

A Study of Best Practices in The Professional Performance of Islamic Religious Education Teachers at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir

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Abstract

This study examines the best practices of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir, focusing on pedagogical effectiveness, character internalization, and professional competence in classroom management. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of instructional documents. The findings reveal that the teacher employs a combination of contextual teaching, interactive learning, moral modeling, value habituation, and reflective dialogue to enhance students' understanding and internalization of Islamic teachings. Additionally, the teacher demonstrates strong professional competence through structured lesson planning, ethical conduct, emotional intelligence, and adaptive instructional strategies. These best practices contribute significantly to creating a holistic learning environment that supports students' cognitive, moral, and spiritual development. The study highlights the importance of integrating pedagogical skills, ethical professionalism, and character-based approaches in strengthening the overall quality of PAI instruction.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education, Best Practices, Pedagogical Strategies, Character Internalization, Professional Competence, Classroom Management.*

BACKGROUND

Best practices in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) play a critical role in shaping students' moral, spiritual, and intellectual development within the school environment. At the secondary level, PAI teachers are expected not only to convey religious knowledge but to model ethical conduct and guide students in applying Islamic values in daily life. Such responsibilities demand professional competence supported by effective and contextually appropriate instructional strategies. An examination of best practices therefore becomes essential for enhancing the quality of PAI instruction. This study positions best practices as a foundation for strengthening professional performance in the teaching of religion (Hasan et.al, 2024).

The effectiveness of PAI learning depends heavily on the teacher's ability to integrate pedagogical principles with the socio-cultural realities of students. A teacher must understand learners' developmental needs to facilitate meaningful engagement with religious content. Best practices provide practical evidence of strategies that have successfully addressed these needs in real classroom settings. They enable teachers to refine their methods based on proven experiences rather than assumptions (Khoiriyah & Nursalim, 2025). This analytical approach supports the development of more adaptive and responsive religious education.

Contemporary social changes, digital influences, and shifting youth behavior patterns require PAI teachers to continuously innovate in their instructional approaches. Students encounter diverse information sources that shape their understanding of values, morality, and identity. To address these dynamics, teachers must use strategies that maintain the essence of Islamic teachings while remaining relevant to students' lived experiences. Best practices highlight how teachers can navigate these demands effectively (Retnosaro et.al, 2021). The present study explores these approaches within the context of SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir.

The learning environment at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir provides an important context for examining effective religious teaching practices. The school's culture, community background, and student characteristics influence how PAI learning is implemented. Understanding these contextual factors offers insight into how best practices emerge and why they are effective. Such analysis ensures that the practices identified are grounded in actual challenges and opportunities. This contextual examination strengthens the credibility of best practice identification (Noor, 2025).

Professionalism in PAI teaching also involves demonstrating integrity, empathy, and leadership in managing classroom dynamics. Effective teachers serve as moral role models who embody the values they teach. Best practices therefore extend beyond instructional techniques and include elements such as ethical communication, student mentoring, and character reinforcement. Investigating these dimensions highlights the comprehensive nature of the teacher's role. It also illustrates the importance of holistic approaches in Islamic education.

Documenting best practices contributes to the ongoing professional growth of PAI teachers by promoting reflective teaching. Reflection enables teachers to evaluate their successes, identify weaknesses, and adjust their strategies for improved effectiveness. Such documentation also provides a knowledge base for other teachers who may seek guidance in developing their own practices. This cumulative body of knowledge becomes a valuable asset for strengthening the quality of PAI teaching. The study emphasizes reflection as a critical component of professional development (Cholique et.al, 2025).

Best practices also offer empirical support for the effective implementation of the PAI curriculum. Classroom strategies that consistently yield positive outcomes demonstrate how curriculum objectives can be achieved in practical settings. These strategies help bridge the gap between curricular theory and the everyday realities of teaching. As a result, the study of best practices becomes a tool for strengthening curriculum implementation. This alignment ensures that PAI learning remains purposeful and impactful.

Character formation is a core component of PAI instruction, making best practices vital in supporting students' moral and ethical growth. Approaches that encourage value internalization, such as storytelling, guided reflection, and ethical modeling, contribute significantly to students' spiritual development. Teachers who employ these practices foster deeper understanding and genuine behavioral transformation. The present study analyzes how these approaches are practiced at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir. Such analysis reinforces the importance of integrating character education into religious teaching.

