

COMBINING PROFESSIONALISM AND ACADEMIC ETHICS: A FOUR-PILLAR MODEL FOR TEACHERS OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT THE MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH LEVEL

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Abstract

Teachers who excel technically but fall short ethically, and those who hold strong values but lack pedagogical skills, each pose distinct challenges to educational quality. To address this imbalance, the present study aims to construct a conceptual framework that operationally integrates professionalism and academic ethics for Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at the lower secondary (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) level. A review of prior research indicates that discussions of adab and academic integrity in Islamic education have largely focused on higher education and digital-related issues, whilst the context of lower secondary teachers and foundational, non-digital concerns remain relatively under-explored conceptually. Using a library-based research method, this study examines the theological foundation of 'qawiy' and 'amin' as expressed in Surah Al-Qashash, verse 26, and translates this into a four-pillar instructional model encompassing input, process, output and relationships, each accompanied by measurable success indicators. The findings show that the four pillars function as a mutually reinforcing cycle and can be implemented through five concrete classroom strategies, including academic learning contracts, character-based authentic assessment, higher-order thinking examinations, teacher modelling of scholarly conduct, and habitual source citation. This study contributes an operational model that can be directly adopted by teachers and educational institutions, whilst opening up scope for further empirical research to test its effectiveness in practice.

Keywords: Teacher Professionalism; Academic Ethics; Four-Pillar Model; Islamic Religious Education Teacher; Adab

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, the quality of education can no longer be understood solely through the lens of educators' technical ability to master subject matter, apply teaching strategies or utilise educational technology. Another dimension of fundamental importance is moral integrity, which serves as the foundation for the entire educational process. Teachers' professional competence, without being accompanied by ethical commitment, has the potential to give rise to educational practices that lack a values-based orientation, whilst moral commitment without the support of pedagogical competence may limit the effectiveness of learning. Thus, teacher professionalism should ideally not be viewed as a construct oriented solely towards academic skills, but as an integration of intellectual ability, professional responsibility and moral exemplarity.

The issue of academic integrity in the world of education demonstrates that the relationship between professional competence and ethical values still faces various challenges. The phenomenon of breaches of academic integrity does not only manifest itself in the form of individual actions, but is also linked to the culture and educational system that has developed within an institution. Akbar and Picard (2019) explain that the issue of academic integrity in Indonesia cannot be understood as an isolated case, but rather as part of a structural ' ' problem

relating to academic culture, institutional policies, and educational oversight mechanisms. These circumstances subsequently prompted the government to issue the Minister of National Education Regulation No. 17 of 2010 on the Prevention and Combating of Plagiarism in Higher Education as a demonstration of the state's commitment to the importance of upholding integrity within the academic environment. This regulation demonstrates that academic integrity has become a strategic issue in the development of national educational quality.

In the context of Islamic education, the issue of academic integrity takes on a more complex dimension, as education aims not only to shape intellectually capable individuals, but also those of good character and moral integrity. Teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupy a highly strategic position, as they serve both as conveyors of religious values and as role models for their pupils. Unlike other subjects, the success of PAI teaching is determined not only by the teacher's ability to convey religious concepts, but also by the consistency between the values taught and the professional conduct demonstrated in day-to-day educational practice. A PAI teacher who teaches the values of honesty, trustworthiness and responsibility, but fails to demonstrate these values in their academic activities, will create a pedagogical contradiction that can undermine the effectiveness of character education.

Amelia, Fauzi and Zawawi (2025) demonstrate that an ethical crisis in education can arise when educators possess adequate technical skills but lack commitment to academic integrity, such as through the manipulation of assessment, the use of teaching materials without independent development, or academic practices that do not reflect scientific integrity. This phenomenon becomes increasingly problematic when it occurs amongst Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, as there is a disconnect between the Islamic moral messages conveyed to pupils and the professional practices carried out by the educators. Therefore, the professionalism of PAI teachers cannot be measured solely by their mastery of pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competences, as set out in the national standards for teachers; it must also be assessed through the lens of academic ethics, which reflect the values of trustworthiness and moral responsibility.

These issues highlight two trends that both require attention. Firstly, there is the possibility of teachers emerging who possess high technical competence in teaching but have not yet fully demonstrated academic integrity in the practice of their profession. Secondly, there are teachers who possess a strong moral orientation but still face limitations in the development of their pedagogical and professional competences. These two conditions demonstrate that professionalism and academic ethics should not be understood as two separate aspects, but rather as two complementary components in building the quality of Islamic Education (PAI) teaching.

