

## The Islamic Education Teacher Profession: A Q Methodology Study

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students' views of the Islamic Education (PAI) teaching profession and its impact on improving their learning experience. Using Q methodology, this study identified three main factors that influence students' perceptions and how they contribute to the quality of their learning experience in the context of teaching Islamic Education. The first factor is the Teacher's Role in Planned Character Building of Students. This view emphasises the importance of the teacher's role in shaping students' character through careful lesson planning. Students who support this view believe that good planning allows teachers to create a learning environment that supports moral development and akhlaqul karimah, which positively affects their learning experience. The second factor, Conventional and Authentic Assessment as a Tool to Improve Learning, shows that the combination of conventional and authentic assessment is very effective in improving the learning process. Students see that conventional assessment provides a clear frame of reference, while authentic assessment allows a more in-depth and relevant evaluation of students' abilities in real situations. This encourages them to be more critical and reflective in measuring learning progress. The third factor, Development of Learning by PAI Teachers According to Context and Student Needs, highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptation in teaching. This view reflects the belief that PAI teachers who are able to adapt learning methods to the context and needs of students will be more effective in delivering materials and achieving educational goals. Students who support this view are inspired to adopt a student-centred approach, which has the potential to improve the quality of their learning experience. This research shows that students' views on the profession of PAI teachers are strongly influenced by holistic, adaptive and diverse approaches to teaching. By understanding and applying these views, students are expected to develop competence as prospective teachers who are able to provide better and more meaningful learning experiences for their students.

### KEYWORDS

professionalism,  
PAI,  
Teacher

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### Introduction

Teaching has been the subject of debate throughout history as to whether it can be considered a profession or not (Demirkasimoglu, 2010). Some authors that include Leiter (1978) and Samuels (1970) consider teaching as a semi-professional occupation as teachers have to fulfil certain standards set by their superiors. As a result, teachers'

autonomy and ability to make decisions are limited. Other authors such as Ozga (1995) and Stevenson, Carter dan Passy (2007) argue that professionalism is an ideological construct used to control teachers' work. A different approach put forward by Phelps (2006) shows a positive view of teacher professionalism and identifies the term as the highest and best standard for teachers.

The concept of professionalism is multifaceted and difficult to define. The term, in everyday speech, refers to paid rather than voluntary activities. In addition, the term is used to classify the status of occupational groups based on honour (Kennedy, 2007). In the business world, professionalism is identified with 'success' or refers to the behaviour expected of individuals in a particular occupation (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). The meaning of professionalism changes and evolves over time and is influenced by competition between different stakeholder groups (Hilferty, 2008).

Hoyle (1975) defined professionalism as 'the strategies and rhetoric used by members of an occupation to improve status, pay and conditions'. In another of his works, Hoyle (2001) states that professionalism is related to improving service quality rather than improving status. Boyt, Lusch and Naylor (2001) explain the concept as a multi-dimensional structure consisting of a person's attitudes and behaviours towards their work, and refers to the achievement of high levels of standards. If we synthesise the various definitions, professionalism can be interpreted as a multidimensional structure that includes a person's work behaviour and attitude to achieve the highest standards and improve service quality.

Before discussing teacher professionalism further, it is important to distinguish between the two terms 'professionalism' and 'professionalisation' that often appear in scholarly discourse. Professionalisation is concerned with 'promoting the material and ideal interests of an occupational group' (Goodson, 2000, p. 182), thus encompassing 'efforts to obtain the professionals associated with a profession' (Whitty, 2000). On the other hand, professionalism 'focuses on questions of qualifications and acquired abilities, as well as what competences are necessary for the successful performance of an occupation.'

David, as cited by Carr (2000), mentions five criteria of professionalism that frequently appear in the literature. These criteria are: (a) the profession provides an important public service, (b) the profession involves expertise based on theory and practice, (c) the profession has an ethical dimension that must be expressed in a code of ethics, (d) the profession requires organisation and regulation for recruitment and discipline, and (e) professional practitioners require a high degree of individual autonomy to assess and practice effectively. Meanwhile, Barber (1965) describes four main characteristics of professional behaviour, namely: (a) high and systematic knowledge, (b) primary orientation to the interests of society rather than personal interests, (c) high self-control of behaviour through a code of ethics in the process of work socialisation, and (d) a reward system that is considered a symbol of work achievement.

Autonomy is one of the main foci in the characteristics of professionalism. Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) contributed to the professionalism debate by stating that professional tasks are important, exclusive, and complex, so professionals should have autonomous decision-making power and be free from external pressures. Other authors state that one of the main goals of professionalising teachers is to provide professional autonomy (Bull, 1988). Autonomy is a component of teacher professionalism that provides space for individual decision-making to achieve goals and control situations related to their work. Autonomy not only serves as a buffer against the pressures teachers face, but also as a means to strengthen them personally and professionally (Friedman, 1999). Teacher autonomy will have an impact on student learning outcomes (Pratama, 2019). Therefore, autonomy functions in opposition to organisational control (Bull, 1988; Johnson, 1992).

