

Cultural and Structural Pathways to Character Formation: Teacher Parent Collaboration in Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the forms, strategies, and supporting and inhibiting factors of collaboration between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and parents in developing students' character, as well as to compare collaboration patterns within different Islamic educational traditions. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a comparative case study design. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving PAI teachers, parents, school principals, and students. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and technique triangulation. The findings show that teacher-parent collaboration plays an important role in strengthening students' religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social behavior. Two complementary collaboration patterns were identified: a cultural-relational approach emphasizing religious habituation, exemplary behavior, and interpersonal communication, and a structured-programmatic approach emphasizing formal communication, character monitoring, parenting programs, and systematic documentation. Supporting factors include shared religious values, institutional commitment, communication technology, and parental awareness, while major obstacles include limited parental availability, uneven participation, and differences in home-based parenting practices. The study implies that sustainable character formation requires adaptive collaboration that integrates institutional systems, interpersonal relationships, and continuity between school and home.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental social institution because it shapes not only academic competence but also the moral, social, and religious character required for responsible citizenship. Character formation is particularly important in

adolescence, when students develop habits, identities, values, and patterns of interaction that may influence their future participation in society (Parrott et al., 2025; Suhermanto, 2025). Islamic education contributes to this process by connecting knowledge with ethical conduct, spiritual awareness, responsibility, and social behavior. Research on Islamic education emphasizes that learning should address students' broader development rather than merely transferring religious information (Munif, 2023). Therefore, character education should be understood as a shared societal responsibility involving schools, families, and communities. When educational environments communicate consistent values, students receive stronger guidance for translating moral principles into everyday conduct. Strengthening collaboration between teachers and parents is consequently important for sustaining character development beyond classroom instruction and social participation.

The importance of school–family collaboration becomes greater because character cannot be formed through classroom instruction alone. Teachers may introduce religious and moral values, but students encounter influences at home, among peers, and through digital environments (Maimuna, 2024). Parents remain central actors because daily routines, supervision, communication, and examples within families continuously shape children's behavior. Studies concerning teacher roles in Islamic elementary education indicate that educators carry responsibilities extending beyond instructional delivery, including guidance and developmental support (Demir & Lukes, 2025). Likewise, parental involvement and communication can strengthen educational consistency and support children's development (Hu et al., 2025). Thus, cooperation between Islamic Religious Education teachers and parents is socially significant because it connects formal and informal education. A partnership can reinforce discipline, responsibility, religious practice, respect, and social sensitivity. Conversely, weak cooperation may create inconsistent expectations that reduce the effectiveness of character formation.

The general problem is that schools and families do not always possess a mechanism for coordinating character education. In practice, parents may assume that character formation is primarily the school's responsibility, while teachers may have limited opportunities to understand students' family conditions, habits, and challenges. Such separation can weaken continuity between values taught at school and behaviors practiced at home. Contemporary educational environments also involve diverse backgrounds and competing social influences, requiring communication that is inclusive, sustained, and responsive to students' needs. Research on inclusivity in mainstream classrooms demonstrates the importance of supportive educational environments that accommodate differences among learners (Alirahman et al., 2024). Meanwhile,

studies of religious moderation indicate that character and religious values need to be cultivated through structured educational practices (Idoko, 2023). These conditions make systematic teacher–parent cooperation necessary for strengthening students’ character within vocational Islamic-oriented educational settings.

Previous studies have established that Islamic education and character education require coordinated roles among educational actors, yet important limitations remain (Osman, 2026; Rachman, 2026). Research on Islamic Religious Education in families highlights the family’s contribution to children’s spiritual awareness, while studies of teacher roles emphasize educators’ responsibility for students’ development (Munif, 2023; Elihami & Melbourne, 2023). Research on religious moderation further demonstrates the importance of organized value learning within educational institutions (Zulfatmi, 2023). However, these studies generally discuss family education, teacher roles, or institutional value formation separately. They provide limited explanation of how PAI teachers and parents jointly organize communication, responsibilities, and strategies for character formation in vocational schools (Asfiati et al., 2023). Consequently, the existing literature does not sufficiently explain the practical mechanisms through which school–family collaboration operates within specific institutional cultures. This limitation creates a research gap concerning collaborative character education in vocational Islamic educational contexts (Aisyah et al., 2024).

