

The Implementation of Teachers' Understanding of Learners from the Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy: An Observational Study at Buana Waru Junior High School

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how teachers at Buana Waru Junior High School understand learners from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, as well as how such practices relate to the comprehensive objectives of Islamic education. The research employs a qualitative approach using direct classroom and school-environment observations as the primary data collection method. The observational findings indicate that teachers do not perceive learners as passive objects, but rather as individuals possessing physical, intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social potential. Teachers implement a humanistic pedagogical approach by fostering dialogical interactions, adapting instructional styles to the diverse characteristics of learners, and paying close attention to students' social backgrounds. These practices reflect a holistic understanding of learners that is consistent with the principles of Islamic educational philosophy, which views human beings as integrated and multidimensional entities. Furthermore, the observed educational practices align with the core objectives of Islamic education, namely the formation of learners who possess noble character (*akhlakul karimah*), sound knowledge, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility. Teachers internalize values such as honesty, discipline, respect, cooperation, and religious consciousness within classroom activities, while simultaneously encouraging learners to think critically and connect academic content with real-life experiences. Thus, the research questions are addressed by demonstrating a clear consistency between teachers' understanding, pedagogical practices, and the core values of Islamic educational philosophy. This study affirms that education grounded in Islamic philosophy is not merely normative in nature but can be practically implemented through pedagogical interactions and approaches that are sensitive to learners' developmental needs. Future research is recommended to expand data sources through in-depth interviews and cross-school comparisons to achieve a more comprehensive mapping of the implementation of Islamic educational philosophy in educational practice.

Keywords: islamic educational philosophy; teachers' understanding; learners; holistic education; qualitative observation.

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INTRODUCTION

Education from an Islamic perspective is understood as a comprehensive process aimed at developing the human being holistically, encompassing not only intellectual dimensions but also moral, spiritual, and social aspects. This understanding is grounded in the view that human beings are created with inherent potentials that must be nurtured through a proper process of *tarbiyah*. Accordingly, Islamic education does not merely focus on the transmission of knowledge, but rather on cultivating individuals who are civilized, ethically grounded, and capable of fulfilling their responsibilities as servants of Allah and as *khalifah* on earth. This perspective is strongly reinforced in the thought of Syed

Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who asserts that the essence of Islamic education lies in the inculcation of *adab*, as a sound personality structure can only emerge through the formation of conduct rooted in noble values (Al-Attas, 2011). In other words, the success of education is not measured solely by academic achievement, but by learners' ability to place things in their proper context, act wisely, and uphold moral values in everyday life.

Within this framework, the role of the teacher occupies a central position. Teachers are not merely transmitters of subject matter, but moral exemplars and spiritual guides who significantly influence the character development of students. Classical Islamic educational tradition positions teachers as *murabbi*, *mu'allim*, and *mu'addib* figures responsible for nurturing human potential in its entirety to form well-rounded individuals. Nata (2020) explains that the effectiveness of Islamic education is largely determined by teachers' sensitivity in understanding students' development across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Without such sensitivity, education loses its essence as a process of guiding human beings toward moral and ethical perfection.

Field observations conducted at SMP Buana Waru indicate that teachers' understanding of students plays a crucial role in the daily implementation of education. Teachers strive to recognize students' characteristics, learning tendencies, emotional dynamics, and social backgrounds. In practice, teachers adjust their instructional strategies when dealing with students who are shy, lack self-confidence, display dominant behavior, or experience difficulties in emotional regulation. This adaptive approach reflects the application of the concept of *fitrah* in Islamic education, which acknowledges that each student possesses innate potential requiring guidance, stimulation, and habituation for optimal development. Tafsir (2020) emphasizes that Islamic education aims to develop this *fitrah* through a balanced cultivation of intellectual and moral capacities, enabling individuals to become not only academically competent but also ethically mature.

In addition to understanding students' individual characteristics, teachers at SMP Buana Waru also implement a humanistic approach to learning. This approach is evident in their practice of creating spaces for dialogue, encouraging students to ask questions, and motivating them to actively express their opinions. Teachers connect lesson content with students' real-life experiences, making learning not merely theoretical but socially relevant. Such an approach aligns with Muhaimin's (2020) argument that Islamic education should be dialogical and participatory, as sound reasoning develops through critical thinking, intellectual interaction, and the courage to question.