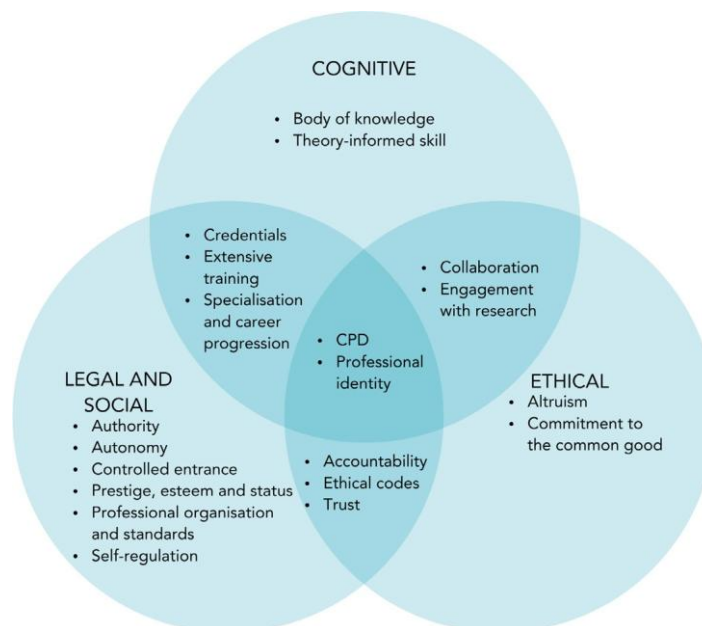
The profession of Islamic Education teacher, due to its content, is viewed diversely by students from different backgrounds. The profession of Islamic Education teacher transcends worldly criteria, as it teaches goodness for the hereafter. On the other hand, the view is that professional criteria will have a positive impact on student learning outcomes at school. These various views will be ‘objectified’ in this study to obtain a reliable view of the Islamic Education teacher profession. This research will answer the following two questions, namely: (1) What are the students' views on the profession of Islamic Education teachers? And (2) How does the view impact on the improvement of students' learning experience?

## Literature Review

### Defining teacher professionalism

Teacher professionalism is a term that has been defined and interpreted in different ways historically and across disciplines. Narrow, technocratic views are contrasted with views that consider teachers as reflexive practitioners with agency and autonomy, leading to polarised debates and often contradictory definitions (Goodwin, 2021; Governder et al., 2016).

Mezza (2022) defines professionalism based on literature reviewed from various disciplines covering cognitive, legal/social and ethical domains (figure 1). The purpose of this Venn diagram is to show the areas of overlap between the three domains and illustrate how they influence each other.



**Figure1:** Teacher Professionalism (Mezza, 2022)

### Cognitive domain

Teacher education is the basis for developing general knowledge about teaching, but this knowledge needs to be developed continuously. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to teaching and learning, but teachers need to develop their own effective teaching strategies. This will enable them to choose the strategies that are most effective in their classrooms.

Evidence-based practice has received much attention in education (Coldwell, 2022; Malin et al., 2020), in the arena of its potential to improve student learning outcomes (Burns & Schuller, 2007; Mincu, 2014) and teacher job satisfaction (Bell et al., 2010; Godfrey, 2016). However, the level of teacher engagement in research remains relatively low, due to the limited practical relevance and accessibility of academic research (Coldwell, 2022; Nägel et al., 2023), leading to a gap between research and practice (Rycroft-Smith, 2022).

Evidence-based practice requires a careful combination of the best available evidence from research with teachers' experience, expertise and professional judgement, and context-appropriate implementation (Scutt, 2019). Evidence-based practice as top-down practice, where research is simply communicated to teachers without recognising the need to make context-appropriate adaptations and changes, does not recognise the importance of teacher expertise.

A top-down interpretation of evidence-based practice risks limiting practitioners' autonomy, which should be avoided given what we know about the importance of autonomy for teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Therefore, it is not enough to improve teachers' access to research, but it is equally important to improve researchers' access to teacher expertise. This will ultimately help develop effective teaching models that are based on theory informed by practice. Collaboration between teachers and researchers in classroom action research is one form of practice-based theory development.

Eriksen (2022) proposes a professional research literacy built on three sensitivities, namely genre sensitivity, practice sensitivity, and situational sensitivity. Practice sensitivity relates to teachers' collective ethical reflection on research evidence and may lead teachers to reject interventions if they conflict with their moral commitments (Heikkilä & Eriksen, 2023).

#### Ethical domain

Teachers' mental health and well-being is an important part of teacher professionalism and to compensate for altruism, as only when teachers are in good health can they engage in professional learning and teaching. Mezza (2022) emphasises the importance of valuing teachers' expertise and providing career development programmes, especially for teachers who are more interested in being classroom practitioners (Booth et al., 2021). Continuous professional development (CPD) can have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and, in turn, improved student learning (Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Kennedy, 2007). Research shows that high-quality CPD is an important factor in retaining teachers, especially early and mid-career (Booth et al., 2021).

School supervision is an important aspect of accountability systems and has been shown to positively impact test results, self-evaluation and school management processes (Hofer et al., 2020). However, negative consequences of school supervision can range from 'teaching to the test' (Nelson & Ehren, 2014), teacher stress and anxiety (Ehren et al., 2016; Penninckx et al., 2016), disruption of teaching practice (Klerks, 2012), cheating, preparation of data and documents for inspection, or constriction of teaching practice (Ehren et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2017) to name a few.

#### Legal and social domains

Another important aspect of professionalism is teacher autonomy, which has been highlighted as an influential factor on student success (Derakhshan et al., 2020; Hawthorne-Kocak, 2021). Supporting teacher autonomy has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement. Teacher autonomy has also been associated with higher job satisfaction and a desire to stay in teaching, especially if they are given more autonomy over their professional learning (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). Giving schools and teachers the freedom to take the approach they

deem most appropriate to their context is likely to support student learning. Given the link between autonomy and teacher job satisfaction, this may provide further benefits to teacher retention and thus student achievement in the long term.

## **Methodology**

This research question is about students' views on the Islamic Education teaching profession and its impact on improving students' learning experience. To answer this question, the researcher used Q Methodology. This methodology is concerned with understanding the attitudes, opinions, or beliefs of participants (Brown, 1980). In this study, the researcher sought to find out what students believe about the professionalism of Islamic Education teachers. Q Methodology provides a method that allows participants to sort and rank statements they agree and disagree with, which provides a more nuanced understanding of students' beliefs about the professionalism of Islamic Education teachers.

