

The Role of Teachers in Fostering Empathy in Students at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran

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Abstract: This research aims to describe the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' empathetic attitudes at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The research informants consist of one PAI teacher, one principal, and five fifth-grade students selected thru purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model. The research results show that PAI teachers play the role of facilitators, guides, motivators, demonstrators, mediators, and learning resources in the development of students' empathy. The strategies used include role-playing, *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL), discussions, *storytelling*, social habituation, and collaboration with parents. *Storytelling* has been found to be the most effective strategy in helping students understand the feelings and perspectives of others because it provides a more reflective and meaningful learning experience. The development of empathy faces challenges such as the diversity of student characteristics, differences in family backgrounds, and the dynamics of classroom management. Overall, the development of empathy requires a holistic approach through the synergy of learning, school culture, and family support to support students' social-emotional development optimally.

Keywords: Empathy; Islamic Education Teacher; Elementary School; Social-Emotional.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan peran guru PAI dalam membangun sikap empati siswa di SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Informan penelitian terdiri atas satu guru PAI, satu kepala sekolah, dan lima siswa kelas V yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan model analisis interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru PAI berperan sebagai fasilitator, pembimbing, motivator, demonstrator, mediator, dan sumber belajar dalam pengembangan empati siswa. Strategi yang digunakan meliputi bermain peran, *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL), diskusi, *storytelling*, pembiasaan sosial, dan kolaborasi dengan orang tua. *Storytelling* ditemukan sebagai strategi yang paling efektif dalam membantu siswa memahami perasaan dan perspektif orang lain karena memberikan pengalaman belajar yang lebih reflektif dan bermakna. Pengembangan empati menghadapi tantangan berupa keragaman karakteristik siswa, perbedaan latar belakang keluarga, dan dinamika pengelolaan kelas. Secara keseluruhan, pengembangan empati memerlukan pendekatan yang holistik melalui sinergi antara pembelajaran, budaya sekolah, dan dukungan keluarga guna mendukung perkembangan sosial-emosional siswa secara optimal.

Kata Kunci: Empati; Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam; Sekolah Dasar; Sosial-Emosional.

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is the ability of an individual to understand, feel, and place themselves in the conditions, feelings, thoughts, and perspectives of others

consciously, while appreciating emotional differences to build good social and emotional relationships (Fajri et al., 2025; Mulyawati et al., 2022). In the context of child development, empathy is one of the important abilities that plays a role in shaping social and emotional behavior. Instilling empathy from an early age is important because it can help children understand the feelings of others, appreciate differences, and develop a caring attitude and positive social interaction skills. Empathy also contributes to the development of prosocial behavior, the ability to cooperate, the formation of positive social relationships, and the reduction of aggressive behavior tendencies in children (Vairami & Petrogiannis, 2026). Thus, the attitude of empathy needs to be developed in children as part of character building and social skills that support community life.

However, children's social development in the modern era shows various social problems that indicate a low level of empathy among students. The phenomenon of bullying and violence among peers remains an issue found in the educational environment in Indonesia. UNICEF data (2020) shows that 41% of 15-year-old students in Indonesia have experienced bullying several times in the past month. Low empathy is known to be associated with increased bullying and aggressive behavior among students (Utomo, 2022). That condition indicates that the social-emotional development of students requires more serious attention in the educational process. Schools not only play a role in developing students' academic abilities but also have the responsibility of shaping character, social skills, and social-emotional development as preparation for community life (Silke et al., 2024). Therefore, the development of empathy becomes one of the aspects that needs attention in the elementary school education process.

At the elementary school level, teachers hold a very strategic position in developing students' empathy because the elementary school years are a crucial period in a child's social and emotional development (P. Wang et al., 2025). At this stage, children begin to learn to understand the feelings of others, build social relationships, and adjust their behavior to the norms prevailing in their surroundings (P. Wang et al., 2025). In the process, the intense interaction between teachers and students positions the teacher as an important figure who plays a role in shaping the attitudes, behaviors, and character of the students (Rao et al., 2024).