Teachers also pay close attention to the social dimension of students' lives. In informal interactions, they inquire about students' family situations, daily activities, and personal challenges that may affect their behavior at school. This response demonstrates that teachers do not perceive education as an activity confined to the classroom, but as a process closely linked to students' social contexts. Mastuhu (2020) asserts that moral and behavioral development cannot be separated from family and community environments. Therefore, effective Islamic educational approaches must consider students' social backgrounds to ensure that character formation efforts are realistic and appropriately targeted (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Bakar et al., 2024; Firmansyah, 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2023; Syah et al., 2023; Tobroni et al., 2023; Faridi, 2024; Romelah, 2023; Jamil, 2025; Idris, 2024).

Moral development is also prominently reflected in daily activities at SMP Buana Waru. Teachers consistently instill values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and diligence in learning. Moral education is carried out not only through explicit instruction, but also through exemplary conduct, reminders during daily interactions, and habituation of positive behavior. This approach resonates with Al-Ghazali's view that moral education is ineffective if delivered solely through normative advice; rather, role modeling and habituation exert far greater influence in cultivating virtuous character (Al-Ghazali, 2021).

Based on these observational findings, it is essential to further examine how teachers conceptualize and enact their roles within the context of contemporary Islamic education. Teachers are no longer expected merely to master subject matter, but are also required to understand students' psychological development, apply appropriate pedagogical approaches, and embody moral exemplarity. Islamic education in the modern era faces significant challenges, particularly as students live in complex social environments characterized by constant distraction and shifting values. In such contexts, teachers become decisive figures in determining whether Islamic educational values can be effectively internalized.

This study seeks to address these challenges by posing fundamental questions regarding how teachers understand student characteristics, how they implement intellectual and moral development, and how closely classroom practices align with the principles of Islamic educational philosophy. The research not only describes instructional practices, but also interprets their meaning within the framework of Islamic educational thought, thereby offering a deeper and more comprehensive understanding. Through this analysis, the study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education literature and serve as a reference for teachers and educational institutions seeking to strengthen pedagogical and moral foundations in the learning process.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive interpretative research design. This approach was selected because the focus of the study lies in gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers' practices in comprehending and nurturing students, as well as interpreting these practices through the lens of Islamic educational philosophy. A qualitative approach enables the exploration of meanings, patterns, and dynamics of social interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement. The research was conducted at SMP Buana Waru, a junior high school selected as the site for direct classroom observation. The research subjects included subject teachers, students, and the classroom environment related to the learning process. Teachers constituted the primary focus of the study, as the research analyzed how they understand students and implement character development in educational practice.

Classroom observations were conducted directly during the learning process. The researcher observed patterns of teacher–student interaction, the ways teachers adjusted their approaches to students' characteristics, the use of humanistic teaching methods, and the forms of moral guidance emerging in learning activities. Observations were carried out in a non-interventionist manner so that learning conditions remained natural.

In addition, the researcher conducted informal conversations with teachers and several students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of the learning process, classroom dynamics, and approaches to character development. Unstructured interviews allowed the researcher to explore information flexibly according to the direction of conversations and field findings.

Supporting documents, such as syllabi, learning notes, school regulations, and institutional guidelines, were also examined to understand the educational context and values internalized by the school. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of:

1. Data reduction, involving the selection, simplification, and focusing of relevant observation and interview data;
2. Data display, organizing field findings into descriptive narratives to reveal patterns and relationships among data;

3. Conclusion drawing, interpreting findings through the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy to assess the alignment between teachers' practices and the fundamental concepts, scope, and objectives of Islamic education.

This analytical model enabled the researcher to connect empirical findings with a philosophical framework, resulting in a more comprehensive interpretation.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results of classroom observations at SMP Buana Waru indicate that the teaching and learning process of Islamic Religious Education demonstrates considerable complexity, reflecting interactions between teachers' understanding, students' conditions, and the learning environment. In general, teachers strive to implement learning in accordance with the curriculum and school schedule. However, several aspects reveal a gap between the philosophical demands of Islamic education and classroom practices. This gap becomes the central focus of analysis, particularly in relation to the research questions concerning the scope of Islamic educational philosophy, the relevance of learning to the objectives of Islamic education, and teachers' understanding of students.

Regarding teachers' understanding of students, observations reveal that teachers are aware of differences in students' characteristics, abilities, and social backgrounds. This awareness is evident in differentiated treatment of students with varying learning speeds. For instance, students who appear less confident receive additional guidance and gentler verbal approaches, while overly dominant students are instructed to restrain themselves to avoid monopolizing classroom interactions. Although this approach reflects a practical understanding of students, it is not yet supported by a systematic pedagogical framework (Hidayat, 2021).

