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Innovative Efforts of Islamic Education Teachers in Instilling *Akhlakul Karimah* in Autistic Students at Special Needs Schools (SLB)

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to describe and analyse in depth the innovative efforts made by Islamic Education teachers in fostering and instilling akhlakul karimah in autistic students at Pacitan Special School. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study methodology. Data collection techniques are interviews, observations, and documentation. The main data sources in this study include Islamic Education teachers, principals, and parents of students. The secondary data sources include school documents, scientific literature, and educational regulations related to Islamic education. The data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman approach with a narrative analysis type, namely analysing data in narrative form to understand experiences or perspectives. The results of the study indicate that the efforts of Islamic Education teachers in instilling good morals in autistic students are carried out through four main strategies, namely exemplary behaviour, habituation, supervision, and rewards and reprimands. In addition, the implementation of class trust programs, school agreements, and positive culture also play a role in forming a conducive learning environment. The success of this program is supported by collaboration between teachers, parents, and schools, despite facing challenges such as student learning difficulties and inconsistency in enforcing rules at home. The implications of this research indicate that instilling akhlakul karimah in autistic students cannot be done partially but requires a holistic and collaborative approach.

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan dan menganalisis secara mendalam upaya inovatif yang dilakukan oleh guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam membina dan

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menanamkan karakter mulia pada siswa autisme di Sekolah Luar Biasa Pacitan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metodologi studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data adalah wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Sumber data utama dalam penelitian ini meliputi guru PAI, kepala sekolah, dan orang tua siswa. Adapun sumber data sekunder mencakup dokumen sekolah, literatur ilmiah, dan peraturan pendidikan yang terkait dengan pendidikan agama Islam. Data dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan Miles dan Huberman dengan jenis analisis naratif, yakni menganalisis data dalam bentuk naratif untuk memahami pengalaman atau perspektif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa upaya guru PAI dalam menanamkan *akhlakul karimah* pada siswa autisme dilakukan melalui empat strategi utama, yaitu perilaku teladan, pembiasaan, pengawasan, dan penghargaan serta teguran. Selain itu, pelaksanaan program kepercayaan kelas, kesepakatan sekolah, dan budaya positif juga berperan dalam membentuk lingkungan belajar yang kondusif. Keberhasilan program ini didukung oleh kolaborasi antara guru, orang tua, dan sekolah, meskipun menghadapi tantangan seperti kesulitan belajar siswa dan ketidakkonsistenan dalam penegakan aturan di rumah. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa menanamkan karakter mulia pada siswa autisme tidak dapat dilakukan secara parsial, melainkan memerlukan pendekatan yang holistik dan kolaboratif.

I. INTRODUCTION

Moral education is a basic right for every student. We include children with special needs, regardless of their physical, mental, or socio-economic status. Through quality and adequate education, every individual can develop their potential optimally, build independence, and actively participate in society (Utari et al., 2020). The right to education for children with special needs is regulated in the Ministerial Regulation in Article 3, paragraph 1, which states that *"every student with physical, emotional, mental, and social limitations or with extraordinary intelligence or talent is entitled to participate in certain education according to their needs and abilities"* (Permendikbud, 2010). Children with special needs are children with physical, mental-intellectual, social, or emotional limitations. Autism itself is a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties in social interaction and communication (Andriyani & Amalia, 2021). Thus, the existence of limitations in autistic children does not make them blind in education. Autistic children also have the right to demand education like children in general, but still based on special supervision and approaches.

The increasing number of children with autism poses a significant challenge for Indonesia in the future. According to Detik Health, the number of children with autism is expected to continue increasing year by year, highlighting the growing challenge Indonesia may face in the future. Pediatric specialist Dr Bernie Endyarni Medise, SpA, estimates that the number of births in Indonesia reaches 4.5 million per year. Of that number, 1 in 100 children experience autism. This requires a complex and integrated approach to providing attention and support to children with autism and their families (Stefanni, 2024). Based on these facts, instilling *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students requires special attention due to the challenges in their development. One of the efforts to instil *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students is the involvement of teachers and their efforts in guiding (Jainiyah et al., 2023).