In the context of Islamic education, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers hold a strategic position in instilling moral values and social concern in students. Teachers do not merely serve as conveyors of religious knowledge but also as facilitators, guides, and moral exemplars who can shape students' character holistically. Through learning interactions, habituation, exemplary behavior, and the reinforcement of Islamic values in daily school life, teachers play an important role in fostering students' empathetic attitudes. The attitude of empathy instilled through education is expected to shape students who are not only academically excellent but also possess social concern, respect for others, and the ability to build good interpersonal relationships.

Several previous studies have shown that the role of teachers has a significant contribution to the development of empathy and prosocial behavior in students. Research conducted by Manda & Arifin (2024) shows that teachers play an important role in designing and implementing learning that involves social values, including empathy, through thematic learning in elementary schools. In the research, the teacher plays a role in creating learning activities that encourage social



interaction, cooperation, discussion, and reflection so that students can better understand the feelings and perspectives of others. Other research also explains that teachers play an important role in fostering students' empathy through play-based learning strategies, group activities, and social interaction-based learning that encourages students to help, share, and cooperate (Kanza et al., 2025). These findings affirm that the effectiveness of empathy development in schools greatly depends on how teachers design and facilitate socially and emotionally meaningful learning experiences.

However, previous research has focused more on the development of empathy through the application of certain teaching methods or strategies, such as thematic learning, play-based learning, and group activities (Ramadhanti et al., 2024). These studies show the effectiveness of various learning strategies in fostering student empathy. Still, they have not yet revealed how the role of PAI teachers comprehensively contributes to building empathy through learning integration, exemplary behavior, habituation, and school culture. In addition, previous research is still limited in integrating the perspectives of various parties in the school environment, such as teachers, principals, and students, into a cohesive study framework. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed to understand the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' empathetic attitudes through the integration of learning strategies, exemplary behavior, habituation, and school culture in the daily life of an Islamic-based elementary school environment.

SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran has become a relevant research context because this school has developed various affective learning strategies and social activities aimed at fostering students' empathy. Based on the initial information obtained by the researchers, the school has developed various learning and habituation activities that have the potential to foster students' empathy. These conditions make this school a relevant context for examining how the role of PAI teachers is implemented in the process of fostering students' empathy.

The novelty of this research lies in the analysis of the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' empathetic attitudes through the integration of learning strategies, exemplary behavior, habituation, and school culture in the Muhammadiyah elementary school environment. Additionally, this research integrates the perspectives of teachers, principals, and students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the empathy development process in Islamic-based schools. Based on that background, this research aims to describe the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' empathy at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran, including the teaching strategies applied, the integration of empathy values in the curriculum, and the challenges faced by teachers in the process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Case studies are one of the designs in qualitative research that focus on in-depth investigation of a specific case to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Kusumastuti et al., 2025). The case study design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' empathetic attitudes at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran. The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Insan



Kreatif Kembaran. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which enables researchers to select participants who can provide rich, relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The research informants include one PAI teacher, one principal, and five fifth-grade students, for a total of seven.

Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview was conducted to explore information regarding the implementation of the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' empathy, the strategies applied, and the various challenges faced in the development process. The entire interview process is recorded with the informant's consent and then transcribed verbatim to support the data analysis process.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Analysis is conducted continuously from the data collection process through to the attainment of a comprehensive understanding of the researched phenomenon. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, a strategy that enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Morgan, 2024). This process involved comparing information obtained from PAI teachers, the school principal, and students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview data, the study found that PAI teachers play an important role in fostering students' empathy through various learning strategies, habituation activities, and collaboration with parents. These efforts are implemented both in and out of the classroom to support students' social and emotional development. The findings are presented according to the main strategies employed by PAI teachers in fostering empathy among students at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran.