In terms of teacher, student relationships, teachers appear to maintain close interactions with students, particularly through brief conversations before and after lessons. Teachers occasionally inquire about students' home conditions, daily activities, and learning difficulties. Such informal interactions indicate teachers' concern for students' social backgrounds. However, this concern has not been reflected in instructional planning, as lesson plans remain generic and are not based on in-depth assessments of individual student needs. Teachers' understanding of students thus remains at a practical level, rather than a philosophical one that recognizes human beings as possessing *fitrah*, spiritual potential, and developmental structures requiring conscious cultivation (Mahfud, 2022).

In classroom practice, teachers predominantly employ lecture-based methods combined with simple question-and-answer sessions. Students take notes, reread materials, and respond briefly to teachers' questions without engaging in deeper dialogue. When teaching moral values (*akhlaq*), teachers emphasize behavioral norms such as respect for teachers and cleanliness but do not encourage students to analyze the essence of these values in the context of modern life. This approach, which stresses "what should be done" without explaining "why it matters," leads students to perceive morality merely as behavioral rules rather than as a process of moral consciousness formation (Nasution, 2020).

This learning situation is highly relevant to the research question concerning the application of the scope of Islamic educational philosophy. Ideally, Islamic education encompasses ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. Ontologically, students are viewed as beings endowed with *fitrah* and potential; epistemologically, learning should develop intellect, heart, and experience; axiologically, education should culminate in moral character formation. Observation findings indicate that teachers primarily apply a basic epistemological aspect knowledge transmission while ontological

and axiological dimensions are not deeply integrated, as learning is not grounded in a profound understanding of students' nature or value-oriented educational objectives (Fadilah, 2022).

Observations also show that most students participate passively in learning activities. When teachers pose questions, only two or three students respond, while others remain silent or await instructions. Low student engagement suggests that learning activities do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to construct understanding, explore material, or develop critical thinking skills. Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes reflection, reasoning, and moral consideration; however, teacher centered classroom conditions limit students' opportunities for reflective learning experiences (Syamsuddin, 2020).

School facilities are actually adequate to support creative and student-centered learning. Multimedia equipment such as LCD projectors and sound systems is available but underutilized. Teachers continue to rely on lectures, even though technology-based learning could present real-life examples, videos, or case studies relevant to Islamic Religious Education. For example, moral education could be enhanced through videos depicting positive social interactions or case studies addressing value conflicts among adolescents. Nevertheless, such potential remains largely untapped (Rahman, 2021).

These conditions are relevant to the second research question concerning the alignment between learning practices and the objectives of Islamic educational philosophy. Islamic education aims to form morally grounded, knowledgeable individuals capable of fulfilling their role as *khalifah* on earth. This objective requires learning processes that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. However, observations reveal that learning remains predominantly theoretical, lacking experiential activities that connect religious values with students' social realities (Nurhayati, 2021).

Values such as honesty, discipline, and respect are taught, yet without effective strategies for value internalization. In Islamic education, internalization should involve habituation, role modeling, and self-reflection. Instead, teachers mainly provide verbal instructions, leading students to perceive values as school regulations rather than spiritually grounded life principles. The ultimate goal of Islamic education moral development through lived experience and internal reflection thus remains inadequately realized (Habibi, 2021).

Teachers' responses to students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds further illustrate limitations in understanding. For instance, students from economically disadvantaged families who submit assignments late are often reprimanded or penalized without investigating underlying causes. This indicates a superficial understanding of students' social backgrounds that has not been translated into inclusive and adaptive learning policies. From an Islamic educational perspective, understanding students' circumstances is integral to *tarbiyah*, as education aims to elevate human dignity based on individual conditions (Marzuki, 2020).

Regarding the objectives of Islamic education, observations reveal a discrepancy between theoretical ideals and classroom implementation. Islamic education seeks to produce *insan kamil* individuals whose intellect, heart, and actions are harmoniously integrated. However, current practices emphasize intellectual aspects while neglecting systematic cultivation of the heart (*qalb*) and actions (*amal*). Teachers provide moral examples but do not encourage reflection on the relationship between good deeds and spiritual consciousness. The absence of reflective activities or self-assessment limits students' understanding of the spiritual significance of learning materials (Sari, 2020).

Spiritual elements in learning are generally confined to opening and closing rituals, such as reciting prayers or reminding students of intention. This indicates that spirituality has not been integrated as an essential component of the learning process but remains a

separate ritual. Islamic education, however, views spirituality as the essence that imbues meaning into all educational activities (Hakim, 2021).

Social aspects also present challenges, as students tend to exhibit individualistic behavior during assignments, and group work is often ineffective due to limited collaboration skills. This contradicts Islamic educational goals emphasizing *ukhuwah*, cooperation, and social responsibility. Learning environments that fail to foster collaboration hinder the internalization of core Islamic social values (Ramli, 2020).