### **Participant**

The researcher, in this case, applied purposive sampling to identify potential participants. The 19 students were classified as pure students and student teachers. McKeown and Thomas (2013) state that participant selection can be driven by the relevance and purpose of the research or pragmatic considerations. Furthermore, McKeown and Thomas (2013) explain that Q methodology explores attitudes within a population and that a complete representation of everyone in the population is not required.

### **Research Design**

Q methodology, hereafter referred to as Q, is a mixed-methods approach to studying people's opinions, attitudes, discourses, and beliefs (Brown, 1980). In application, Q studies provide participants with a number of statements, opinions, or other stimuli, which they then sort and rank according to an affinity scale. Subsequently, factor analysis is used to reveal and quantify any underlying viewpoints or factors held by the participants. Thus, Q aims to find commonalities among groups of participants, leading to opinions, attitudes or beliefs commonly held by the group.

In the Q-sort stage, participants are asked to sort the statements based on their level of agreement or congruence. First, participants categorise the statements into positive, negative, or neutral groups. After that, they gave more specific ratings by placing the statement cards on a scale that indicated how much they agreed with, related to, or were represented by the statements. After completing the sorting process and submitting the results, participants go through a mathematical factor analysis procedure that helps researchers detect and interpret possible patterns in the sorting results. The study may also include pre and/or post-sorting questions that aid in the interpretation and analysis process.

### **Q steps**

The Q methodology consists of seven stages: building the concourse, selecting the Q sample, running the pilot study, selecting the P sample, collecting the Q sample, completing the data analysis, and providing data interpretation. This section provides an overview of each stage.

#### **Concept Construction (Concourse)**

The first stage is to identify the discourse or topic to be explored in the research. Here, discourse means 'a set of shared beliefs, opinions, understandings or meanings held by a population' (Previte et al., 2007, p. 137). In this study, discourse is considered as attitudes, beliefs, or opinions about the profession of PAI teachers.

### Selecting the Q sample

The second stage is to select the Q sample, which Brown (2002, p. 2) calls 'a purposive selection of statements' from the discourse. Although there is no exact number of statements to obtain an adequate Q-sample. Previte, Pini and Haslam-McKenzie (2007) suggest considering time and practical aspects when determining the sample size. The function of the Q-set is to ensure that the various opinions or themes that may exist in a discourse are well represented, as well as to avoid unnecessary duplication and under- or over-sampling (Previte et al., 2007).

### Conducting a pilot test

Once the Q sample is determined, the third stage is to conduct the sorting trial. The purpose of the trial is to allow the sorting process to occur so that the researcher can gather feedback from the trial participants to refine the sorting process before it is used in the actual study. As noted for the Q study, a trial run can provide feedback to the researcher regarding the quality of the written instructions, the arrangement of the Q sample statements, and the length of completion of the Q sort (Paige & Morin, 2016)

### Selecting a P-Set

The fourth stage is to select the participants, or P-set. Q requires the collection of perceptual or subjective data from the participants by conducting Q sorting. In Q, the participants themselves, and not the statements they sort, are the variables (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The aim is to discover patterns of thinking, not to report how many people think a certain way (Valenta & Wigger, 1997).

### The Q-Sort

The fifth stage was when the participants did the Q-sorting. This was a two-part process. In the first part, participants do a pre-sort where they create up to three piles of statement cards based on whether they feel the statements on the cards represent their views, do not represent their views, or represent neutrally. They pre-sorted each statement card provided.

Once the pre-sorted statements are complete, the next step involves participants ranking each pre-sorted statement along a quasi-normal distribution grid, typically using terms such as 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. This process is also known as forced free distribution, which means that participants must place each statement somewhere on the table between each end.

### Data Analysis

Once the Q-sorting data is collected, the researcher will begin data analysis. Data analysis in Q is done in three parts: correlation, factor analysis, and calculating factor scores. Firstly, the researcher will create a correlation matrix, which shows how similar or dissimilar each participant's sort is (Brown, 1980). An array was created for each completed Q sort. These individual sortings were used to create the matrix.

Once the correlation matrix was created, the researcher conducted a factor analysis. Factor analysis is an algorithmic process that attempts to find patterns, or factors, underlying variables using weighted averages. In Q, the variables are participants rather than statements, so factor analysis reveals what a person or group of people subjectively think about the topic. When a group of people have similar viewpoints, they will form groups, or factors. Analyse the data using KADE software.

### Interpretation of Results

The seventh and final stage of Q is interpreting the data. This stage will allow the researcher to identify important themes and patterns from the data by using coding. Coding is the process of attaching labels or marks to segments of qualitative data to

categorise and organise information (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is both analytical and interpretive. Coding provides a systematic way for analysis and categorisation, naming or identifying themes, patterns or relationships discovered from participants' responses to post-sorting questions. This can be done using descriptive codes to summarise content, ATLAS.ti codes that use participants' words to describe themes, or conceptual codes that identify concepts or ideas. This iterative, interpretive process allows for iterative movement between the data, research questions, participant responses, and emerging codes. This iterative process allowed for refinement and revision of codes as new interpretations and insights emerged.

## Results

Quantitative and qualitative data assisted in identifying key themes or perspectives of the factor. The researcher reviewed the factor's Z-scores, individual and composite sort scores, statement types, and questionnaire responses provided by participants whose types were marked on the factor. A Z-score is a measure of how far a statement's rating is from the average rating for that statement. A positive value means that the statement is rated better than the average value. A negative value means the statement is rated less favourably than the average. A sort score is a number assigned by a participant or factor to a statement. In this study, the sort value ranges from +5 to -5. Table 1 shows the Z-scores and sort values of the participants who loaded significantly on the factor.