Implementation of the Role of PAI Teachers in Building Students' Empathy Attitude

Based on interviews with PAI teachers, the principal, and students at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran, it was found that PAI teachers have a diverse role in fostering students' empathetic attitudes. That role is realized through the implementation of various learning strategies and school activities, such as role-playing, *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL), reflective discussions, *storytelling*, habituation through school activities, and collaboration with parents. Research findings indicate that teachers not only serve as conveyors of learning material but also as facilitators, guides, motivators, demonstrators, and mediators in the process of developing students' empathy. A summary of the role of PAI teachers and the strategies used to build students' empathy is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Role of PAI Teachers and Strategies for Developing Student Empathy

The Role of PAI Teachers	The Strategy Used
Facilitator	Role-playing, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), and discussion strategy
Mentor	Storytelling and discussion strategy
Motivador	Encouraging adaptation activities in schools
Demostrador	Habituation through various social and prosocial activities at school
Mediador	Collaboration with parents in the development of empathy



Role-Playing Strategy

Based on interviews with students, teachers, and the principal at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran, it was found that some students still have difficulty controlling their emotions and understanding the feelings of their peers. To address this issue, the PAI teacher implemented a role-playing strategy as an effort to foster students' empathy. Through this strategy, students are encouraged to understand the feelings, perspectives, and conditions of others by placing themselves in specific social situations. These findings are in line with the research by Fauzi et al. (2024), which shows that role-playing can help develop students' social and emotional skills.

Role-playing strategies are implemented in learning activities using scenarios relevant to the material, such as a case of a friend being mocked. Students are asked to portray certain characters so that they can recognize appropriate responses in social situations while also fostering empathy toward friends who are facing problems (Indriyanawati & Utomo, 2024). The results of the interview with the PAI teacher with the initials NA also provided direct questions and certain arguments as material for discussion and problem-solving.

"For example, if a friend keeps mocking you, how would you react? If a friend falls in front of you, how would you react?"

During the role-playing activities, students can also learn from the roles of their peers, seeing how their friends feel when playing different characters. This indicates that students can understand other people's perspectives and feel what their peers feel; this response is one form of the development of students' empathetic attitudes. Other students, who do not take part in the roles, can observe this activity and understand the feelings and attitudes of each character portrayed by their peers. Other students, who do not take part in the roles, can observe this activity and understand the feelings and attitudes of each character portrayed by their peers. Thus, this role-playing activity can train students to understand the conditions and feelings of others, thereby encouraging them to be empathetic toward others.

The strategy of fostering empathy awareness through role-playing is a method that can directly stimulate students' understanding of empathy. Through this strategy, students are asked to play specific roles to identify and solve problems. They can also learn problem-solving techniques by observing their classmates who are playing certain roles (Wijayanto, 2025). Role-playing strategies are important because they can help students understand the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others more realistically through emotional involvement in the situations being acted out. Furthermore, according to Musthofiyyah et al. (Musthofiyyah et al., 2025), role-playing activities can train social sensitivity, communication skills, and build students' awareness to be caring and respectful toward others in daily life as a form of empathy toward others.

In its implementation, PAI teachers act as facilitators, guides, and learning resources who direct learning activities, provide stimuli to social issues, and help students reflect on the values of empathy that emerge during role-playing activities. These findings indicate that the success of empathy development is not only influenced by the teaching methods used but also by the teacher's ability to create



active, reflective, and meaningful learning experiences. This is in line with the opinion of Gautam and Agarwal (2023), who state that teachers as facilitators play a role in creating a learning environment that allows students to build understanding based on their learning experiences.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

The interview results also concluded that the PAI teacher mentioned that one of the strategies used to foster students' empathy is through the *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL) approach. This approach is used to provide a learning experience centered on activities and direct student involvement in the completion of a project. This strategy provides students with the opportunity to develop social awareness skills, effectively enhancing their ability to understand perspectives and empathize with others (Kilby, 2022; Yuliani et al., 2025). From this project assignment, students can develop a sense of social concern and empathy toward others. One example of the assigned task is to create an anti-bullying poster. The PAI teacher with the initials NA stated in an interview:

"Each class usually has an assignment to make an anti-bullying poster, then they go into the classrooms to inform and campaign against bullying inside the classrooms."