The Islamic Education teacher plays a key role in this process, not only as a religious educator but also as a role model and guide. According to Hilman, Islamic Education teachers play a role as educators and spiritual guides, conveying messages of goodness, morality, and Islamic ethical values to students (Taabudillah, 2023). In this regard, Islamic Education teachers are responsible for nurturing the physical and spiritual development of students to achieve maturity and be able to carry out humanitarian duties in accordance with Islamic values.

Akhlakul karimah is praiseworthy behaviour that reflects moral and spiritual values in Islam, such as honesty, responsibility, and patience. According to Al-Ghazali, *akhlak* is a trait embedded in the human soul that can easily produce commendable behaviour without the need for deep thought and consideration (Qodim, 2022). Morality reflects actual behaviour that serves as a measure of a Muslim's faith perfection. In this regard, Islamic education plays an important role as a medium for the formation of *akhlakul karimah* and the strengthening of students' spiritual dimensions (Asih, 2024).

Several studies have examined the instillation of *akhlakul karimah* in students in various contexts. Miswadi and Kosma Nengsi, through a literature study, emphasise the important role of Islamic Education teachers as guides, directors, and controllers of the morals of autistic children with approaches based on habituation, integrative, emotional, experiential, and exemplary methods rooted in

the Qur'an and Hadith (Miswadi & Nengsi, 2025). Previous research at SLB Autisme River Kids Malang showed that the religious character of autistic and mentally challenged students can be nurtured through routine activities such as prayer and Quran recitation. However, they still face challenges in social interaction and emotions (Daryono et al., 2024). Besides that, previous research conducted in SLBN Yapenas, shows that Islamic Education learning fosters religiosity and independence in children with intellectual disabilities. However, it is limited by low learning motivation and parental involvement (Anjariani, 2022). Safira (2024) through a phenomenological approach at SDN Meruya Selatan 06, found that the habituation of greetings, eating and drinking etiquette, and manners effectively shape the *akhlakul karimah* of mentally challenged students in inclusive schools (Safira, 2024). Meanwhile, previous research at SLB Bhakti Wanita, shows that the communication patterns of Islamic Education teachers, both verbal and nonverbal, as well as the use of visual media, are capable of effectively fostering the morals of disabled students (Yudowati, 2021).

From several previous studies that have been mentioned, there are novelties in this study compared to previous studies, including: *First*, the subjects of this research are focused solely on students with autism. *Second*, the research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a case study research method. The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a case study research method. The case study research method applied is to present data and analyse it in more depth regarding the chosen research topic. *Third*, the scope of the proposed research is not limited to describing the efforts made by Islamic Education teachers in instilling *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students but also examining the obstacles, supports, implications, and development programs implemented.

II. METHOD

This research uses a field research model Wijayanti & Astuti (2024) with a qualitative method. The research was conducted at Sekolah Luar Biasa Pacitan, a location chosen because it aligns with the research objectives. Meanwhile, the

approach used in this research is a case study, which was chosen due to its relevance to the research topic (Ridlo, 2023). This case study examines an event, situation, or condition related to the efforts of Islamic Education teachers in instilling *akhlakul karimah* in special needs schools in Pacitan (Abdussamad, 2021). The researcher will be directly involved in observing the interaction process that occurs in the school environment between teachers, students, and related parties (Astuti et al., 2021).

Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews are conducted to obtain detailed information from sources; the type of interview conducted in this study is semi-structured, with the researcher preparing a guide before conducting the interview (Sofyan & Saputra, 2022). Observation involves observing the subjects, and documentation is the collection and storage of documents related to the research (Triyanto & Astuti, 2024).

Four months of research were conducted at the Special School in Pacitan. Data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman approach, which includes data reduction, presentation, and simultaneous conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). To maintain validity and credibility, source triangulation was used through interviews, observations, and documentation (Astuti et al., 2024). The researcher interviewed Islamic Education teachers, the school principal, and students' parents, as well as observed the learning process and reviewed documents such as learning modules and daily journals. Data is considered valid if the three sources support each other.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Innovative Efforts and Programs of Islamic Education Teachers in the Formation of *Akhlakul Karimah* at SLB Pacitan

To instil the values of *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students, Islamic Education teachers at the special school in Pacitan implement various innovative efforts tailored to the needs and characteristics of the students. These innovative efforts are designed not only to convey Islamic teachings but also to shape students' daily

behaviour to reflect *akhlakul karimah*. Based on observations and interviews that have been conducted, the innovative efforts made by Islamic Education teachers can be detailed in the table.