**Table 1**  
**Factor 1: Z-Score dan Sort Value**

No.	Statements	Z-Score	Sort Value
5	PAI teachers can be said to be the main person in charge of student character building.	2.17	5
8	The exemplary behaviour of PAI teachers is the most important thing.	1.3	4
12	PAI teachers have the flexibility to implement the curriculum according to student needs.	0.94	2
6	The duties of PAI teachers must be supported by adequate allowances.	0.58	1
29	PAI teachers are living examples of the application of PAI materials in daily life. Learning takes into account the characteristics of the students, even though it is different from the design.	-0.14	0
18	Islamic Religious Education is a subject that emphasises practice, so the main assessment is authentic assessment techniques, while traditional assessment techniques as support.	-0.42	-1
17	Systematic selection of material, a fun and effective learning process can be realised through writing lesson plans before learning.	-0.86	-2
26	Most of the assessment in Islamic Religious Education is subjective.	-0.87	-2
15	The purpose of Islamic Education learning is to help students understand and practice during the learning process.	-2.15	-5

### Theme Factor 1: Planned student character building

Participants in factor 1 gave the highest rating to statement 5. This represents a statement that characterises their views. Participants expressed viewpoints about the role of teachers in students' character building. Two participants identified statement 5 (PAI teachers can be said to be the main person in charge of student character building) as a +5 or 'strongly agree' statement. Participant SS01 answered in the post-sorting questionnaire,

"... Islamic education has an important role in shaping moral values and akhaql karimah in students. Islamic Education teachers teach these principles which are very important in the formation of student character. They not only deliver the material, but also act as role models who help students develop good attitudes, such as honesty, tolerance, and a sense of responsibility."

The argument of the teacher as the person responsible for moral development was also stated by SS03

"... from my perspective as a student, I see that PAI teachers have a significant responsibility in teaching and instilling religious values and akhlaql karimah. Religious education includes discussions about good values, such as honesty, justice, and responsibility. PAI teachers not only teach the cognitive aspects, but also guide students in internalising these values. I also think that since religious education is often directly related to aspects of worship and akhlaql karimah, PAI teachers naturally become important figures in shaping students' characters. They act as role models who are expected to show examples of behaviour in accordance with the values taught."

Other statements contributed to this view of the factor. Statement 15 'The purpose of learning PAI is to help students understand and practice during the learning process' was identified as the statement that least described the characteristics of this factor. Statements that were seen as somewhat describing the characteristics of the factor were statement 17 'Systematic selection of materials, a fun and effective learning process can be realised through writing lesson plans before learning.' and statement 26 'Most of the assessment in Islamic Education is subjective.' Statement 15 asserts that the purpose of Islamic Education learning should extend beyond the classroom, not be limited to the classroom. Islamic Education is not just material, but a system of values and a system of behaviour that contributes to the formation of student character. SS01 asserted that 'the learning objectives of Islamic Education should not only focus on understanding and practice during the learning process. More important goals are faith and worship, character development, instilling moral values and akhlaql karimah, or other more essential aspects of Islamic Education.'

Statement 17 states that the preparation of lesson plans can be a guide in implementing learning. However, this is not fully implemented during learning. When linked to the most agreed statement on this factor, it indicates that learning design can help in getting used to thinking, feeling and behaving that reflect religious teachings and character values. The implementation of objectives can be adjusted to the needs of students and the learning context. SS07 stated that 'doubts about the effectiveness of rigid and formal lesson plans in creating a fun and effective learning process'.

Statement 26 states that assessment in Islamic Education (PAI) learning is subjective. This shows that the results of the assessment are strongly influenced by the perception of the evaluator, which in this context is the teacher. The teacher's perception of the assessment becomes a key factor that shapes the characteristics of the assessment itself. In other words, the way teachers understand and assess students' abilities depends not only on the standards that have been set, but also on teachers' personal views of what is considered important in Islamic Education learning.

In addition, teachers' perceptions are also influenced by their level of insight into the various assessment techniques available. Teachers who have extensive and in-depth knowledge of assessment techniques may tend to be more objective and comprehensive in conducting evaluations, whereas teachers who lack insight may rely more on intuition or personal preference. As a result, this subjectivity in assessment may vary from one teacher to another, which may ultimately affect consistency and fairness in assessing student learning outcomes.

**Tabel 2**  
**Factor 2: Z-Score and Sort Value**

Nomor	Pernyataan	Z-Score	Sort Value
19	Authentic assessment is the process of collecting, processing and presenting student learning outcomes for learning improvement.	1.23	3
16	PAI teacher allowance is not related to performance.	0.52	1
29	PAI teachers are living examples of the application of PAI materials in daily life. Learning takes into account students' characteristics, even though they are different from the design.	0.51	1
4	PAI teachers not only provide lessons verbally, but it is mandatory to practice directly.	-0.13	0
12	PAI teachers have the flexibility to implement the curriculum according to students' needs.	-0.37	-1
6	The duties of PAI teachers must be supported by adequate allowances.	-0.73	-2
8	The role model of PAI teachers is the most important thing.	-1.18	-3
20	The more senior, the higher the professional value of a teacher.	-1.71	-5

#### Theme Factor 2: Assessment for Learning improvement

Participants in factor 2 gave the highest rating to statement 19 'Authentic assessment is the process of collecting, processing and presenting student learning outcomes for learning improvement.'. This represents a statement that characterises his view. Participants expressed a viewpoint on assessment as a point to make learning improvements.

