastic." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

The head of the madrasah reinforced the findings by emphasizing that the example of PAI teachers is a reference for students' behavior in daily life in the madrasah:

"The example of PAI teachers is a reference for daily student behavior, both in the classroom and in religious activities. What the teacher does will usually be followed by the students." (*Interview with the head of the madrasah, February 12, 2025*).

The results of the observation showed that PAI teachers were present early, welcomed students with greetings, led prayers before learning, and closed learning activities with prayers. The teacher also reminded students to perform Dzuhur prayers in congregation and

to accompany them to the prayer room. Madrasah documentation shows that PAI teachers routinely lead the morning recitation of the Qur'an, coordinate congregational prayers, and are actively involved in religious activities such as commemorating the Prophet's Birthday, Isra Mikraj, and Ramadan.

The documentation records of the madrasah state:

"Every morning before the lesson starts, PAI teachers lead the recitation of the Qur'an with the students. This activity has become a school tradition that makes the atmosphere more religious." (*Documentation of madrasah activities, 2025*).

Thus, the professionalism of PAI teachers at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari is manifested through their role as educators, role models, guides, and movers of religious culture. Teacher discipline, exemplary worship, and active involvement in religious activities are important factors in building a religious environment that students accept and exemplify.

## 2. Implementation of Religious Programs in Madrasah

The implementation of religious programs is a tangible manifestation of PAI teachers' professionalism in building a madrasah environment with Islamic nuances. Religious programs are carried out in a structured and sustainable manner through Qur'an tadarus activities every morning, congregational Dhuha and Dzuhur prayers, and Friday alms. This program is not only intended to improve religious understanding but also to foster students' habits, discipline, responsibility, and social care.

One of the students said that morning tadarus has become part of the daily routine at the madrasah:

"Every morning we read the Qur'an together before the lesson started. It was a bit heavy at first, but now it's become a habit. It feels strange if you don't follow the tadarus." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

The statement shows that tadarus activities are not only an obligation of the school, but have formed religious habits in students. This activity trains discipline, readiness to learn, and love for the Qur'an. Other students also explained that congregational prayers help them to carry out worship more orderly:

"At school, we rarely leave congregational prayers. The teachers are supervising, so we are used to doing it together." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

The head of the madrasah emphasized that the consistency of the implementation of religious programs is an important factor in building a religious culture:

"From year to year, student participation in religious programs is getting better. If in the past only some students participated in tadarus, now almost all are involved. We make this program a habit so that children's religious character is formed." (*Interview with the head of the madrasah, February 12, 2025*).

The observations showed that in the morning, most students brought the mushaf, sat in groups, and read the Qur'an before learning began. During Dhuha and Dzuhur, students are directed to the prayer room to perform congregational prayers under the guidance of PAI teachers. Most students participated in the activity in an orderly manner, though some were late or left the prayer room before it ended.

Another religious program is Friday alms. This activity is carried out by students bringing alms according to their respective abilities. The results of the alms are managed by PAI teachers, together with student administrators, to help students in need and support madrasah social activities. One of the students revealed:

"Every Friday we bring alms according to our ability. From there I learned to share. Even if it's small, if you gather it together, it can be a lot and help friends in need." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

The PAI teacher explained that Friday alms are not only aimed at raising funds, but also at building students' empathy from an early age:

"We get used to children bringing alms. The amount is not determined; the important thing is that there is an intention. We distribute the proceeds to underprivileged friends and school social activities." (*Interview with PAI teachers, February 12, 2025*).

The observation showed that on Friday morning, the students collected alms in an orderly manner. PAI teachers and student administrators manage the collection process. The atmosphere of the activity was warm and participatory, and it showed the active involvement of students. Thus, the implementation of religious programs at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari is quite effective. Tadarus Al-Qur'an forms discipline and love for the holy book, congregational prayers habituate order and togetherness, while Friday alms strengthen empathy and social concern.

### 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of PAI Teacher Professionalism

The professionalism of PAI teachers in shaping the religious environment is influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors. The main supporting factor is the existence of a madrasah policy that provides space for the implementation of religious habits. Tadarus activities before learning, congregational prayers, and Friday alms have become part of the rules and culture of madrasahs. This policy helps PAI teachers in guiding students because religious activities have a clear institutional basis.