Table 1. Innovative Efforts of Islamic Education Teachers in Instilling *Akhlakul Karimah*

Innovative Efforts	Description
Exemplary Behavior	The role of Islamic Education teachers is not limited to delivering religious material but also includes serving as role models in behaviour. The teacher consistently exemplifies <i>akhlakul karimah</i> in daily classroom activities. The teacher greets when entering and leaving the classroom, disposes of trash in its place, says "please" when asking for help, and "thank you" after being helped. With a gentle and positive tone, this exemplary approach effectively teaches social skills and empathy to autistic students, allowing them to imitate and apply these good behaviours in their daily lives, both inside and outside of school.
Habituation	Habituation is an activity carried out regularly and continuously to train students to develop certain habits. In the learning process, Islamic Education teachers at special needs school Pacitan instil religious values through routine prayers at the beginning and end of class and by encouraging students to express gratitude by saying "hamdalah" for the blessing of health. Outside of lessons, the teacher exemplifies a <i>akhlakul karimah</i> through habits such as maintaining cleanliness, not disturbing friends, speaking politely, praying before meals, and eating and drinking with the right hand and in the correct position.
Supervision	At the extraordinary school in Pacitan, Islamic Education teachers not only supervise but also provide guidance when students struggle to apply positive habits. This approach is effective in creating an environment that supports the character development of all students. Outside the classroom, all teachers and staff monitor students' behaviour, which is then reported to parents as part of character development monitoring. When at school, supervision is carried out by all teachers and school staff. Supervision at home becomes the responsibility of the parents, and communication between teachers and parents is conducted regularly to monitor students' progress.

Appreciation and Reprimand	Through the supervision that has been conducted previously, the Islamic Education teacher will give appreciation when students demonstrate good behaviour that reflects <i>akhlakul karimah</i> in various situations. The appreciation can take the form of praise and recognition for what they have done. On the other hand, if students engage in inappropriate actions, the teacher gives reprimands in the form of advice to instil an understanding of the importance of respecting moral values in daily life. This approach is expected to shape students' behaviour in accordance with the teachings of <i>akhlakul karimah</i> .
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In addition to the efforts made by Islamic Education teachers, the Special School in Pacitan also implements various structured programs designed to create an environment that supports the process of forming a *akhlakul karimah* for students. Each component of this program is designed to be integrated and mutually supportive in order to create a conducive learning environment for the development of *akhlakul karimah*. The program can be detailed in the table.

Table 2. Programs at the Pacitan Special School in Instilling *Akhlakul Karimah*

Program name	Description
Class Beliefs	This rule is posted in every classroom and must be followed by all class members. If anyone violates the rules, the teacher will immediately reprimand and remind them not to repeat the same mistake. The class beliefs include Saying greetings and shaking hands, Praying before and after studying, Keeping the class clean and tidy, Learning happily, and Respecting and caring for each other.
School Agreement	This school agreement was made to support the instillation of <i>akhlakul karimah</i> in students. This school agreement includes values such as faith and piety towards Allah Swt, discipline towards school rules, compassion, gratitude for all the blessings given, mutual assistance, appreciation of differences and the uniqueness of every human being, love for the homeland, and the cultivation of greetings, smiles, salutes, politeness, and courtesy.
Positive Culture	Positive culture is implemented as a method of habituating good practices to shape the <i>akhlakul karimah</i> of the students. These positive cultures include shaking hands when meeting teachers

	and greeting them when entering and leaving the room, performing congregational Friday prayers and regular religious activities, including the celebration of Islamic holidays, and the weekly Clean Friday to foster a love for nature, cooperation, and mutual assistance. The Clean Friday program is carried out regularly every week. This activity aims to instil a love for nature in the students. Through active participation in cleaning the school environment, students are encouraged to appreciate the cleanliness and beauty of their surroundings.
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Various programs such as Class Beliefs, School Agreements, and Positive Culture implemented at the special needs school Pacitan are designed to instil *akhlakul karimah* through the internalisation of moral and religious values in the daily lives of students. This approach is very important, especially for children on the autism spectrum who have developmental needs different from those of typical children.