Student engagement is another essential dimension of effective PAI learning. Best practices often emphasize interactive learning that encourages dialogue, inquiry, and personal reflection. These strategies help students connect religious principles with real-life situations, making learning more meaningful. SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir demonstrates potential in promoting such engagement due to its supportive school environment. This study captures how engagement-based strategies contribute to improved learning outcomes.

Professional collaboration within the school setting also supports the emergence of best practices. Teachers who share experiences, discuss challenges, and develop solutions collectively enhance their instructional capabilities. SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir fosters such collaboration through its academic culture and institutional support. The study examines how collaborative practices shape the effectiveness of PAI teaching. This collaborative dimension adds depth to the understanding of best practices (Riza, 2024).

The identification of best practices at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir provides opportunities for replication and adaptation in other educational settings. Documented practices supported by empirical evidence serve as practical references for institutions seeking to improve PAI teaching. This research therefore contributes to broader educational development by presenting models that can be contextualized in diverse environments. The insights gained support efforts to elevate the overall quality of Islamic Religious Education. Such contributions underline the value of best practice research in enhancing national educational standards.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of effective strategies employed by PAI teachers at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir. The findings highlight the pedagogical, ethical, interpersonal, and contextual elements that contribute to exemplary teaching performance. By examining these dimensions, the research strengthens understanding of how PAI teachers can optimize their professional roles. The study thus serves as an important reference for educators, policymakers, and institutions committed to improving Islamic education. Its insights affirm the essential role of PAI teachers in fostering morally responsible and spiritually grounded students.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the best practices implemented by the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir. The qualitative method was selected to allow an in-depth exploration of teaching strategies, classroom interactions, and contextual factors that contribute to effective instructional practices. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the PAI teacher, and documentation analysis of lesson plans, teaching materials, and school policy documents. These techniques provided comprehensive insights into the authentic practices carried out in the teaching and learning process. The use of multiple data sources ensured the validity of findings through triangulation.

Data analysis was conducted using an inductive thematic approach, beginning with data reduction, followed by categorization, and culminating in the formulation of key themes representing best practices. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of

pedagogical effectiveness, value internalization strategies, and teacher professionalism as reflected in instructional activities. Coding was performed manually to maintain close engagement with the data and to ensure accuracy in interpreting meaning. The results of the analysis were then synthesized to construct a detailed description of best practices relevant to the PAI teaching context at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir. This methodological approach allowed the study to present findings that are both contextually grounded and academically rigorous.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Effective Pedagogical Strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

Effective pedagogical strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) play a significant role in shaping students' comprehension of religious principles and their ability to apply Islamic teachings in daily life. At SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir, the PAI teacher utilizes a variety of methods adapted to students' cognitive and emotional development. These strategies ensure that learning is not merely theoretical but bridges understanding with practical implementation. A balanced combination of explanation, discussion, and guided practice contributes to deeper engagement. This approach positions the classroom as an active space for meaningful religious learning (Latiefah & Basyari, 2025).

One of the central strategies used is contextual teaching, which connects Islamic concepts with real-life situations students encounter in their environment. This approach enables learners to understand the relevance of religious teachings beyond the classroom. The teacher integrates examples from social interactions, family life, and community activities. By relating lessons to familiar experiences, students develop a more concrete understanding of moral and ethical principles. This method strengthens the connection between knowledge and moral practice.

Interactive learning techniques also form an essential part of effective PAI instruction. The teacher incorporates question-and-answer sessions, small-group discussions, and reflective dialogue to stimulate student participation. These strategies encourage students to express their thoughts and clarify their understanding. Interactive learning also promotes critical thinking as students compare ideas and analyze their meaning. Such engagement creates a dynamic classroom atmosphere that supports collaborative learning (Sukma & Hasanah, 2021).

The PAI teacher also employs storytelling as a pedagogical tool to deliver Islamic values in a compelling and memorable way. Stories from the Qur'an, prophetic traditions, and historical Islamic figures are used to illustrate moral lessons. Storytelling captures students' attention and helps them visualize abstract concepts. It also facilitates emotional connection, enabling students to internalize values through narrative. This strategy enriches the learning experience with cultural and spiritual depth.