The PAI teacher uses this strategy to provide a learning experience that allows students to understand the value of social concern through direct involvement in project activities. Through the assignment of a project, students are asked to create a poster that contains anti-bullying behavior. Not only are students required to make posters, but they are also asked to distribute their posters to other classes. This shows that this activity supports students' understanding of anti-bullying, where students must be able to understand other people's perspectives. Understanding how this bullying behavior can hurt others can encourage students to be caring toward friends who are affected by bullying from others.

The anti-bullying campaign activities through PjBL show that empathy learning not only develops through conceptual understanding but also through direct social engagement. Through the campaign activities, students learn to understand the impact of bullying behavior on the emotional condition of others while also developing social responsibility toward their surroundings. This condition shows that project-based learning is capable of building empathy awareness through collaborative and participatory student experiences.

Thus, in the implementation of PjBL, the teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students to gain direct social experiences through collaborative activities and social problem-solving. The teacher guides students to understand the impact of bullying behavior on others through anti-bullying campaign activities conducted directly in the classrooms. In addition, teachers also play a role in developing cooperation, social awareness, and student responsibility during the project completion process. The role of the teacher shows that project-based learning not only helps students understand the learning material but also provides social experiences that can foster empathy and concern for others through active student participation in learning activities. In line with the research by Nurdauletova et al. (2024), which shows that project-based learning can enhance student engagement, collaboration skills, and meaningful learning experiences through contextual learning activities.



Discussion Strategy

The discussion strategy implemented by the PAI teacher at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran is used as one of the efforts to support the development of students' empathetic attitudes. The form of discussion applied is an interactive discussion between teachers and students that focuses on understanding the emotional conditions and social problems experienced by peers. In the learning process, students are involved in discussion activities about feelings, experiences, and responses that should be taken when facing certain situations as a form of developing empathy skills.

Through the discussion activities, the teacher poses reflective questions related to the students' daily lives, thereby encouraging them to understand the perspectives and feelings of others. The teacher strives to guide students to reflect on their social attitudes and behaviors through direct communication. The PAI teacher with the initials NA stated:

"We ask how he knows his friend's feelings, we invite him to discuss directly: 'If your friend were in this condition, how would you feel?'"

The results of the interview with the Principal of SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran, initial E, also indicate the implementation of discussion strategies in training students' empathy. The principal stated:

"Listening to students' complaints, then later discussing them, we can also discuss them with the child. For example, if there is a child who mocks, we can invite them to discuss it."

In the discussion strategy, the teacher acts as both a facilitator and a guide, directing the students' reflection process on various social situations related to empathy. In its implementation, the teacher who directs the course of the discussion provides stimuli to social issues and builds an atmosphere of open and reflective communication (Yasnita et al., 2025). The condition indicates that the process of reflective discussion can help students develop the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others as part of fostering an empathetic attitude. Mars(Khaidir et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2022) state that educators as facilitators have a role in encouraging reflective dialogue and creating a safe and supportive learning environment so that the reflection process can develop optimally. Thus, the presence of teachers as facilitators becomes important in helping students develop the ability to understand others' perspectives and build a caring attitude toward others.

In addition, the teacher also integrates values of empathy into the PAI learning materials, particularly in the moral education toward fellow living beings. The PAI teacher with the initials NA stated:

"For example, in 6th grade, the morals toward Allah's creatures, whether friends or animals, can ultimately be linked to empathy."

The statement shows that the teacher is trying to connect the concept of morality with the value of social care and the ability to understand the feelings of others. The discussion strategy applied helps students not only understand the learning material cognitively but also develop social awareness and an attitude of empathy in their daily lives. This is in line with the opinion of Steed et al. (2021),



which states that social emotional learning includes the development of social awareness, social relationship skills, and students' prosocial behavior. Thus, discussions become an effective strategy in fostering students' empathy because they help them understand the perspectives and emotional conditions of others through interaction and social reflection.