A number of previous studies have made significant contributions to our understanding of the relationship between moral values, adab and Islamic education. Maryana and her team (2025) demonstrate that the values of adab remain a key principle within the Islamic educational context, particularly as learning evolves in the digital sphere and faces the challenges posed by the use of artificial intelligence. The study by In'ami and Wekke (2025) reinforces the philosophical perspective by positioning Al-Attas's concept of adab as a vital foundation in contemporary Islamic education. Meanwhile, the research by Aji and colleagues (2026) examines the practice of adab within pesantren and madrasah settings as part of the character development of learners.

Although research on academic conduct and integrity has progressed, there remain several research gaps that require further investigation. Firstly, from an educational context perspective, previous research has largely focused on higher education and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), whilst studies on the integration of professionalism and academic ethics amongst Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level remain relatively limited. In fact, the MTs level is a crucial phase in the character development of pupils as it coincides with the transitional period of moral and social development in early adolescence.

Secondly, previous research has largely situated academic conduct within the context of pupils' behaviour or academic culture in general, whilst the dimension of professional integrity among PAI teachers in concrete activities—such as the development of teaching materials, the assessment of learning outcomes, and educational relationships with pupils and parents—has not yet been extensively explored. Thirdly, the majority of studies have remained at the level of describing phenomena and have not yet produced a conceptual model that can serve as a framework for implementation in PAI teaching practice.

In light of this gap, this study offers a new perspective by formulating a synthesis between teacher professionalism and academic ethics in Islamic Education (PAI) through the values of 'qawiy' (competent, strong in professional capacity) and 'amin' (trustworthy, possessing moral integrity), as depicted in Surah Al-Qashash, verse 26. The synthesis of these two values is significant as it embodies the ideal of an Islamic educator who not only possesses the ability to carry out professional duties but also exhibits the moral character necessary to ensure that the educational process proceeds authentically.

Consequently, this study aims to develop a conceptual model that integrates the professional competencies and academic ethics of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at the MTs level. It is hoped that this study will make a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education research, as well as a practical contribution to enhancing the quality of PAI teachers through an approach to professionalism based on values and integrity.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to construct a conceptual synthesis of the relationship between teacher professionalism and academic ethics from the perspective of Islamic education, rather than to test the relationship between variables empirically. A literature review enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of various scholarly sources, religious texts and relevant policy documents in order to formulate a conceptual framework that can be applied in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Qur'an and relevant exegetical works, particularly verses relating to the values of competence, trustworthiness and moral integrity of educators, as well as national regulatory documents governing teacher professionalism, such as Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, and policies relating to academic ethics and professional standards for educators. Meanwhile, secondary sources consist of academic books and scientific journal articles discussing teacher professionalism, educators' competencies, academic integrity, etiquette in Islamic education, and contemporary Islamic educational thought. The scientific literature used prioritises publications from the period 2020–2026 to provide an overview of the latest developments in the field, whilst still taking into account fundamental works of theoretical relevance.

The literature was selected using a purposive literature selection technique, which involves selecting sources based on their relevance to the theme, academic credibility, and contribution to the research focus. The inclusion criteria for the literature comprised: (1) discussing the ' ' of teacher professionalism or educator competence; (2) examining aspects of ethics, academic integrity, or Islamic educational etiquette; (3) having a

connection to the context of Islamic Education (PAI) learning; and (4) originating from reliable academic sources. Literature that is repetitive, lacks a direct connection to the research focus, or fails to meet academic standards was not utilised in the analysis process.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-analytical methods and conceptual synthesis across three stages. The first stage involved the identification and categorisation of the literature, namely grouping sources according to key themes, including teacher professionalism, academic ethics, Islamic educational etiquette, and the concept of ‘qawiyy–amin’ as the basis for the integration of educators’ competencies and morality. The second stage was a comparative analysis, which involved comparing various theoretical perspectives and the results of previous research to identify similarities, differences and research gaps. The third stage was conceptual synthesis, which involved integrating the various findings from the literature into an applicable four-pillar model of professionalism and academic ethics for Islamic Education (PAI) teachers.