Another limitation concerns the diversity of institutional and ideological contexts in which character education is implemented. Existing research discusses character education in pluralistic schools and religious institutions, showing that value internalization requires contextual management (Munif, 2025). Research on traditional Islamic boarding schools also indicates that philosophical and religious values can become foundations for character development (Islamic et al., 2024). Nevertheless, insufficient attention has been given to comparative collaboration between teachers and parents in vocational schools associated with different Islamic organizational traditions. The relationship between institutional culture, communication patterns, parental participation, and PAI teachers’ strategies therefore remains insufficiently understood (Faridi & Umiarso, 2024). This gap is because organizational identity may influence how schools interpret religious values, define character priorities, and engage families. The present study addresses this limitation by examining collaboration comparatively, thereby producing contextual knowledge about similarities, differences, strategies, and challenges in character formation.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative examination of collaboration between Islamic Religious Education teachers and parents in two vocational schools representing different Islamic organizational traditions: SMK

NU Wringin and SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso. Rather than treating teacher–parent cooperation as a general partnership, this study investigates its concrete forms, communication patterns, implementation strategies, supporting conditions, and obstacles within each institutional context. The comparison is intended to reveal how organizational culture and educational practices shape collaboration in character formation. This approach is important because it connects school–family partnership with Islamic character education and vocational-school realities in an analytical framework. The study therefore seeks to develop a contextual understanding of how shared responsibility can be organized between teachers and parents. Its findings are expected to provide a basis for strengthening sustainable collaboration while respecting characteristics and educational values cultivated within each school.

This study addresses the research problem of how Islamic Religious Education teachers and parents collaborate to form students' character at SMK NU Wringin and SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso. It specifically examines the forms of collaboration, the strategies used to implement it, and the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered by both schools. The central argument is that effective character formation requires a partnership in which teachers and parents share responsibilities, communicate continuously, coordinate expectations, and reinforce values across school and home environments. Such collaboration is expected to become more effective when adapted to institutional culture, student conditions, and practical capacities of families and teachers. A comparative investigation of the two schools can clarify whether different organizational backgrounds produce distinctive collaboration patterns or whether common principles can be identified. The study ultimately provides insights for strengthening sustainable school–family cooperation effectively in Islamic vocational education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a comparative case study design to investigate collaboration between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and parents in developing students' character (Akhyar et al., 2024; Nasrullah et al., 2023). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, practices, and interactions within their natural educational contexts rather than measure relationships statistically (Fantinelli et al., 2024; Lim, 2025). The comparative case study design is selected because the research examines two bounded institutional cases, SMK NU Wringin and SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso, and compares their forms of collaboration, implementation

strategies, and supporting and inhibiting factors. The design enables the researcher to examine each school in depth while identifying similarities and differences across the two contexts (Fonsén et al., 2023). The researcher functions as the primary research instrument, supported by interview guides, observation guidelines, and documentation instruments. The study therefore emphasizes contextual understanding, interpretation, and comparison of educational practices systematically.

The research is conducted at SMK NU Wringin and SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso, located in Bondowoso, East Java, Indonesia. These locations were selected purposively because both institutions provide vocational education while developing students' character through Islamic educational values. SMK NU Wringin represents a vocational school associated with Nahdlatul Ulama, whereas SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso represents a vocational school associated with Muhammadiyah. Their different organizational backgrounds provide a meaningful context for examining whether institutional culture influences patterns of collaboration between PAI teachers and parents. The selection corresponds with the comparative focus of the study and allows the researcher to investigate collaboration within each school's educational environment. Data are obtained from participants who are directly involved in character development, including PAI teachers, parents, school principals, and students as supporting informants. School documents are also examined to complement information obtained from participants and field observations.