Storytelling Strategy

The PAI teacher with the initials NA mentioned in an interview that one of the strategies used to cultivate students' empathy is through storytelling. This strategy is carried out by conveying exemplary stories, especially the stories of the prophets and the Messenger of Allah, which are related to the values of care, compassion, and forgiveness toward others. The PAI teacher with the initials NA stated:

"If in history lessons there are stories, the stories of the Prophets can be related there. Later, we will take a story, usually told about how forgiving the Prophet Muhammad was, and then, through role-playing can narrate that, it's a story, right? Usually, stories are easier. Role-playing is indeed rare, because the child's condition makes it easier to listen to stories than to role-play."

Based on the interview results, the storytelling strategy is considered more effective in the learning process because students at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran tend to understand the values of empathy more easily through stories compared to the role-playing approach. The teacher explained that during role-playing activities, students sometimes focus more on entertainment aspects or things they find funny, causing their attention to the meaning of learning to diminish and the classroom conditions to become less conducive. Therefore, the storytelling approach was chosen because it is considered more capable of helping students understand the value of empathy in a more focused and reflective manner. Furthermore, in its implementation, the teacher connects the history learning material with the exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad, particularly regarding attitudes of forgiveness, care, and compassion toward others.

Through the story, students are invited to understand the value of empathy through the experiences of the characters so that they can emulate that attitude in their daily lives. Walker et al. (2025) state that *storytelling* can help students understand the experiences and perspectives of others and foster empathy through narrative experiences and emotional reflection. The condition shows that storytelling in learning can help students develop a deeper understanding of the value of empathy because students not only listen to the material but also experience the emotional journey of the characters being told.

The findings indicate that storytelling strategies not only serve as a medium for delivering learning materials but also as a means of internalizing moral and social values for students. Through this strategy, teachers act as sources of learning and value instillers who help students understand the meaning of empathy through exemplary stories. That role is important because it helps students understand the emotional conditions of others, develop social sensitivity, and foster an attitude of empathy toward others. Thus, storytelling strategies not only support students' understanding in cognitive aspects but also contribute to the social-emotional development and character formation of learners.



In addition, storytelling strategies also help create more reflective and meaningful learning because students gain emotional experiences through the stories told by the teacher. Omar's opinion (2025) explains that *storytelling* in learning can create more meaningful learning experiences, enhance students' emotional engagement, and foster empathy through understanding the experiences and perspectives of characters in the story. Thus, storytelling strategies become one of the effective approaches in fostering students' empathy because they help students understand the values of social concern, forgiveness, and the ability to comprehend others' feelings through the exemplary characters in the stories (Putri et al., 2024).

Habit Formation Strategy Through School Activities

The habituation strategy through school activities has become one of the efforts made by PAI teachers and the school authorities to foster students' empathy at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran. This strategy is implemented through various routine activities that directly involve students in social activities, environmental awareness, and mutual assistance-based activities. The habituation aims for the value of empathy to not only be understood theoretically in classroom learning but also to be applied in real life in the daily lives of students in the school environment.

Based on the interview results with the PAI teacher with the initials NA, there are several school activities that support the development of students' empathy, such as community service, waste donation every Friday, and the regular Ta'awun fund activities. The PAI teacher conveyed:

"If it's for empathy, we have community service, there's something called trash charity usually on Fridays, assisted by the committee." Once a year, there is a Ta'awun fund, usually organized by Muhammadiyah. Each student is required to donate one thousand or two thousand, which is then collected from all schools in Kasihan and will be distributed to schools that are in great need of those funds."

Community service activities in the school environment become a form of social habituation that trains students to work together, help each other, and foster concern for the environment and others. Through these activities, students learn to understand the importance of shared responsibility and caring attitudes toward others. In addition, the waste donation program carried out every Friday, involving the school committee, teaches students to collect and sort waste that still has value into social funds. This activity not only increases environmental awareness but also fosters social consciousness and empathy through the experience of sharing and helping others from an early age.