The PAI teacher explained:

"Madrasahs have clear rules about religious habits, such as tadarus before lessons and congregational prayers. With this policy, it is easier for us as teachers to guide students because there are official rules that strengthen our steps." (*Interview with PAI teachers, February 12, 2025*).

In addition to madrasah policies, parental support is also an important factor. The head of the madrasah said:

"Many parents support madrasah activities by continuing their habituation at home. Children are asked to continue to pray five times, so that what is instilled in the madrasah can continue at home." (*Interview with the head of the madrasah, February 12, 2025*).

Teachers' personal motivation is also a factor that strengthens PAI teachers' professionalism. Teachers try to participate in training or self-development activities to improve the quality of learning and students' character development. One of the teachers said:

"I always try to take part in training or workshops even though the time is limited. It's important so that I can teach better and be a role model for students." (*Interview with PAI teachers, February 12, 2025*).

However, the study also found several inhibiting factors. Observations show that the madrasah prayer room has not been able to accommodate all students at the same time, so congregational prayers are sometimes conducted alternately. In addition, the administrative burden is also a challenge for PAI teachers because it can reduce the time for assistance with religious activities. One of the teachers explained:

"Sometimes we take care of the administration too much. Meanwhile, the time to accompany students in religious activities has decreased." (*Interview with PAI teachers, February 12, 2025*).

Another inhibiting factor is the discipline of a small number of students who are not consistent. Documentation of disciplinary records shows that some students are still late for tadarus or leave the mushala before the congregational prayer is over. Thus, the professionalism of PAI teachers is supported by madrasah policies, parental involvement, and teacher motivation. However, it still faces obstacles, including limited facilities, administrative burdens, and uneven student discipline.

#### 4. The Impact of PAI Teacher Professionalism on the Formation of Students' Character

The professionalism of PAI teachers has a positive impact on the formation of students' religious character and soft skills. This impact can be seen in increasing discipline, togetherness, responsibility, and social concern. Through consistent example and habituation, students begin to show behavioral changes, both in the madrasah environment and at home.

One of the students said:

"If in the madrasah I am used to tadarus and congregational prayers, at home I am more diligent in praying. Parents are also happy because I can remind my younger siblings to join in the prayer." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

The statement shows that the religious values that are ingrained in madrasahs do not remain confined to the school environment but are also carried over into family life. Friday alms activities also affect the development of empathy and social concern. Students submitted:

"Every Friday we bring alms according to our ability. From there I learned to share. Even if it's small, if you gather it together, it can be a lot and help friends in need." (*Interview with students, February 12, 2025*).

The results of the observation show that congregational worship activities form an attitude of discipline and cooperation. Students enter the prayer room in an orderly manner, line up neatly, and follow the teacher's instructions. This activity provides a collective experience that accustoms students to respecting time, obeying rules, and maintaining togetherness. The madrasah documentation also shows students' active involvement in morning tadarus, congregational prayers, and Friday alms.

Thus, the professionalism of PAI teachers has a real effect on students' character development at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari. The examples, mentoring, and religious habituation carried out by PAI teachers can build discipline, togetherness, empathy, responsibility, and social concern. These findings suggest that the success of religious education is not determined solely by classroom learning, but also by the religious culture consistently built into madrasah life.

**Table 1. Research Findings on PAI Teacher Professionalism in Strengthening Students' Religious Character and Soft Skills**

Aspect Examined	Research Findings
Professionalism of PAI Teachers	PAI teachers demonstrate professionalism through discipline, exemplary behavior, religious guidance, and active involvement in madrasah religious activities.
Religious Programs	Religious programs are implemented through regular, structured morning Qur'an recitation, Dhuha prayer, congregational Zuhr prayer, and Friday charity.
Supporting Factors	Madrasah policy support, parental involvement, and teachers' motivation are the main factors that strengthen PAI teachers' professionalism.
Inhibiting Factors	Limited worship facilities, teachers' administrative workload, and uneven student discipline become obstacles to the implementation of religious programs.
Impact on Students	PAI teacher professionalism contributes to the development of students' religious character, discipline, responsibility, togetherness, empathy, and social awareness.