Data are collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation is conducted to examine naturally occurring activities related to character development and teacher–parent collaboration without the researcher participating directly in those activities. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with PAI teachers, parents, school principals, and selected students to obtain detailed information concerning collaboration forms, communication patterns, implementation strategies, parental involvement, and supporting or inhibiting factors. Participants are selected purposively according to their relevance to the research focus, while additional participants may be identified through snowball procedures when necessary. Documentation is used to strengthen and verify field information through relevant school programs, communication records, meeting minutes, student records, activity archives, and other available documents. Data analysis follows an interactive qualitative process consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Mustainah et al., 2025). The analysis is conducted continuously during and after data collection.

Table 1. Research Focus, Aspects, Indicators, and Data Sources

No.	Research Focus	Aspects Examined	Indicators	Data Sources
1	Forms of PAI Teacher–Parent Collaboration	Communication patterns	Direct and indirect communication; communication intensity	PAI teachers, parents, school principals
		Communication media	Communication books, WhatsApp, parent meetings	PAI teachers, parents
		Parental involvement	Participation in school activities and parenting programs	Parents, school principals
2	Collaboration Strategies and Implementation	PAI teacher strategies	Modeling, habituation, persuasive approaches	PAI teachers
		School-based implementation	Character programs and religious activities	PAI teachers, school principals
		Home-based implementation	Supervision of worship and students' discipline	Parents
3	Supporting and Inhibiting Factors	Internal factors	Teacher motivation and parental awareness	PAI teachers, parents
		External factors	Environment, technology, and time availability	PAI teachers, parents
		Character-related outcomes	Discipline, religiosity, and responsibility	PAI teachers, students

Table 1 presents the research framework used to organize data collection and analysis across the two research sites. The framework consists of three main focuses: forms of teacher–parent collaboration, collaboration strategies and implementation, and supporting and inhibiting factors. The first focus examines communication patterns, communication media, and parental involvement. The second examines PAI teachers' strategies, school-based implementation, and home-based implementation. The third examines internal and external factors that facilitate or constrain collaboration, together with character-related outcomes in practice. Data are obtained primarily from PAI teachers, parents, school principals, and students, according to the relevance of each indicator. During analysis, information from interviews, observations, and documents is condensed into thematic categories, displayed comparatively between the two schools, and verified through source and technique triangulation processes. This framework helps maintain alignment between research questions, collected evidence, comparative analysis, interpretation, and final conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings at SMK NU Wringin Bondowoso indicate that collaboration between Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and parents has become an important part of students' character formation. Based on interviews, observations, and school documentation, collaboration has been implemented through both formal and informal communication. Informal communication is mainly conducted through class WhatsApp groups, while formal communication is conducted through parent meetings held periodically, generally each semester. PAI teachers also communicate students' character development through student communication books and personality reports. Parents are involved in several religious activities, including Islamic commemorations, school religious gatherings, and activities supporting students' moral development.

Although a collaborative structure has been established, its implementation is still developing and has not yet become fully systematic. The level of parental participation is not uniform. Some parents actively respond to information from teachers, while others have limited involvement because of work responsibilities and family activities. Consequently, information about students' development is not always followed up consistently at home. Teachers also experience limitations in providing individual assistance to every student because of time constraints. Nevertheless, the existing communication system provides a basis for maintaining contact between the school and family.

The collaboration at SMK NU Wringin is implemented through a cultural-religious approach. PAI teachers emphasize exemplary behavior, religious habituation, and persuasive approaches in guiding students and communicating with parents. School observations identified routine activities such as congregational Dhuha prayer, prayers before learning activities, and other religious programs. Teachers also encourage students to continue religious practices at home, including congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, respect for parents, and time discipline. Student communication books contain character-related records that can be reviewed and acknowledged by teachers and parents. These findings show that collaboration is not limited to verbal communication but is also supported by administrative documentation.