Autism is a developmental neurological disorder that substantially affects verbal and nonverbal communication abilities as well as interaction. Children with autism physically have the same appearance as typical children. The main difference lies in their development, which is delayed in various aspects. Children with autism tend to behave and act like young children, repeating the same words or echoing; their emotions can easily explode, and they often ignore their surroundings when invited to communicate. This is in line with what Ishartiwi stated, that children with autism often exhibit distinctive characteristics such as difficulty in communication, frequently repeating certain words, speaking with a unique intonation or as if they are singing, and easily experiencing emotional outbursts. Autistic children tend to be focused on their world, making it difficult for them to understand their feelings or those of others. As a result, they face obstacles in forming friendships, playing or sharing with peers, and concentrating on learning (Ishartiwi et al., 2023).

The main education for autistic children is about good morals. This is important because autistic children often act based on impulses to calm themselves. Khaerudin stated that moral education would help prevent undesirable behaviour, make them more comfortable in daily life, and facilitate the implementation of

necessary regulations (Khaerudin et al., 2021). In this regard, education plays an important role in shaping students with *akhlakul karimah* because education can mature personalities and align behaviours (Sari & Pahrurroji, 2024). Morality becomes a measure of whether someone is good or not because a person's goodness or badness depends on their morality. Someone with good morals always fulfils their obligations to God, themselves, other beings, and fellow humans (Hasanah et al., 2023).

Based on field observations, instilling *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students is essentially the same as with children in general. However, this process requires a more intensive and specialised approach. The key to this process is consistent repetition, considering that children with autism often experience significant behavioural fluctuations. Islamic Education teachers have a special role in instilling *akhlakul karimah*. Because Islamic Education teachers not only play a role in teaching the material, but in Islamic education, teachers have the task of developing all the potential that students possess in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The development of that potential must be carried out through Islamic teachings (Nashihin & Musbikhin, 2021).

One of the efforts made by Islamic Education teachers is to provide an example or model. In the context of education, the exemplary behaviour of teachers includes every word and action that can be emulated by students to be applied in daily life, both in the school environment and in society (Rifki et al., 2023). Exemplary behaviour is applied through a direct approach, where educators demonstrate the positive behaviour they want to instil in autistic students. In addition to exemplary behaviour, habituation becomes an effective method for shaping students' character sustainably. Habituation is the process of forming attitudes and character through the consistent repetition of positive behaviours so that they become ingrained habits, lasting and enduring. Through this process, negative behaviours can gradually be replaced with better behaviours (Ali & Diponegoro, 2023).

After the habituation process is carried out, supervision is needed as a follow-up step to evaluate the extent to which these values are internalised and manifested

in students' behaviour. Supervision is a form of comprehensive observation that compares the reality being implemented with what should be implemented. In supervision, observation is conducted comprehensively, not separately, to determine results by comparing reality with what should have happened (Muslim, 2022). As part of the mechanism for reinforcing and correcting behaviour, the application of appreciation and reprimand becomes an important strategy in supporting the effectiveness of internalising the values of *akhlakul karimah*. Appreciation and reprimand are related to the consequences of the actions taken. Appreciation is given when someone successfully applies the desired behaviour, while reprimands are given when someone makes a mistake or violates that behaviour (Gunawan, 2014). The provision of rewards in the form of praise and punishment serves as feedback received by students after applying or not applying *akhlakul karimah*.

In addition to the innovative efforts made by Islamic Education teachers, the Special Needs School in Pacitan implements various structured programs. These programs are designed to create an environment that supports the formation of character and commendable behaviour among students, especially those with autism. Mrs. X, the principal, stated that

"The cultivation of akhlakul karimah at the Pacitan Special Needs School is carried out through a comprehensive approach that involves all members of the school. Programs such as class beliefs, school agreements, and a positive culture have become an integral part of the character-building process."