Other statements contributed to this view of the factor. Statement 20 'The more senior, the higher the professional value of a teacher.' was identified as the statement that least describes the characteristics of this factor. The statement that was seen as somewhat describing the characteristics of the factor was statement 6 'The duties of PAI teachers must be supported by adequate allowances.' statement 20 asserts that a person who has been in the teaching profession for a long time will have an impact on the teacher's professional allowance. A teacher's success in fulfilling performance and administrative criteria will have an impact on the teacher's career. The allowance provided by the teacher is a motivating factor to fulfil these criteria. FS02 emphasised that

"I disagree with the view that length of service or seniority automatically increases the professional value of a teacher. Teacher professionalism, in my

view, is determined more by competence, dedication and a willingness to continuously improve. A teacher who has longer experience is not necessarily more professional if they do not endeavour to continuously improve their skills, keep up with the latest developments in education, or demonstrate a high commitment to teaching quality. Conversely, a teacher who is younger or less experienced but has a passion for learning, is innovative, and is highly dedicated to teaching could demonstrate a higher level of professionalism... attributing professionalism only to seniority can overlook the importance of competence and self-development, and this is the reason why I place this statement as the least agreeable.”

Statement 6 states that a teacher's duties should be supported by adequate allowances. Teachers should not be distracted by fulfilling their physiological needs. Teachers should focus on learning activities. However, FS04 gave a different view:

“I believe that the primary motivation of a teacher, especially an Islamic Education (PAI) teacher, should come from a calling and commitment to service, not solely from financial incentives. While adequate allowances are important to support teachers' welfare, an excessive focus on compensation can obscure the core values of dedication, devotion and moral responsibility that an educator, especially in the context of religious education, must exercise.”

**Table 3**  
**Factor 3: Z-Score and Sort Value**

Nomor	Pernyataan	Z-Score	Sort Value
12	PAI teachers have the flexibility to implement the curriculum according to students' needs.	2.43	5
14	Learning is essentially a change in learner behaviour. Therefore, assessment should provide direct indicators of those changes.	0.93	3
7	PAI teachers cannot impose activities outside the classroom.	0.68	2
8	Exemplary PAI teacher is the most important thing	-0.35	-1
13	PAI is not just a subject, but a guide to religious behaviour and life.	-0.35	-1
29	PAI teachers are living examples of the application of PAI material in daily life. Learning takes into account the characteristics of students, even though it is different from the design.	-0.93	-2
6	The duties of PAI teachers must be supported by adequate allowances.	-1.42	-4
31	The teacher professional allowance is a motivation to work professionally.	-2.04	-5

#### Theme Factor 3: Autonomy of PAI Teachers

Participants in factor 3 gave the highest rating (+5) to statement 12, which reads, ‘PAI teachers have the flexibility to implement the curriculum according to students’ needs.’ This reflects a very strong view on the importance of flexibility and autonomy in

teaching practice. By giving this statement the highest rating, participants expressed the belief that teachers have a crucial role in adapting the curriculum to the unique needs of each student. They emphasised that autonomy in teaching is essential for creating a responsive and effective learning environment where teachers can make the right professional decisions to meet students' educational needs holistically. This view shows respect for teachers' ability to assess and respond to classroom situations in the most appropriate way and reflects the importance of the trust given to teachers in carrying out their duties independently.

Other statements contributed to this view of the factor. Statement 31 'The teacher professional allowance is a motivation to work professionally.' was identified as the statement that least described the characteristics of this factor. Statements that were seen as somewhat describing the characteristics of the factor were statement 29 'PAI teachers are living examples of the application of PAI materials in daily life. Learning takes into account the characteristics of the students, even though it is different from the design.' statement 31 confirmed that participants in this factor tended to disagree with the idea that teachers' work motivation is based on professional allowances. Teachers' main motivation in performing their duties should come from a commitment to professionalism and dedication to providing the best learning for students. This view emphasises that intrinsic factors such as the desire to educate, a sense of responsibility and passion for contributing to students' development are more important drivers of teachers' professional performance than extrinsic factors such as financial benefits. It also reflects the understanding that professionalism in education should not be driven solely by material compensation but rather by dedication to student development and the quality of education. FS01 asserts that 'a teacher's main motivation should come from dedication to educating and guiding students, not from financial incentives. Professional commitment and passion for providing quality education are important, and that these intrinsic factors should be the main drivers of teacher performance, not professional allowances.'

Statement 29 confirms that a teacher should act as an *uswah* or good example in everyday life for students. Teachers are expected to be positive examples that students can follow in various aspects of life. In the implementation of learning, it is important for teachers to not only apply a uniform approach to all students, but also consider the individual characteristics of each student. This means that teachers need to understand the unique differences in personality, needs and learning styles of each student so that they can tailor the most effective teaching methods for each individual. A personalised and tailored approach to student needs can help create a more inclusive learning environment that supports student development. Teachers' role as *uswah* and their ability to adapt learning according to students' characteristics will also help build stronger and more empathetic relationships between teachers and students, which can ultimately improve learning effectiveness and students' character development.

## **Discussion**

### **The Comprehensive Role of PAI Teachers**

Through factor analysis 1, the researcher identified the comprehensive role of PAI teachers, which cannot be viewed as an activity limited to delivering knowledge in the classroom. Instead, teachers hold a comprehensive role that involves a wide range of responsibilities and functions in supporting students' holistic development. This role covers a wide range of aspects that include academic, moral, social, emotional, and spiritual development.

Character building is one of the crucial components in the role of an educator. Teachers have the responsibility of instilling moral, ethical and social values, with the aim of shaping students into individuals with integrity and responsibility. This process is done

not only through the teaching of materials, but also through daily interactions and role models provided by teachers.