The implementation of character formation at SMK NU Wringin shows positive developments, particularly in religiosity, discipline, respect for teachers, and politeness. Students were observed participating in congregational prayers, demonstrating respectful behavior toward teachers, and following school routines. Teachers reported that many students showed behavioral improvement

following cooperation with parents. However, consistency varied among students. Students receiving stronger parental supervision tended to demonstrate more stable character practices than those receiving less supervision at home. School records also indicated several disciplinary cases, including lateness and insufficient responsibility for assignments. These findings indicate that character formation requires continuous reinforcement between school and family.

The supporting factors at SMK NU Wringin include the emotional closeness between teachers and parents and the strong religious culture of the surrounding community. Students' familiarity with religious activities at home also facilitates the continuation of school-based character practices. School observations and activity documentation indicate considerable student participation in religious activities. At the same time, several factors inhibit collaboration, particularly the limited participation of some parents, parents' work commitments, and teachers' limited time for intensive individual communication. The communication system therefore exists, but its effectiveness differs according to parental responsiveness and availability.

The findings at SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso indicate that collaboration between PAI teachers and parents is implemented in a more structured and program-oriented manner. The collaboration includes regular parent meetings, student development reports, official school WhatsApp groups, and periodic character evaluations. Communication concerns students' academic development, discipline, religious practices, and social behavior. School documentation shows that student development is recorded through administrative reporting, while parents are also involved in parenting education and character-development activities organized by the school.

The collaboration is not limited to one-way communication. PAI teachers communicate students' development to parents and involve parents in supporting character formation at home. School observations indicate that communication is conducted through class WhatsApp groups, parent meetings, and parenting programs. Parents are also invited to participate in educational activities intended to strengthen shared understanding between school and family. Nevertheless, parental participation remains uneven. Some parents actively communicate with the school, whereas others respond mainly when problems occur. Work responsibilities and limited availability are among the factors affecting participation.

The implementation strategy at SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso combines learning, habituation, and structured character programs. PAI teachers function not only as instructors but also as character-development guides who communicate with parents regarding students' development. School activities include congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, discipline-building activities,

and other scheduled religious programs. Character values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and work ethic are incorporated into school activities. Parents are encouraged to continue these practices at home, although the degree of implementation depends on their ability to supervise students outside school.

Communication between PAI teachers and parents is supported by an organized administrative system and digital communication. School documentation contains periodic character evaluations and records of student development. This system makes it possible for information to be communicated and documented systematically. However, the level of parental response varies. Some parents actively follow up on information, while others communicate only when their children experience problems. Thus, the communication structure is well established, but active and continuous parental participation remains an area requiring further strengthening.

The supporting factors at SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso include structured school management, organizational commitment to character education, and the use of communication technology. School programs include parenting education, character evaluation, and parent coordination meetings. These mechanisms facilitate regular interaction between school and family. However, obstacles include parents' work commitments and differences between school-based and home-based parenting practices. These differences may create inconsistencies in students' character development when communication is insufficient. The school therefore continues to use persuasive approaches and ongoing communication to maintain cooperation.

Observations of students indicate relatively stable and organized discipline. Students were observed following school regulations, arriving on time, participating in congregational prayer, and maintaining appropriate behavior toward teachers. Teachers reported that consistent habituation at school contributed to positive student behavior. School records also indicated that disciplinary cases were relatively limited following the implementation of more intensive character-development programs. Nevertheless, some students remained inconsistent in carrying out learning responsibilities at home. This finding demonstrates that although the school environment supports character development, parental involvement remains necessary to sustain students' character outside school.

Comparative Findings

The comparison of the two schools shows that both institutions share the same general objective of developing students' religiosity, discipline, responsibility, and appropriate social behavior. However, the form and implementation of collaboration differ. SMK NU Wringin demonstrates a more cultural-religious and relational pattern, emphasizing personal communication,

religious habituation, exemplary behavior, and community-based values. SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso demonstrates a more formal, structured, and programmatic pattern, emphasizing administrative communication, scheduled programs, character reports, parenting education, and digital communication.