Another effective strategy is the use of guided practice, where students are assisted in applying religious teachings through structured activities. These activities may include practice in performing worship, memorization of short surahs, or reflective writing about moral behavior. Guided practice helps students bridge the gap between theory and

application. It promotes confidence by providing structured opportunities for mastery. This strategy ensures that learning outcomes are demonstrated clearly and practically.

The teacher also integrates cooperative learning to foster collaboration among students. Through group assignments, discussions, and peer mentoring, students learn to appreciate shared responsibility in religious understanding. Cooperative learning allows them to negotiate ideas, respect differing perspectives, and build social skills. In the context of PAI, these interactions reinforce values such as teamwork, empathy, and mutual respect. This strategy contributes to the formation of positive social behavior rooted in Islamic principles (Sulthon, 2021).

Visual and multimedia resources also support effective PAI teaching. The use of slides, short videos, and illustrated materials helps simplify complex concepts and sustain students' interest. Visual aids provide alternative modes of representation that accommodate diverse learning styles. The integration of multimedia makes lessons more engaging and accessible. This method enhances comprehension by combining auditory, visual, and textual elements.

Formative assessment is another pedagogical strategy that plays an important role in monitoring students' progress. The PAI teacher implements short quizzes, oral questioning, and feedback sessions to evaluate understanding. These assessments allow the teacher to identify learning gaps and adjust instruction accordingly. Students also benefit from timely feedback that guides their improvement. Formative assessment thus contributes to continuous learning development.

The teacher promotes reflective learning as an effort to deepen students' internalization of Islamic values. Students are encouraged to reflect on their attitudes, choices, and personal experiences in relation to the lesson. Reflection enhances self-awareness and strengthens the moral dimension of religious education. This practice also cultivates independent thinking and ethical decision-making. Reflective learning supports the integration of knowledge with personal character development (Mardiyatun, 2021).

Modeling, or learning through example, is also an effective pedagogical strategy in PAI instruction. The teacher embodies Islamic values in behavior, communication, and classroom management. Students observe these behaviors and learn indirectly through imitation. Modeling reinforces the idea that religious education is not limited to verbal instruction but demonstrated through daily conduct. This approach contributes significantly to students' moral formation.

The PAI teacher also uses scaffolding to support students in progressing from simple to more complex concepts. The teacher first provides clear explanations, followed by guided examples, and gradually transitions students toward independent work. This method ensures that each student receives appropriate support according to their readiness level. Scaffolding minimizes academic anxiety and enhances learning confidence. It also ensures that students develop strong conceptual foundations (Ma'rifatani, 2017).

Finally, the integration of habituation practices strengthens the continuous reinforcement of Islamic values. Regular routines such as greetings, short prayers, and

moral reminders create an environment supportive of character formation. These practices help internalize values through repetition and daily application. Habituation complements formal instruction by shaping consistent behavior. This strategy demonstrates how PAI teaching extends beyond cognitive learning into sustained moral development.

Character and Value Internalization Practices in Classroom Activities

Character and value internalization in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) forms the core of religious learning at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir. The PAI teacher emphasizes moral development as an integral aspect of the curriculum, ensuring that students understand and embody Islamic values in behavior and interaction. Internalization takes place through deliberate instructional design that aligns content with ethical principles. This process strengthens the relevance of religious teachings in students' daily lives. The teacher's structured approach ensures that character formation is a consistent component of classroom activities (Dahlan et.al, 2025).

One of the key practices in value internalization is the integration of moral themes into every lesson. Instead of treating character formation as a separate topic, the teacher weaves ethical reflections into discussions of Qur'anic verses, hadith, and Islamic history. This integration allows students to connect various aspects of Islamic knowledge with moral implications. Through consistent exposure to these themes, students begin to associate religious learning with ethical responsibility. This approach helps build a holistic understanding of Islamic values.

Daily routines also play a significant role in reinforcing character development. Practices such as greeting with salam, reading short prayers, and demonstrating respectful gestures help cultivate behavioral consistency. These routines create a classroom atmosphere grounded in courtesy, discipline, and sincerity. Over time, repeated exposure shapes students' internal dispositions toward virtuous conduct. The simplicity of these routines increases their effectiveness in promoting value habituation.