#### Discussion

The professionalism of PAI teachers in shaping the madrasah's religious environment demonstrates that the success of religious education is not determined solely by mastery of teaching materials, but also by teachers' ability to present religious values in students' daily practice. PAI teachers serve as learning managers, supervisors of religious activities, and role

models who connect religious materials with students' real experiences in madrasas (Putkonen et al., 2025). For example, habituation to worship and assistance in religious activities are important parts of teacher professionalism because, through this process, students learn to understand religion not only as knowledge but as a value practiced. These findings are reinforced by the view that a school climate based on religious values can support the formation of moral identity, positive expectations, and character development of students (Aldridge et al., 2024). In this study, the professionalism of PAI teachers appears to be a combination of pedagogical competence, moral exemplarity, and active involvement in building the madrasah's religious culture.

The role of the PAI teacher was then seen in the habituation of religious activities that took place regularly in the madrasah environment. It is not enough to convey character education only through classroom learning; it must be instilled through a school culture that is directed, consistent, and involves all madrasah residents. Programs such as tadarus Al-Qur'an, congregational prayers, and Friday alms are means of character formation because they train in discipline, responsibility, social care, and student involvement in daily religious practices. Effective character education requires an institutional design that is intentionally built through school culture, leadership, teacher involvement, and student participation on an ongoing basis (Dabdoub et al., 2024; Marnayana et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic education, religious habits play an important role in instilling the values of discipline, responsibility, social concern, and noble morals in students through religious practices that are carried out consistently (Kropfreiter et al., 2024; Nursobah et al., 2025). Therefore, religious habituation in madrasahs can be understood as a cultural practice that strengthens students' character through example, repetition, collective involvement, and institutional support.

The implications of the findings of this study show that the professionalism of PAI teachers needs to be understood more broadly, not only as the ability to teach and fulfill the administration of learning, but also as the ability to guide, set an example, build worship discipline, and move the religious culture of the madrasah. Madrasahs need to position PAI teachers as key actors in shaping a religious environment through policy support, adequate worship facilities, strengthened religious programs, and the involvement of all madrasah residents. Religious programs such as Qur'anic tadarus, congregational prayers, and Friday alms are not enough to be considered routine; they need to be directed as a medium for character building that is carried out consistently, consistently, and continuously. Thus, the formation of students' religious character will be more effective if PAI teachers' professionalism is supported by madrasah culture, institutional leadership, the participation of other teachers, and parents' involvement in maintaining religious habits in the family environment.

The limitation of this study lies in its limited geographic scope, focusing on only one madrasah, so the findings cannot be generalized to all madrasahs with different social backgrounds, facilities, leadership, and institutional cultures. In addition, this study uses a qualitative approach through interviews, observations, and documentation, so that it has not quantitatively measured the level of influence of PAI teachers' professionalism on changes in students' character. Another limitation is the lack of long-term observation to assess the sustainability of the impact of religious habituation on students' lives outside the madrasah. This limitation needs to be considered because character formation is influenced by many factors, including school culture, teacher-student relationships, family, peers, and the broader social environment.

Given these limitations, further research is recommended using a multisite design involving several madrasahs to provide a broader comparison of PAI teachers' professionalism and the formation of a religious environment. Follow-up research can also use a longitudinal approach to examine the sustainability of religious habituation's influence on student behavior over the long term. In addition, a mixed-methods approach can be used to measure the relationships among teacher example, religious program intensity, parental support, and

student character formation in a more rigorous way. In practice, madrasas are recommended to strengthen worship facilities, reduce the administrative burden on PAI teachers that are not directly related to student development, involve non-PAI teachers in strengthening religious culture, and build more systematic communication with parents so that religious habits in madrasas can continue in family life.

## Conclusion

The professionalism of PAI teachers plays a central role in shaping the religious environment at MTs Darussalam Sumedang Sari and in strengthening students' religious character and soft skills. The study's findings show that PAI teachers' professionalism is reflected in discipline, example, guidance in religious activities, and active involvement in the madrasah's religious culture. In this context, PAI teachers not only function as conveyors of teaching materials but also as role models and drivers of religious values in madrasah life.

The implementation of religious programs such as Qur'anic tadarus, Dhuha prayers, congregational Zuhur prayers, and Friday alms has been proven to support the formation of discipline, responsibility, togetherness, empathy, and social concern in students. This finding answers the research's purpose: strengthening religious character does not occur solely through classroom learning but also through religious habituation carried out consistently within madrasah culture. This study also found that madrasah policies, parental support, and teacher motivation were supporting factors, while limited facilities, teacher administrative burden, and discipline of some students were inhibiting factors. Overall, the results of the study confirm that the professionalism of PAI teachers supported by institutional culture and religious habits contributes significantly to the formation of religious character and *soft skills* of students.

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