The two schools also share similar challenges. Parental participation is not uniform, parents' work commitments limit direct involvement, and the continuity of character habituation at home remains dependent on parental supervision. The main difference concerns the organizational mechanism through which collaboration is maintained. SMK NU Wringin relies more strongly on interpersonal relationships and religious culture, whereas SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso relies more strongly on formal systems, school programs, and organized communication. Despite these differences, both schools demonstrate positive developments in students' character, particularly in religiosity, discipline, responsibility, and respectful behavior.

Table 2. Comparison of Teacher–Parent Collaboration in Character Formation

Aspect	SMK NU Wringin Bondowoso	SMK Mu Bondowoso
Collaboration pattern	Cultural-religious and relational	Formal, structured, and programmatic
Communication	WhatsApp groups, parent meetings, communication books, personal communication	Official WhatsApp groups, parent meetings, periodic reports, parenting programs
Main strategy	Exemplary behavior, habituation, persuasive approach, religious practices	Curriculum integration, structured habituation, character programs, monitoring
Parental involvement	Religious activities, communication, home supervision	Parenting education, communication, character monitoring, home supervision
Supporting factors	Religious community culture, emotional closeness, shared religious values	Structured management, organizational commitment, communication technology
Main obstacles	Limited parental participation, parents' work commitments, limited teacher time	Parents' work commitments, uneven participation, differences in parenting practices
Character development	Religiosity, discipline, politeness, respect for teachers	Discipline, responsibility, religiosity, work ethic
Main characteristic	Strong cultural and interpersonal foundation	Strong institutional and administrative foundation

Table 2 summarizes the similarities and differences identified through interviews, observations, and documentation at the two research sites. The table shows that both schools employ communication, habituation, parental involvement, and religious activities as components of character formation. The main distinction lies in the organizational pattern of collaboration. SMK NU

Wringin relies more on cultural and interpersonal mechanisms, while SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso relies more on formal programs and administrative systems. Both institutions nevertheless face similar challenges concerning parental availability, participation, and continuity of character practices at home. The comparison therefore indicates that the two schools have different mechanisms for implementing collaboration while pursuing similar character-development objectives.

Discussion

The findings show that teacher–parent collaboration contributes to character formation in both schools, while the mechanisms differ according to institutional context. At SMK NU Wringin, collaboration is predominantly cultural, relational, and religious, whereas SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso applies a more formal and programmatic model. These findings correspond with previous studies emphasizing that Islamic education involves spiritual, moral, and social development rather than knowledge transmission alone (Munif, 2023). The teacher’s role also extends beyond classroom instruction toward guidance and student development (Elihami & Melbourne, 2023). The structured programs at Muhammadiyah Bondowoso are consistent with research emphasizing organized value learning within educational institutions (Zulfatmi, 2023). However, the present findings add a comparative dimension by showing that similar character objectives can be pursued through different organizational pathways. Thus, institutional culture appears to shape how school–family collaboration is organized and sustained.

The findings concerning SMK NU Wringin are consistent with literature emphasizing religious habituation, exemplary behavior, and value internalization as important components of Islamic character education. The school’s emphasis on religious practices, personal relationships, and community culture corresponds with research on philosophical and religious values as foundations for character development in Islamic educational environments (Islamic et al., 2024). The continuation of religious practices between school and home is also compatible with research emphasizing Islamic learning within the family as a means of strengthening children’s spiritual awareness (Munif, 2023). However, the present study demonstrates that cultural strength does not automatically guarantee consistent parental participation. Limited parental availability and uneven communication remain obstacles. Theoretically, this finding suggests that cultural capital should be complemented by mechanisms that sustain communication. Practically, schools with strong religious traditions can retain relational approaches while strengthening documentation, follow-up,

and communication procedures with less-active parents.