Although autistic students have limitations and require more time in the learning process, schools still provide the same rights in moral education with a more intensive and consistent approach. This is in line with what Albima said: that instilling *akhlakul karimah* in autistic children is a fundamental aspect that needs to be nurtured from an early age as preparation for daily life. Habits such as patience, politeness, and helping each other need to be taught not to demand perfection in worship but to foster awareness of religious values and life rules. With this understanding, it is hoped that they can position themselves well in their environment, especially at school, even though the process may take longer (Albima et al., 2024).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Formation of *Akhlakul Karimah* in Autistic Students

Supporting factors in instilling *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students include the cooperation of all school members at the Pacitan Special School. All parties at the school, including Islamic Education teachers, classroom teachers, and staff, collaborate in providing examples, habituating, and supervising the behaviour of autistic students both inside and outside the classroom, as long as they are still within the school environment. Co-teaching can encourage the development of deep professional relationships and help students stay on task (Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023). A healthy cafeteria is also provided to support the success of this program.

In addition, there is collaboration between teachers and parents. The roles of both parties are equally necessary to monitor and evaluate the students' behavioural development. The teacher's efforts in providing examples, habituation, and supervision at school must be continued by parents at home. This is in line with the theory that parental involvement in caregiving greatly supports the development of children with autism (Syaputri & Afriza, 2022). Through effective communication between teachers and parents, evaluations can also be conducted to assess the extent to which autistic students are able to apply the *akhlakul karimah* traits that have been taught, not only in the school environment but also in other settings.

One of the main obstacles faced by teachers is the difficulty students have in learning new things and abstract concepts. Such difficulties may lead students to struggle with understanding or even forgetting the values that have been taught. Autistic learners tend to have difficulty retaining newly learned information, requiring consistent and ongoing practice and habituation. The Islamic Education teacher also mentioned that the limitations experienced by autistic students result in a longer time required for the learning process.

This is in line with what Elen said that autistic students certainly cannot receive learning perfectly. Communication competence plays an important role in the success of learning. Due to their limited abilities, these children also require repeated lessons (Rubianti et al., 2023). Additionally, the variation in individuals' ability to absorb and apply behaviours that reflect commendable morals poses an

additional challenge in their educational process. This is in line with the theory that states that autism is a syndrome characterised by limitations in communication, concentration, and social interaction, as well as the emergence of typical behaviours such as hyperactivity and a tendency to immerse themselves in their world without paying attention to the surrounding environment (Irawan, 2019). Therefore, a structured, repetitive, and tailored learning approach to each student's needs is very important to help them develop and maintain positive behaviours that reflect *akhlakul karimah*.

Besides factors originating from the child, another obstacle in instilling good morals in autistic children is the difficulty parents face in implementing a strict diet. Parents sometimes give foods that should be avoided by autistic children, which negatively impacts the learning process. As a result, the child has difficulty concentrating, gets easily irritated, and experiences other behavioural problems. Based on several studies, the implementation of a gluten-free and casein-free diet in autistic children shows behavioural changes, although not very significant. However, this diet is considered quite effective in helping to reduce hyperactivity symptoms in children with autism (Bagaskorowati et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of parental consistency in managing the diets of autistic children to support their behavioural development and learning abilities.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the instillation of *akhlakul karimah* in autistic students at the Pacitan Special School is carried out in a structured and continuous manner through strategies of exemplary behaviour, habituation, and supervision, as well as appreciation and reprimand. Islamic Education teachers not only act as educators but also as spiritual guides and behavioural role models for autistic students. The approach used has proven effective, especially when combined with school programs such as class beliefs, school agreements, and a positive culture. The success of instilling *akhlakul karimah* is greatly influenced by the collaborative support between teachers, school staff, and parents. However, it still faces challenges, such as students' limitations in understanding abstract concepts and

inconsistencies in parenting at home, including dietary issues that affect behaviour. Therefore, moral education for autistic students requires a consistent, adaptive approach that actively involves all parties. Further research is needed to explore in-depth the active role of parents in character formation at home, as well as the influence of diet on the behaviour of autistic children. Furthermore, the development of media.

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