The validity of the study’s findings is ensured through source triangulation, namely by comparing information obtained from religious texts, educational regulations, academic literature and the results of previous research. Through these stages, this study is expected to produce a conceptual framework that not only has a strong theoretical foundation but is also relevant to the development of Islamic Education (PAI) teaching practices at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Professionalism from the Perspective of Teacher Training Regulations

Legally speaking, Act No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers defines professionalism as the fulfilment of competencies, performance and responsibilities in line with applicable professional standards. These standards are further broken down into four areas of competence that teachers must master, covering the pedagogical, personal, social and professional domains. Put simply, the essence of this professionalism can be summarised as the ability to teach well (how to teach well), namely the ability to design and deliver learning effectively so that educational objectives are achieved. Mulyasa (2013) emphasises that mastery of subject matter alone is not sufficient to be considered a professional teacher. The ability to manage a class, select appropriate strategies, and engage in continuous professional development are equally important. In other words, professionalism places greater emphasis on an educator’s technical and pedagogical capacities.

Academic Ethics

Unlike professionalism, academic ethics relates to the system of values and norms that govern behaviour within the academic world, encompassing intellectual honesty, objectivity in assessment, and integrity throughout the entire academic process. Indicators include an anti-plagiarism stance, objectivity in marking, freedom from conflicts of interest, and respect for the intellectual property rights of others. Whilst professionalism addresses the question of how to teach well, academic ethics addresses the question of how to teach correctly (how to teach right).

Priatna (2016) explains that professional ethics in teaching encompass four forms of responsibility simultaneously: towards pupils, the profession, society, and God. A teacher can only be said to possess complete professional ethics if all four of these dimensions are present simultaneously, rather than merely being fulfilled in administrative terms alone.

The Urgency of Synthesising Professionalism and Academic Ethics

Professionalism on its own, without ethics, has the potential to produce teachers who are technically proficient but prone to cheating. Conversely, ethics without the underpinning of professionalism produce teachers who are well-intentioned but fail to help pupils achieve their

learning objectives. Both of these situations are equally undesirable and equally detrimental to pupils.

The need to unite these two aspects can be traced back to the concept of ‘Insan Kamil’ in Islamic education. Surah Al-Qasas, verse 26, describes the ideal worker as an individual who is both strong and trustworthy. The word qawiyy (strong, competent) in this verse represents the dimension of professionalism, whilst amin (trustworthy) represents the ethical dimension. The two are deliberately juxtaposed, signifying that competence without trustworthiness, or trustworthiness without competence, equally fail to meet the standard of goodness to which this verse aspires.

Al-Attas (1980) reinforces this idea through the concept of adab, namely the ability to place oneself, one’s knowledge and one’s behaviour appropriately in their rightful place. A teacher who embodies adab, according to this framework, automatically becomes both professional and ethical, because for them teaching is not merely a job but a form of worship that must be carried out to the best of their ability. This concept of adab has also recently been widely used as an analytical framework in the study of contemporary Islamic education. In’ami and Wekke (2025), for example, re-examine the relevance of Al-Attas’s thoughts on adab to contemporary Islamic education, whilst Aji et al. (2026) demonstrate how the values of adab continue to be practised in pesantren- and madrasah-based learning. Maryana and her team (2025), working at postgraduate level, even found that academic adab serves as a crucial pillar when learning relies on digital technology and artificial intelligence.

These three studies demonstrate that the concept of adab remains relevant across different contexts; however, its application at the level of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in lower secondary schools has not yet been extensively formulated in operational terms. It is here that the ‘qawiyy’ and ‘amin’ frameworks discussed in this section are sought to be developed into a more practical model, as outlined in the following sub-section.

Kuntowijoyo (1991) adds another dimension, namely the transformative nature of knowledge from an Islamic perspective, whereby knowledge should serve as a driving force for the improvement of the social order, rather than merely remaining at a theoretical level. Teachers who combine professionalism and academic ethics thus contribute to this social transformation, particularly through the character development of their pupils.

The Synthesis Model: The Four Pillars of Islamic Religious Education Teachers

The synthesis of professionalism and academic ethics can be put into practice through four interrelated pillars of learning, as summarised in the following table.

Table 1. The Four-Pillar Model of the Synthesis of Professionalism and Academic Ethics

Pillar	Professionalism	Academic Ethics	Form of Synthesis	Indicators of Success
1. Inputs	Mastery of Islamic Education (PAI) subject matter and targeted pedagogical strategies	Being honest in the use of scientific and religious reference sources	Providing guidance based on sound knowledge to foster students’ faith and piety	Original lesson plans, with references cited, and scientifically valid material