Research highlights the important role of teachers in value education, emphasising their responsibility in shaping students' moral and ethical character (Shingala, 2023). Teachers' contribution to moral culture is crucial, especially in creating a school environment that encourages ethical behaviour and self-development (Mazurova & Maslova, 2024). Moreover, character education is seen as an integral part of shaping a child's personality, with educators playing a key role in this process (Windra et al., 2024).

In addition, the integration of moral values in the curriculum, especially in the digital era, has been emphasised as an important aspect of education (Qowim et al., 2024). Islamic education also contributes significantly to the character building of the nation, with teachers being pivotal in this developmental process (Effendi & Fathullah, 2024).

The role of the teacher in the delivery of knowledge and skills remains at the core of the teaching profession. Teachers are expected to effectively deliver subject matter, as well as equip students with the critical skills necessary to adapt and succeed in a variety of life contexts. Research shows that teachers' professional development plays an important role in improving their knowledge and skills, which has a direct impact on the effectiveness of classroom delivery (Ezurike & Nwankwo, 2024). Furthermore, the use of tools such as AI in education has also been shown to improve students' cognitive skills, provide adaptive feedback, and support the development of critical skills (Majeed & Torralba, 2024).

The example set by teachers plays a crucial role in education. Teachers not only function as teachers who transfer knowledge, but also as models of behaviour that students can emulate. Exemplary behaviour, morals and ethics demonstrated by teachers contribute significantly to students' character building. Research shows that the role of teachers as ethical and moral models greatly influences the development of positive values in students, which in turn helps shape their behaviour and integrity (Windra et al., 2024).

Teachers play an important role in students' spiritual and emotional development. In the context of Islamic Education, for example, the teacher's role is not limited to the theoretical delivery of religious teachings, but also involves guiding students in understanding, internalising and applying religious values in everyday life. The development of these spiritual and emotional aspects is essential to forming balanced and moral individuals. Research shows that effective teachers in Islamic Education not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also on building students' character and morals, which in turn contribute to their spiritual development (Effendi & Fathullah, 2024).

Finally, the role of teachers in providing guidance and support cannot be ignored. Teachers are often a source of motivation and support for students, both in academic and non-academic matters. Through guidance, teachers can help students face challenges and reach their full potential.

The role of teachers in providing guidance and support is significant and cannot be ignored. Teachers are often the main source of motivation and support for students, both in academic and non-academic contexts. Through their guidance, teachers play an important role in helping students deal with the challenges they face in the learning process and supporting them to reach their full potential. Research shows that strong relationships between teachers and students, characterised by ongoing support and guidance, significantly improve students' academic achievement and personal development (Royster, 2024).

### Teacher Professionalism in Learning, Assessment, and Moral Responsibility

Professionalism in the teaching profession not only includes mastery of technical competencies, but also involves a deep commitment to moral and ethical responsibilities in education. A professional teacher must have a deep mastery of the content being taught as well as the ability to communicate that knowledge effectively and engagingly to students with various backgrounds and learning styles. Effective mastery of pedagogical skills is the foundation of this professionalism, where teachers are required to adapt their teaching strategies to the individual needs of students, create a dynamic learning environment, and ensure that each student feels supported and motivated to reach their full potential (Hattie, 2003; Shulman, 1986).

Structured and thorough lesson planning is a key element of teacher professionalism. It involves not only the preparation of syllabi and lesson plans, but also the selection of the most effective teaching methods and media to achieve specific learning objectives (Glatthorn, 1993). Professional teachers should be able to implement efficient classroom management strategies to minimise distractions and maximise student participation in learning activities (Marzano et al., 2003). In this framework, teachers not only act as facilitators, but also as competent mentors in guiding students through complex and challenging learning processes.

Commitment to continuous professional development is one of the key characteristics of a professional teacher. Dedicated teachers consistently seek opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge through ongoing training, as well as keeping up with the latest developments in educational theory and practice. In addition, active involvement in professional communities allows teachers to exchange valuable ideas and experiences. Critical reflection on their own teaching practices is also an integral part of this process, where teachers actively evaluate and adjust their approaches based on feedback from students and learning outcomes. Research shows that continuous professional development and critical reflection have a significant positive impact on teaching effectiveness and improved student learning outcomes (Ezurike & Nwankwo, 2024).

High professional ethics is the main pillar in a teacher's professionalism. In carrying out their duties, teachers are expected to act with integrity, prioritise the interests of students and ensure that every decision made reflects a commitment to equitable and inclusive education. In addition, teachers have an important responsibility in creating a physically safe learning environment that supports students' emotional and psychological well-being. More than just academic instruction, teachers play an important role in shaping students' character and moral values, which will have a lasting impact on their lives. Research shows that teachers who uphold professional ethics and are committed to inclusive education have a significant positive influence on students' academic and character development (Santoso et al., 2024).

### Instructional Quality

Learning quality is a fundamental aspect that reflects the success of the entire education system. This quality indicator is not only measured by the achievement of learning objectives, but also by the depth of understanding and skills developed by students during the teaching and learning process. Quality learning involves a holistic approach, where students not only act as passive recipients of information, but are also actively involved in learning activities that encourage critical thinking, creativity and the ability to solve problems independently. This active engagement is key in building competencies that are relevant and adaptive to real-world demands. Research shows that interactive and participatory learning approaches significantly improve students' learning outcomes and critical thinking skills (Majeed & Torralba, 2024). In addition, students' active involvement in the learning process is proven to be effective in developing the competencies needed to adapt to the dynamics and challenges of the modern world of work (Ezurike & Nwankwo, 2024).