The teacher additionally employs moral modeling as a primary method of character education. By demonstrating patience, respect, and integrity, the teacher becomes a living example of Islamic teachings. Students observe these behaviors and gradually imitate them in their own interactions. Modeling ensures that values are transmitted not only through instruction but also through direct observation. This approach enhances the authenticity and credibility of character education.

Value internalization is further strengthened through reflective dialogue, where students are guided to think deeply about their actions and choices. The teacher facilitates discussions that encourage students to analyze real-life situations through the lens of Islamic ethics. These reflective sessions help students develop moral reasoning and self-awareness. They learn to relate abstract values to concrete experiences. Reflection thus becomes a vehicle for internal transformation (Hakim, 2020).

Group activities also support value internalization by fostering cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. The teacher designs collaborative tasks where students must work together harmoniously and demonstrate mutual respect. These interactions expose students

to the social dimensions of Islamic values, such as teamwork, kindness, and fairness. Cooperative learning helps internalize values in a natural and realistic context. This strategy strengthens both social and moral competence (Sumarni, 2016).

The use of storytelling in character education is particularly effective in capturing students' attention and imagination. Stories of prophets, companions, and historical Muslim figures convey moral lessons in a relatable and engaging manner. Students are able to draw inspiration from these narratives and reflect on their own behavior. Storytelling combines emotional and cognitive engagement, promoting deeper internalization. It also connects students to Islamic tradition in meaningful ways.

The teacher incorporates moral reinforcement through consistent feedback and encouragement. When students display positive behavior, the teacher acknowledges and affirms their actions. This reinforcement motivates students to continue practicing good habits. Constructive feedback is also given when behavior needs improvement, guiding students toward better choices. The balance of affirmation and correction supports healthy moral development (Astuti & Suryana, 2024).

Practical activities that simulate real-life situations are another method used to cultivate character. Students may be assigned tasks such as organizing a charity initiative, participating in classroom responsibilities, or practicing conflict resolution. These activities allow students to apply Islamic values in concrete contexts. Practical engagement ensures that values are not only understood intellectually but enacted behaviorally. This experiential learning strengthens long-term internalization (Farhan & said, 2021).

Memorization and recitation of relevant Qur'anic verses also contribute to moral grounding. Verses that emphasize honesty, kindness, patience, and obedience provide ethical guidance in a concise form. Reciting these verses reinforces their meaning and serves as a moral reminder. Students develop a personal connection to the teachings through repetition. This method integrates spiritual discipline with character development.

The classroom environment is intentionally structured to promote emotional and spiritual comfort. A supportive atmosphere encourages honesty, openness, and mutual respect among students. The teacher fosters trust so that students feel safe to express their thoughts and concerns. This emotional security enhances students' receptiveness to moral guidance. A positive classroom climate is therefore essential for successful value internalization.

The practices implemented by the PAI teacher at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir demonstrate a comprehensive approach to character education. Through modeling, habituation, reflection, collaboration, and practical engagement, students experience a multidimensional process of value internalization. These strategies ensure that Islamic values become embedded in thought, attitude, and behavior. The teacher's consistent and intentional methods highlight the central role of character formation in PAI learning (Hidayat et.al, 2024). This holistic model serves as a strong foundation for students' moral and spiritual development.

Professional Competence and Classroom Management of the PAI Teacher

Professional competence forms the foundation of effective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching, and the teacher at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir demonstrates a high level of mastery in both subject matter and pedagogical knowledge. Mastery of Islamic teachings enables the teacher to explain concepts clearly, address students' questions with confidence, and provide accurate interpretations of religious texts. This academic strength ensures that learning is credible and grounded in authoritative sources. Furthermore, pedagogical competence allows the teacher to choose appropriate methods for diverse learning needs. These competencies combine to create a robust instructional framework.

The teacher's professional competence is reflected in careful lesson planning that aligns instructional goals with curriculum standards. Lesson plans incorporate clear objectives, relevant materials, and structured learning activities. Such planning ensures that every session has a coherent flow from introduction to assessment. Students benefit from predictable but engaging learning experiences. Thorough preparation also minimizes classroom disruptions and enhances instructional efficiency.