Pillar	Professionalism	Academic Ethics	Form of Synthesis	Indicators of Success
2. Process	Applying varied and contextual teaching methods	Treating all pupils fairly without discrimination	Creating an educational and communicative classroom atmosphere to foster Islamic character	All pupils are treated equally; methods vary from session to session
3. Outcomes	Pupils achieve the specified learning outcomes	Grades are not manipulated for administrative or accreditation purposes	Daily assessments are combined with character-building projects, and remedial work is carried out in practice	There are no fictitious marks; learning outcome reports reflect the actual situation
4. Relationships	Building effective communication with parents and stakeholders	Safeguarding the confidentiality of pupils' personal data	Class communication groups are used solely for relevant academic information	There are no leaks of student data; parents receive accurate, regular reports

These four pillars function as a mutually supportive cycle, rather than as isolated entities. Learning inputs that are ethically sourced and scientifically sound tend to foster a more equitable and purposeful learning process. Such a process, in turn, produces valid and meaningful outcomes, whilst relationships built on trust strengthen the entire educational ecosystem.

Conceptual Illustration of the Model's Application

To clarify how the four-pillar model described above works, three illustrative scenarios commonly encountered in school settings are presented below. All three are conceptual in nature and have been devised based on general patterns widely discussed in the literature; they do not constitute data derived from field observations or interviews, in keeping with the nature of this study as a library-based research project.

Scenario 1: Plagiarism of Lesson Plans

A teacher uses a lesson plan belonging to a colleague or downloaded from the internet without making any significant modifications, and then implements it as it stands in their class. Such practices constitute both a breach of academic ethics and a lack of professionalism, as lesson plans that are not adapted to the actual conditions of the classroom tend to be less effective. Based on the four-pillar model, the solution is twofold. From a professional perspective, teachers need to adapt lesson plans to the characteristics of their pupils and the context of their own class. From an ethical perspective, the sources that served as inspiration must still be cited. A good lesson plan should stem from reflection on the actual conditions of the classroom, not be the result of mindless copying and pasting.

Scenario 2: Manipulation of Grades for the Sake of Accreditation

In order to maintain the pass rate and the institution's accreditation targets, all students are declared to have met the Minimum Pass Criteria, even though some have not yet fully mastered the required competences. This situation illustrates the conflict between administrative pressure and academic responsibility. A professional approach demands remedial programmes and differentiated learning for students who have not yet met the criteria, whilst ethical considerations

demand honest reporting of marks and genuinely measurable improvement programmes, rather than the manipulation of figures to meet pre-determined targets.

Scenario 3: The Dissemination of Religious Content Without Verification

A PAI teacher uses weak, or even unsound, religious arguments or hadiths in social media content in order to reach a wider audience and gain more followers. This practice has the potential to spread erroneous religious understandings to a wider audience. From a professional perspective, teachers need to hone their digital communication skills, including public speaking and media literacy. From an ethical perspective, before uploading religious content, teachers are obliged to seek verification from experts, that is, to verify the accuracy of the information with those competent in the field.

Implementation Strategies in Islamic Religious Education Classes at MTs

The synthesis of professionalism and academic ethics must be realised through concrete learning strategies, rather than remaining merely at the conceptual level. The following five strategies have been formulated for direct application in Islamic Education (PAI) classes at the MTs level. Firstly, an academic learning contract. At the start of the term, teachers and pupils agree on shared rules, such as a ban on cheating and plagiarism, and the acceptance of mistakes provided they are made in good faith. This contract is signed by both parties and displayed in the classroom as a collective reminder; the process of drafting it in itself serves as a lesson in the value of integrity. Secondly, authentic assessment based on character-building projects. Assessment is not based solely on written examinations, but also on real-world projects that measure pupils' moral conduct in their daily lives; for example, a time-bound 'honesty project' in the school canteen, where pupils document their experiences of conducting transactions honestly. Such projects link PAI values to concrete behaviour that can be observed and assessed.

Thirdly, open-book examinations with higher-order thinking questions. Pupils are permitted to consult the Qur'an during the examination; however, the questions set require analytical and application skills, rather than mere rote learning. This approach cultivates critical thinking whilst deepening pupils' understanding of religious texts.

As a concrete illustration, here are two examples of question formats that teachers can adapt for use in the classroom.

The first example question involves verse analysis and contextualisation. Pupils are asked to open Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 6, which contains a call to verify the truth of a piece of news before believing it, particularly if the news is brought by an untrustworthy source. The question is then linked to the phenomenon of fake news, which is rife on social media today. Pupils are asked to analyse three key elements of the verse, and then explain how the principles of the verse can be applied when they encounter information of unclear origin on WhatsApp or Instagram.