Innovation in teaching methods plays a very important role in creating a dynamic and challenging learning environment. Approaches such as project-based learning and collaborative learning have been shown to be effective in encouraging deep student participation. Project-based learning gives students the opportunity to explore real problems, conduct research and develop innovative solutions, which in turn enriches their learning experience. Research shows that this approach not only increases student engagement but also strengthens their critical thinking skills and creativity (Santoso et al., 2024). Similarly, collaborative learning allows students to work in teams, develop communication skills and learn from each other's perspectives, resulting in a more comprehensive and integrative understanding. Studies show that collaborative learning significantly improves students' understanding through deep social interaction and shared learning (Majeed & Torralba, 2024).

An effective evaluation process is a crucial element in maintaining and improving the quality of learning. A well-designed evaluation not only serves as a tool to measure student achievement, but also as a means to provide constructive feedback. This feedback allows students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and provides a clear direction for further improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Research shows that timely and relevant feedback can improve students' achievement in significant ways, as it assists them in developing more effective learning strategies and enhances self-regulation (Black & William, 1998).

For teachers, in-depth and reflective evaluation can be the basis for adjusting teaching strategies. This reflection process allows teachers to identify less effective teaching methods and replace them with new approaches that better suit students' needs. Thus, evaluation is not only a tool to assess student learning, but also an instrument for continuous improvement in teachers' teaching practices (Brookhart, 2011).

Moreover, the quality of learning is also strongly influenced by the learning environment created by teachers. A safe, inclusive and supportive environment will encourage students to take intellectual risks, explore new ideas and actively participate without fear of failure. Research shows that a positive learning atmosphere can increase students' motivation and engagement in learning, which in turn leads to higher academic achievement (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Teachers who successfully create this kind of environment not only improve students' learning outcomes, but also contribute to their social and emotional development, which is crucial for long-term success (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

#### Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment is an evaluation approach that emphasises the relevance of assessment to real-life contexts, making it an important instrument in education. Unlike traditional assessments that are often abstract and detached from practical situations, authentic assessments are designed to assess the extent to which students can apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in situations that reflect real-world challenges. These assessments provide a more accurate picture of students' ability to complete tasks that demand critical thinking skills, complex analyses and creative solutions (Gulikers et al., 2004; Wiggins, 1990).

This approach differs fundamentally from traditional assessments that often only measure students' ability to recall and reproduce information. Authentic assessment requires students to integrate and apply their knowledge in situations similar to the challenges they face outside the school environment. This is in line with the view that meaningful learning occurs when students are engaged in tasks that are relevant to real life, which in turn increases their motivation and engagement in the learning process (Herrington & Herrington, 2006).

Authentic assessment also emphasises the process, not just the end result. It includes observations of how students approach and solve problems, as well as how they

collaborate with others on complex tasks. This process provides a holistic view of students' competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork, all of which are essential in the context of an increasingly dynamic and complex world of work (Mueller, 2005).

In addition, authentic assessment offers greater flexibility in evaluating students, allowing them to demonstrate their competencies through various forms of tasks that are tailored to individual learning styles. These tasks can be projects, presentations, case studies or simulations, each of which provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills in meaningful and relevant contexts (Mueller, 2005). This flexibility not only supports the development of each student's unique potential, but also encourages them to be more engaged and motivated in the learning process.

The authentic assessment approach has significant implications for the role of teachers in the modern educational context. Teachers are required to design tasks that are not only contextually relevant, but also have a level of difficulty appropriate to students' abilities. Research shows that well-designed tasks should reflect real-world challenges, allowing students to develop and apply skills in meaningful contexts (Gulikers et al., 2004). In addition, teachers must be able to provide constructive and in-depth feedback, which not only assesses the final outcome, but also guides students in developing the skills they need to succeed outside the school environment.

Effective feedback is a crucial component in the learning process. This feedback, if given appropriately, can be a very effective tool in encouraging continuous learning and self-development of students. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), timely and specific feedback can significantly improve students' learning outcomes by helping them understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

In a broader context, authentic assessment reflects a paradigm shift in education, from a teacher- and knowledge-centred approach to a student- and competency-centred approach. This change is in line with the increasingly complex demands of the world of work, where technical skills and adaptability are key to success. Authentic assessment not only provides a more accurate assessment of students' abilities, but also prepares them for the real challenges they will face in the future (Mueller, 2005).

#### Teachers' Moral Responsibility

Teachers' moral responsibility is the ethical foundation of the education profession, which involves the obligation to not only teach academic knowledge, but also mould students' character and morals holistically. Teachers serve as role models who, through their daily behaviour and decisions, instil fundamental values such as integrity, responsibility, respect and fairness. This role requires teachers to act with fairness, ensuring that every student, regardless of their background, is treated equally and receives fair treatment without bias or discrimination (Campbell, 2008). Teachers are expected to recognise and respond to students' individual needs, both in terms of academic and emotional support, so that each student feels valued and supported in their learning process.

Respect for students' rights is central to this moral responsibility, including the right to access quality education and a safe and supportive learning environment. Teachers have an obligation to create and maintain learning spaces where students can thrive without fear or threat, whether physical or psychological. This also includes protecting students' privacy and respecting their identity and dignity. In this context, teachers must be sensitive to diverse classroom dynamics and proactive in preventing and addressing any form of bullying or behaviour that harms other students (Noddings, 2003).

Furthermore, teachers' moral responsibility also extends to a commitment to students' overall well-being. This means that teachers are not only responsible for students'

academic development, but also for their physical, mental and emotional health. Teachers should be able to recognise signs of difficulties or distress that students may be experiencing and provide appropriate guidance and support, either directly or through referrals to more competent professionals (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). As such, teachers act as mentors who help students navigate life's challenges and support them in reaching their full potential, not only as learners, but also as fully functioning individuals in society.