The findings at SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso demonstrate stronger formalization of teacher–parent collaboration through meetings, digital communication, parenting education, character reports, and scheduled religious activities. This pattern is consistent with research emphasizing structured approaches to religious moderation and value development in educational institutions (Zulfatmi, 2023). It also reflects the importance of coordinated educational environments in supporting students with different circumstances and needs (Hasanah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the study reveals that strong administrative systems do not eliminate the challenge of parental participation. Some parents remain less responsive because of employment demands or differences in parenting practices. The theoretical implication is that institutional structure should be understood as a support mechanism rather than a substitute for family engagement. Practically, schools can strengthen existing systems by developing flexible communication channels, increasing two-way interaction, and providing opportunities for parents to participate without requiring frequent physical attendance at school.

The comparative findings provide an important theoretical implication for understanding character education as a shared and adaptive process. The two schools demonstrate that collaboration does not have to follow a single institutional model. SMK NU Wringin emphasizes cultural and relational mechanisms, while SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso emphasizes organizational and programmatic mechanisms. This complements research on character education in pluralistic schools, which highlights the importance of managing value internalization according to educational context (Munif, 2025). The practical implication is that schools should develop collaboration models based on their cultural resources, organizational capacity, and family circumstances. A culturally grounded school can strengthen systematic monitoring without losing its relational character, while a highly structured school can increase personal engagement without weakening its administrative system. Therefore, effective collaboration requires balance between institutional organization and meaningful interpersonal relationships.

The state of the art of this study lies in its comparative examination of teacher–parent collaboration for Islamic character formation in two vocational schools representing different Islamic organizational traditions. Previous studies have examined family-based Islamic education, teacher roles, religious moderation, inclusivity, and character education, but these dimensions have generally been considered separately (Munif, 2023; Elihami & Melbourne, 2023). The present study brings them together within the specific context of vocational

Islamic education. Its novelty lies in identifying two complementary collaboration pathways: a culturally embedded model at SMK NU Wringin and a structurally organized model at SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso. This comparison contributes a more contextual understanding of how institutional identity influences school–family collaboration. It also demonstrates that differences in organizational tradition do not necessarily produce different educational goals, but can shape the mechanisms used to achieve shared character-development objectives.

The principal contribution of this study is an empirically grounded understanding of teacher–parent collaboration as a bridge connecting character formation at school with character practices within the family. The findings indicate that effective collaboration depends on institutional culture, communication systems, parental availability, and continuity between school and home. This complements Islamic educational perspectives that emphasize the interconnected roles of educational environments in developing students' values and behavior (Karman et al., 2023). The study contributes theoretically by positioning collaboration as an adaptive process rather than a fixed model, and practically by identifying areas for institutional improvement. For SMK NU Wringin, stronger communication systems and follow-up can complement its cultural strengths. For SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso, stronger personal engagement can complement its structured programs. Overall, the findings provide a practical basis for developing sustainable collaboration that supports students' religiosity, discipline, responsibility, and social character.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the most important finding is that effective character formation through PAI teacher–parent collaboration does not depend on a single superior model, but on the integration of cultural-religious and structural-managerial approaches according to institutional context. SMK NU Wringin demonstrates the strength of cultural and relational collaboration through religious values, exemplary behavior, and emotional closeness, while SMK Muhammadiyah Bondowoso demonstrates the strength of structured collaboration through systematic programs, communication, documentation, and character monitoring. The main lesson is that school–family collaboration becomes more meaningful when institutional systems are combined with active parental involvement and continuity between school and home. Scientifically, this study contributes a comparative understanding of how different institutional cultures shape collaboration mechanisms while pursuing similar character-development goals, particularly in Islamic vocational education. However, the study is limited to two vocational schools and relies primarily on qualitative data,

so its findings cannot be generalized to all educational contexts. Future research should examine more diverse institutions, involve larger participant groups, and consider mixed-methods or intervention-based approaches to develop and evaluate sustainable school–family collaboration models.

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