Meanwhile, the Ta'awun fund activity has become one form of contextual empathy learning because students are invited to help other schools in need of financial assistance. Through the infaq activities, students not only learn to share materially but also understand the conditions and difficulties experienced by others. The condition shows that empathy learning can be developed through direct social experiences, allowing students to understand the meaning of care and mutual assistance in real life.

The findings indicate that habituation strategies play an important role in fostering students' empathetic attitudes because they are carried out repeatedly and continuously in daily school activities. Habituation is an effective character



education process because the social values taught are not only conveyed through verbal explanations but also through real experiences directly undertaken by the students (Suud et al., 2025). This is in line with research findings that emphasize the importance of habituation, exemplary behavior, and a conducive environment in consistently shaping students' positive behavior (Mahmuddah & Junaidi, 2025).

Through these habituation activities, the teacher acts as a demonstrator and role model, directly showing empathetic behavior in various habituation activities at school. In addition, teachers also play the role of motivators who encourage students to actively participate in social activities organized by the school. That role shows that the success of fostering empathy is not only influenced by school programs but also by the active involvement of teachers in guiding and setting an example for students. The impact of this habituation is clearly recorded in the affective response of a fifth-grade student with the initials K, who stated in an interview that the stimulus of this social activity made him understand the meaning of sharing:

"Inviting, if a friend is in trouble, we feel sad and sorry for them."

In addition to social activities, the cultivation of empathy is also supported by a school culture that encourages students to help each other, respect their friends, and maintain positive social relationships. The principal conveyed that students are accustomed to listening to their friends' complaints, discussing issues when they arise, and being fair to one another. These findings indicate that the school environment plays a crucial role in supporting students' social-emotional development. Thus, habituation through school activities and culture becomes an effective approach in building an empathetic attitude because it provides students with the opportunity to apply the value of care in their daily lives.

Collaboration with Parents

The results of the interview with the PAI teacher at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran show that the form of cooperation between teachers and parents is carried out through direct communication as well as through communication media such as WhatsApp groups and personal messages to parents. This strategy is one of the efforts to cultivate and enhance students' empathy. The teacher conveyed that if there are certain conditions related to the development of attitudes or the needs of the students, the teacher will contact the parents so that they can together provide guidance and support to the child. The PAI teacher with the initials NA explained:

"Collaboration with parents is done through a WhatsApp group (if there is any issue with the child's condition). If a child needs guidance from the parents (the parents must know) thru a private chat with the parents because it concerns the child's personal matters."

In addition to personal communication, the school also holds parent-teacher study sessions that are conducted once a month for each class. The activity serves as a means of communication between teachers and parents to discuss students' development, both in terms of academic aspects and the development of students' attitudes and behavior while in the school environment. In the activity, teachers and parents can hold discussions regarding the appropriate steps to support the development of students' character and social attitudes.



The findings indicate that the formation of empathetic attitudes is not only the responsibility of teachers at school but also requires parental involvement in the character education of children. This is in line with the opinion of Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of collaboration between families and schools in supporting students' social-emotional development. Parents play a role in providing habituation, guidance, and exemplary behavior so that the values of empathy instilled in school can be applied in daily life. In this context, the teacher acts as a mediator, bridging communication between the school and the family to support the development of students' empathy and create continuity in character education in both environments.

In addition, cooperation between teachers and parents also has a positive impact on the development of students' empathy because character building can be carried out continuously in various environments of the child's life. The collaborative relationship between teachers and parents contributes to the social-emotional development of children through joint support and guidance (Lang et al., 2020). Through communication and joint guidance, students receive attention, direction, and reinforcement of empathetic attitudes more consistently both at school and at home. Thus, collaboration between teachers and parents becomes one of the important strategies in supporting the development of students' empathetic attitudes.

Based on the research findings, the development of students' empathy at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran is carried out through the integration of various contextual learning strategies in PAI lessons, including role-playing, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), discussion approaches, storytelling, social habituation, and collaboration with parents. In the process, PAI teachers play a central role as facilitators, guides, motivators, demonstrators, mediators, and learning resources in creating a learning environment that supports students' social-emotional development. Through these strategies, students gain firsthand experience in understanding the perspectives, emotional conditions, and needs of others. These findings indicate that empathy learning will be more effective when developed through active student engagement in real and meaningful social experiences.