This moral responsibility also reflects teachers' commitment to continuous self-development and critical reflection on their teaching practices. Teachers should always endeavour to update their knowledge and skills, including an understanding of ethics and social responsibility in education. In this regard, teachers are expected to engage in professional dialogue and collaborate with peers and the wider educational community to continuously improve their professional practice and standards (Schön, 1983). Thus, teachers' moral responsibility is not only an individual duty, but also an important component of the collective ethos in the education profession that aims to build future generations who are characterful, capable and committed to the common good (Sachs, 2003).

#### Teachers as Curriculum Executors

In the context of education, teachers play a very important role in curriculum implementation, which includes the responsibility of ensuring that the learning materials delivered are appropriate to the needs and abilities of each student. Effective curriculum implementation is not only limited to running a set programme, but also includes creative adaptation and in-depth delivery of educational materials..

Teachers have an obligation to design lesson plans that are in line with the applicable curriculum. This design must be done by taking into account the latest pedagogical principles and student characteristics. Research by Astuti, Aslan and Parni (2023) identified five key roles of teachers in curriculum implementation in private Islamic primary schools, namely as educators, mediators, motivators, role models and mentors. These roles are strongly influenced by the involvement of the madrasah head in encouraging collaboration between teachers and regular meetings before each semester.

Learning adaptation is essential, where teachers must demonstrate flexibility in adjusting teaching methods and approaches according to the classroom context and the individual needs of students. This includes the use of various learning strategies that facilitate effective teaching-learning processes, thus accommodating students' diverse backgrounds, abilities and learning styles (Fadli et al., 2023).

For Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, teaching responsibilities are not limited to the delivery of theoretical knowledge. Teaching moral and ethical values is an integral part of the curriculum that must be internalised by students. PAI teachers are required to be models or role models who bring these values to life, both through speech and real actions in daily life. Teaching these values requires a holistic approach, where theory and practice must go hand in hand to shape students' characters in accordance with the values taught (Muadzín, 2021).

In the context of evaluation and assessment, teachers are responsible for measuring student progress using indicators that go beyond the ability to recall information. The evaluation must be able to capture changes in behaviour and appreciation of the values that have been taught. Therefore, the assessment instruments used should be designed to measure the direct impact of learning on students' character and moral development, which is the essence of broader educational goals (Rifa'i et al., 2024).

Each student is unique in terms of learning speed and learning style preferences. Therefore, teachers are required to have high pedagogical sensitivity in recognising and

responding to students' individual needs. This demands teachers' ability to provide learning materials in various forms and levels of difficulty that are accessible to all students. Thus, the learning objectives set out in the curriculum can be achieved by every student, regardless of their background or ability. Teacher flexibility and adaptability in adjusting learning methods are key in achieving optimal learning outcomes (Rasyidi & Al-Idrus, 2024).

### Teacher Welfare and Performance

Teacher welfare is one of the crucial determinants that affect the performance and quality of teaching in educational institutions. Comprehensive well-being, covering financial, physical and emotional aspects, has a significant correlation with how teachers perform their professional duties. Good welfare not only supports teachers' life balance but also strengthens their commitment to their educational duties.

Firstly, financial well-being, which includes adequate salaries, decent benefits and a supportive work environment, plays an important role in improving teachers' motivation and job satisfaction. Research shows that financial well-being has a direct impact on teachers' job satisfaction and performance in delivering quality education (Assaf & Antoun, 2024). Teachers who feel their welfare is secured tend to have high morale in carrying out their teaching duties and interacting with students, which in turn contributes to the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process in the classroom.

Secondly, the fulfilment of teachers' basic needs, such as financial security and work-life balance, allows them to focus their full attention on their teaching role and student development. With these basic needs met, teachers can reduce the mental burden caused by financial worries or other personal issues. Studies show that work motivation and psychological well-being strongly influence teacher performance, which contributes to improving the quality of education (Muhammad & Syahid, 2022).

Furthermore, teachers' well-being also has an impact on their participation in professional development activities. Teachers who are well-off are more likely to attend training, workshops or advanced courses designed to improve their skills and knowledge. This participation in professional development is important as it contributes to improved pedagogical competence and innovation in teaching methods, which is then reflected in improved performance in the classroom (Akhtar et al., 2024).

Finally, emotional well-being, which includes social support from colleagues and recognition of teachers' contributions, also has a significant impact on their emotional stability. Teachers who feel valued and receive adequate emotional support will tend to have good emotional balance. This emotional stability is important in teacher-student interactions, where emotionally stable teachers can build positive relationships with students, create a conducive learning environment, and improve the overall quality of teaching (Despoina et al., 2024).

### Conclusion

This study identifies three factors that influence the improvement of students' learning experience in the context of teaching Islamic Education (PAI). First, the Teacher's Role in Planned Student Character Building: This view emphasises that teachers have a very important role in shaping students' character. With lesson planning, teachers can create a learning environment that supports students' moral development and akhlaqul karimah. This has a positive impact on students' learning experience, as they get direct examples of how good character can be formed and applied in everyday life; Second, Conventional and Authentic Assessment as a Tool to Improve Learning: The combination of conventional and authentic assessment is effective in improving the learning process. Conventional assessment provides a clear frame of reference, while authentic assessment allows for a more in-depth and relevant evaluation of students'

abilities in real situations. This helps students understand various methods of assessment and encourages them to be more critical and reflective in measuring their learning progress; third, Development of Learning by PAI Teachers in accordance with Context and Student Needs: This view highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptation in teaching. PAI teachers who are able to develop learning methods that suit the context and needs of the students will be more effective in delivering the material and achieving educational goals. Students who observe this practice will be more inspired to adopt a student-centred approach, potentially improving the quality of their learning experience.

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