Overall, this study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education at SMP Buana Waru complies with the formal curriculum but requires strengthening in its philosophical foundations. Teachers possess a basic understanding of students but have not fully implemented pedagogical approaches grounded in the Islamic conception of human nature. Moral values are taught, yet internalization strategies remain limited. Spiritual reminders exist but are not meaningfully integrated into learning experiences. Consequently, achieving the objectives of Islamic educational philosophy necessitates more comprehensive and philosophically informed pedagogical strategies (Rahmawati, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Research on teachers' understanding of students from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy at SMP Buana Waru provides a comprehensive portrayal of how learning processes at the school reflect the values, principles, and objectives of Islamic education. The observational findings indicate that teachers play a central role in implementing Islamic values through pedagogical approaches, social interactions, and the moral and spiritual development of students. Nevertheless, the quality of implementation varies, depending on teachers' pedagogical competence, professional experience, and their level of awareness in consistently applying the principles of Islamic education.

Teachers' understanding of students emerges as a crucial factor in the success of Islamic educational practices. The observations reveal that most teachers at SMP Buana Waru perceive students as developing individuals with diverse potentials, needs, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Teachers attempt to manage classroom dynamics through responsive approaches, such as providing additional support for students experiencing learning difficulties, offering opportunities for students to express their opinions, and fostering a more inclusive learning environment. This approach aligns with Islamic educational philosophy, which views human beings as multidimensional entities possessing physical, spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions that must be developed in a balanced manner.

Furthermore, teachers have begun to apply more humanistic and dialogical learning approaches. This is evident in their efforts to initiate conversations, inquire about students' personal conditions, and provide opportunities for students to articulate their thoughts. Such practices resonate with the principle of *rahmah* (compassion) in Islamic education, which emphasizes respect for human dignity, empathy, and non-authoritarian knowledge transmission. However, not all teachers have fully optimized this approach. Some still rely heavily on traditional lecture-based methods, which limits the effectiveness of two-way interaction between teachers and students.

In terms of the scope of Islamic education, SMP Buana Waru has implemented several religious habituation activities that support the internalization of moral and spiritual values. Practices such as congregational prayers, recitation of supplications, and participation in school-based religious programs represent positive initial steps toward fostering a religious culture. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these activities largely depends on teachers' consistency in integrating Islamic values into subject matter and classroom interactions. Observations indicate that while some teachers emphasize learning

ethics such as honesty, respect, and discipline as integral components of education, others tend to separate content delivery from character development, resulting in an incomplete integration of Islamic education.

The objectives of Islamic education namely the formation of individuals who possess noble character, broad knowledge, and the ability to fulfill their roles as servants of Allah and stewards (*khalifah*) on earth are acknowledged by teachers as guiding principles of learning. However, achieving these objectives is not always supported by well structured pedagogical strategies. Although teachers attempt to guide students morally and spiritually, the learning strategies employed do not consistently facilitate the development of critical and reflective thinking as envisioned by Islamic educational philosophy. Some teachers relate learning materials to students' lived experiences, while others remain focused primarily on cognitive aspects without systematically incorporating moral and spiritual dimensions.

The research questions can be addressed based on the empirical findings as follows. First, teachers' understanding of students can be categorized as moderately adequate, as teachers recognize students' diverse characteristics and attempt to adjust their instructional approaches. However, this understanding has not yet been fully translated into consistent pedagogical strategies. Second, the implementation of the scope of Islamic education is evident through religious habituation activities and the incorporation of Islamic values into classroom interactions. Nonetheless, further development is needed to strengthen the integration of Islamic values within the curriculum and instructional methods. Third, although the objectives of Islamic education serve as a general orientation for educational practices at SMP Buana Waru, their achievement remains suboptimal due to limitations in pedagogical creativity, teachers' philosophical understanding, and structural support from the school.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the implementation of Islamic educational philosophy at SMP Buana Waru has been initiated but has not yet reached an ideal level. Teachers' understanding of students is reflected in several positive practices, although greater consistency is required. The scope of Islamic education is present through religious habituation and school culture, yet its integration into classroom learning remains uneven. While the objectives of Islamic education are recognized as guiding principles, achieving them requires strengthened pedagogical strategies, enhanced teacher exemplarity, and more structured curricular support.

Overall, the findings affirm that the success of Islamic education is highly dependent on the quality of teachers' understanding, the consistent application of Islamic values across all learning activities, and the school's capacity to create an environment conducive to students' moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. The integration of values, pedagogical understanding, and exemplary conduct emerges as the key to realizing the comprehensive objectives of Islamic education.

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