Furthermore, this study found that storytelling strategies are more effective than role-playing in the context of elementary school students because students tend to be more focused and reflective when listening to stories. Other findings indicate that the value of empathy is integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile, moral education, religious moderation, and school culture. Thus, the development of students' empathy is not only carried out through classroom learning but also through an educational ecosystem that involves schools, families, and students' social experiences in a sustainable manner.

Integration of Empathy Learning in the Curriculum of SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran School

Based on the results of interviews with the PAI teacher and the principal of SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran, empathy learning is not specifically listed as a subject or a separate learning achievement in the school's curriculum. However, the values of empathy are implicitly integrated through various components of the curriculum, particularly through the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum, moral education, character building, and religious moderation materials in PAI learning.



The PAI teacher with the initials NA conveyed that the value of empathy is integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile module, particularly in the dimensions of cooperation and noble character, and further developed in the learning objectives (LO) in the moral section as a reflection material for learning. The principal with the initial E also added that the value of empathy is incorporated into character education as part of the effort to shape students' character comprehensively.

"There is in the independent curriculum module the Pancasila Student Profile: involved in cooperation, possessing noble character. Further developed in the TP section on ethics for learning reflection."

This finding shows that the value of empathy is integrated into existing subjects and learning activities, rather than through separate subjects. This approach shows that character development can be achieved through the learning process, school culture, and students' social experiences. This is in line with Rosyad's (2019) opinion that character education can be integrated into various aspects of school life, such as learning activities, daily habits, intramural and extracurricular activities, as well as cooperation between schools and parents. This finding is also supported by Irnawanto et al. (2025), who state that the implementation of character education in the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out through the integration of character values in learning and school culture, so that the value of empathy can be learned contextually and sustainably.

In addition to the formal curriculum, the school supports the development of empathy through various character-building programs, such as regular study sessions discussing empathy and emotional regulation, as well as teacher training to strengthen their competence in fostering students' empathy. The PAI teacher also explained that the religious moderation material in the Merdeka Curriculum provides space for students to appreciate differences and understand other people's perspectives. This finding is in line with Aluf et al. (2024), who state that religious moderation education can develop attitudes of tolerance, openness, and the ability to understand other people's perspectives.

The findings indicate that the development of empathy at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran does not only take place in the classroom but is also part of a character education ecosystem supported by school culture, teacher role models, and various school activities. This condition shows that the school environment plays an important role in continuously shaping students' caring and empathetic attitudes (Saryanto et al., 2023). Thus, even tho empathy is not explicitly listed in the curriculum, this value can still develop through various mutually supportive learning experiences in the school environment.

The Challenges of PAI Teachers in Fostering Students' Empathy

Although various strategies have been implemented, PAI teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran face several challenges in fostering students' empathetic attitudes. Based on the interview results, the challenges can be grouped into three main dimensions, namely the diversity of student characteristics, the influence of the family environment, and the dynamics of classroom management.

First, the diversity of student characteristics and emotional maturity becomes the most dominant challenge. The PAI teacher with the initials NA conveyed that



there are students with high egocentrism who are not yet able to recognize their own emotions and have difficulty controlling their emotional responses when faced with certain social situations. Some students are very quiet, experiencing significant communication barriers, to the point of not making any sound at all in class.

"There are children who have difficulty controlling their emotions or are highly egocentric, not yet recognizing their own emotions. Some children are quiet, who don't make a sound at all in second grade."