The second example question concerns the application of values and problem-solving. Pupils are asked to open Surah An-Nisa' verse 58, which emphasises the obligation to convey a trust to the party entitled to receive it. This question is framed within a scenario in which a pupil is appointed as class treasurer, and a classmate borrows money from the class fund for personal use, promising ' ' that they will repay it. Pupils were asked to explain the principle of trust contained in the verse, as well as to determine the appropriate course of action to take, along with two supporting reasons.

This type of question has three main characteristics. Firstly, pupils are permitted to open the Qur'an to look up verses and read brief commentaries, so that the examination no longer emphasises rote memorisation alone. Secondly, the questions are designed to assess analytical, evaluative and creative skills, rather than merely recall and comprehension. Thirdly, each question is contextualised within real-life issues faced by pupils on a daily basis, such as fake news,

bullying, trust, and environmental issues. Through this approach, pupils are expected to understand that the Qur'an serves as practical guidance for life, rather than merely a text to be memorised. Fourthly, teachers as role models of scholarship. Teachers openly demonstrate their thought processes in front of their pupils, and when faced with a question to which they do not yet know the answer, they do not pretend to know, but state that they will first consult reliable sources. This attitude instils a healthy scientific culture and prioritises honesty over the impression of being all-knowing.

Fifth, fostering a culture of citing sources. Pupils are encouraged to cite their sources whenever they give a presentation or express an opinion, and teachers do the same in all their explanations. This practice instils respect for the work of others whilst training pupils to think in an evidence-based manner.

The Impact of Synthesis on Pupils, Teachers and Civilisation

For pupils, the integration of professionalism and academic ethics into learning provides two things at once: scientifically sound knowledge and a tangible example of how to live with integrity. The desired profile is that of a pupil who is devout, capable of critical thinking, and committed to honesty and justice. For teachers, consistently upholding professionalism and ethics will foster trust from pupils, parents and the community – a form of social capital that is difficult to replace with anything else. The prestige of the PAI teaching profession is also enhanced because the community sees that the values taught are genuinely lived out, rather than merely spoken about in the classroom.

In the long term, the consistency of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in combining professionalism with academic ethics helps to foster the emergence of outstanding learners—individuals whom Surah Ali Imran, verse 190, refers to as those of profound understanding, or 'ulul albab', namely those who master knowledge whilst remaining steadfast in good manners and moral character. It is this generation that is hoped will one day be able to lead and advance civilisation in a sustainable manner.

5. CONCLUSION

With reference to the entire discussion in the previous chapter, three key conclusions can be formulated as follows. Firstly, professionalism and academic ethics are complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. Professionalism relates to the ability to teach effectively, whilst academic ethics relates to the integrity, objectivity and moral responsibility that underpin the entire educational process. One dimension without the other will result in a teacher who is unbalanced, both pedagogically and morally.

Secondly, the integration of these two dimensions is not merely a normative recommendation, but a necessity grounded in a strong theological foundation. Surah Al-Qashash, verse 26, juxtaposes strength and faith as two qualities that must coexist in an ideal worker, including an educator. A review of contemporary literature on ethics and academic integrity, as demonstrated by Maryana and her team (2025), In'ami and Wekke (2025), and Aji et al. (2026), reinforces the relevance of this framework across all levels and within the ' ' context of Islamic education, whilst affirming the position of this study as an effort to fill a largely unexplored gap: the formulation of an operational model for Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at the MTs level.

Thirdly, this synthesis can be operationalised through a four-pillar model of learning—namely, input, process, output and relationships—which is then broken down into five concrete strategies that can be directly applied in Islamic Education (PAI) classes at the MTs level. This model bridges the gap between conceptual ideas about adab and the practical needs of teachers in the field.

With reference to the conclusions above, a number of recommendations are put forward to the relevant parties. For PAI teachers, academic ethics should serve as a guiding principle in all professional activities, from the preparation of lesson plans to the awarding of marks. Integrity, in this context, is not an optional extra but a minimum requirement for the teaching profession. For educational institutions, the reward system designed should not only assess administrative completeness but also recognise and appreciate teachers who consistently uphold academic integrity in their teaching practice. For future researchers, the four-pillar model proposed in this conceptual study still requires empirical testing—for example, through classroom action research—to provide field data that can strengthen the foundation for the development of more robust educational policies. This limitation also serves as an honest acknowledgement that a literature review has its own inherent limitations in capturing the reality of practice in the field.

In conclusion, this study aims to emphasise a simple idea. Good manners and knowledge should go hand in hand, for knowledge that stands alone without good manners will only last a short while before losing its power. Professionalism can be understood as a teacher's promise to their pupils, whilst academic ethics is the guiding principle that ensures that promise does not stray from its course.

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