In addition to planning, the teacher demonstrates skillful classroom communication that supports comprehension and engagement. Clear explanations, appropriate pacing, and effective questioning techniques help students follow lessons with ease. The teacher uses language that is both accessible and academically sound, facilitating understanding across different ability levels. Communication is also characterized by warmth and respect. These qualities strengthen rapport and support a positive learning culture (Panjaitan, 2024).

Classroom management is another important dimension of professional competence. The teacher maintains orderly and structured routines that help students stay focused and disciplined. Expectations for behavior are communicated explicitly and consistently applied. This clarity prevents misunderstandings and reduces behavioral problems. A well-managed classroom allows instructional activities to proceed smoothly. Students feel secure in an environment where rules are fair and predictable.

The teacher also demonstrates flexibility in addressing classroom challenges and adapting instruction as needed. When students struggle with particular concepts, the teacher adjusts strategies by offering reinforcement or additional examples. This adaptability reflects a professional understanding of diverse learning needs. It allows the teacher to respond promptly without compromising lesson objectives. Responsive teaching ensures inclusivity and equity in the learning process.

Professional competence is also seen in the teacher's ongoing commitment to self-improvement. Participation in workshops, teacher meetings, and professional development activities strengthens pedagogical capacity. Continuous learning helps the teacher remain informed about new educational approaches and innovations. Such commitment reflects a growth mindset essential for modern educators. It also enhances instructional quality over time (Sirozi, 2024).

Ethical professionalism is equally important, and the PAI teacher consistently demonstrates integrity, fairness, and responsibility. These ethical values influence

interactions with students and colleagues, shaping a respectful school environment. Professional ethics are evident in the teacher's punctuality, accountability, and commitment to delivering quality instruction. Ethical conduct reinforces the credibility of the teacher as a moral role model. This dimension of professionalism supports the broader mission of Islamic education.

Emotional intelligence contributes significantly to the teacher's classroom effectiveness. The ability to empathize with students, understand their challenges, and respond appropriately fosters a supportive environment. The teacher listens attentively to student concerns and provides guidance when needed. Emotional intelligence enables the teacher to maintain patience during difficult moments. It also helps reduce conflict and promote harmony in the classroom (Nisak & Rahmah, 2024).

Student motivation is strengthened through the teacher's use of encouragement and positive reinforcement. Acknowledging students' achievements and efforts increases their confidence and enthusiasm for learning. The teacher employs constructive feedback that guides improvement without discouragement. These motivational strategies help students develop a sense of responsibility for their learning. Positive reinforcement contributes to a classroom climate that values effort and growth (Nisak et.al, 2024).

The teacher's competence is also reflected in effective time management during instructional activities. Lessons are conducted efficiently to ensure coverage of essential content while allowing sufficient time for discussion and reflection. Transitions between activities are smooth and purposeful. Effective time allocation minimizes wasted instructional minutes. This level of organization enhances learning productivity.

Collaboration with colleagues further strengthens the teacher's professional practice. The teacher participates in discussions about curriculum development, student issues, and instructional strategies. Such collaboration fosters shared responsibility for school improvement. It also provides opportunities for exchanging ideas and addressing challenges collectively. Through teamwork, the teacher gains insight that enriches professional competence (Hidayat & Malihah, 2023).

Overall, the professional competence and classroom management demonstrated by the PAI teacher at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir create an environment conducive to effective religious education. Through mastery of content, strong pedagogical skills, disciplined classroom management, and ethical professionalism, the teacher successfully supports students' academic and character development. These competencies ensure that learning is structured, meaningful, and aligned with Islamic educational goals. The teacher's example highlights the importance of comprehensive professionalism in delivering high-quality PAI instruction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the PAI teacher at SMPN 1 Bermani Ilir effectively integrates strong pedagogical strategies, comprehensive value-internalization practices, and solid professional competence to create a meaningful and holistic Islamic Religious Education learning environment. Through contextualized instruction, interactive

methods, character-based routines, ethical modeling, and well-managed classroom practices, the teacher successfully supports students' cognitive, moral, and spiritual development. The combination of reflective teaching, consistent classroom structure, and ethical professionalism reinforces the teacher's role as both an educator and moral guide. Overall, the best practices identified in this study highlight the essential qualities and strategies required to enhance the quality of PAI instruction and contribute to the broader goal of nurturing responsible, ethical, and spiritually grounded students.

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