The condition indicates that the development of empathy is greatly influenced by the students' ability to recognize and regulate their own emotions. Students who are not yet able to understand and control their own emotions tend to have difficulty understanding the emotional states of others. The findings are in line with the research by Wang et al. (2023), which states that emotional awareness is a cognitive skill that forms the foundation of emotional intelligence and social adaptation in elementary school children, including the ability to empathize. Without the ability to recognize their own emotions, students will find it difficult to identify and respond to the feelings of others accurately. The condition indicates that the development of empathy in elementary school students should begin with strengthening self-awareness and emotional regulation skills as a foundation for understanding the feelings of others.

Second, differences in parenting styles and family backgrounds of students pose external challenges that also affect the development of empathy in schools. The PAI teacher conveyed that there are students from broken homes, raised by their grandmothers because their parents have passed away, or who receive less attention due to their parents' busyness. This condition causes the values of empathy instilled in school not always to receive consistent reinforcement in the family environment.

"The busyness of parents, the attention of parents. Some children are directly monitored by their parents, and some are with their grandparents because their parents have passed away or are from broken homes."

This finding indicates that the development of students' empathy cannot be separated from the quality of relationships and parenting patterns within the family. Parental upbringing plays a crucial role in a child's socio-emotional development; the absence of a responsive caregiver affects the child's ability to empathize and regulate emotions (Arta & Prahesti, 2024). On the contrary, the absence of a stable caregiver figure can hinder the development of a child's capacity for empathy from an early age. Kondisi ini menjadi tantangan tersendiri bagi guru PAI karena pembinaan empati yang dilakukan di sekolah memerlukan kesinambungan dengan lingkungan keluarga agar dapat memberikan dampak yang optimal.

Third, the difficult classroom conditions also pose an obstacle to the implementation of empathy learning. The principal with the initial E stated that noisy and unruly students pose a real challenge for teachers in the learning process. This condition was also confirmed by the PAI teacher, who mentioned that the role-playing strategy often does not work optimally because students tend to lose focus and respond more to entertainment aspects than to the substance of learning. The social-emotional competence of teachers plays a crucial role in creating a supportive, responsive, and effective learning environment that meets the emotional needs of students. Teachers who are able to demonstrate positive emotional communication



tend to find it easier to build closeness with students and create cooperative behavior in the classroom (Savina et al., 2025). Thus, the enhancement of teachers' social-emotional competencies becomes one of the key factors in addressing classroom management challenges that impact the effectiveness of empathy learning.

Overall, the various challenges faced by PAI teachers indicate that the development of empathy is a complex and multidimensional process. Its success does not only depend on the learning strategies applied in the classroom, but also on the emotional readiness of the students, the support of the family environment, and the teacher's ability to manage social dynamics in the classroom. Therefore, a holistic and collaborative approach between teachers, families, and school authorities is needed to create optimal conditions for the sustainable development of students' empathy.

This research has limitations in the scope of the research location, which was only conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran. Hence, the findings obtained represent the context of that school and cannot yet comprehensively illustrate the implementation of the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' empathetic attitudes in various contexts of primary education. Further research is recommended to involve schools with diverse characteristics and to examine the effectiveness of various learning and habituation strategies used by PAI teachers in developing students' empathy, so as to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of empathy development in the elementary education environment.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play an important role in fostering students' empathetic attitudes at SD Muhammadiyah Insan Kreatif Kembaran through their roles as facilitators, guides, motivators, demonstrators, mediators, and learning resources. The formation of empathy is carried out through various strategies, such as role-playing, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), discussion approaches, storytelling, social habituation, and collaboration with parents. Research findings indicate that storytelling strategies tend to be more effective than role-playing in helping students understand the feelings and perspectives of others. Nevertheless, these efforts still face several challenges, including the diversity of student characteristics and emotional maturity, differences in family backgrounds, and classroom management dynamics that affect the effectiveness of learning.

The implications of this research indicate that the development of student empathy requires a holistic approach through the synergy of classroom learning, school culture, and family support. The findings of this research emphasize the importance of the role of PAI teachers as agents of character education who not only focus on the cognitive aspects of religion but also on the development of students' social-emotional competencies. Therefore, the results of this study can serve as a consideration for schools in designing learning programs and character strengthening that support the sustainable development of students' empathy.

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