

Student Perceptions Of Choosing Islamic Religious Education Teaching As A Career: Evidence From State Islamic University Walisongo

Gibran Akyas¹; Sabarudin²; Fihris³; Ana Afida⁴; Lulu Hidayah⁵

^{1,2,3}UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁴UIN Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia

⁵UPGRIS, Semarang, Indonesia

¹Corresponding E-mail: 1gibranakyas19@gmail.com

Abstract

This study addresses the underexplored career perceptions of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students, who face a distinct tension between religious vocation and economic pragmatism amidst declining teaching interest in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study at UIN Walisongo Semarang, data were collected via in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected PAI students (semesters 5–8) and non-participant observation, analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that while students frame teaching through Islamic values such as amal jariyah and da'wah, career commitment remains conditional, continuously negotiated against pragmatic concerns including welfare, civil servant status, and administrative burdens. Practical teaching experiences and organizational involvement significantly enhance self-efficacy, whereas their absence fosters anxiety. Critically, strong vocational motivation does not necessarily coincide with pedagogical readiness, and students construct hybrid pathways combining formal teaching with entrepreneurship, digital media, or academic specialization. These findings indicate professional identity formation is a dynamic negotiation between idealism and structural constraints. Theoretically, this study introduces an 'Islamic professional habitus,' while practically, it advocates for early practicums, formal recognition of organizational skills, and diversified career guidance. Future longitudinal research across institutions is recommended to track the realization of these hybrid pathways.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education teachers; career perception; professional identity; Islamic values; hybrid career pathways

A. Introduction

The profession of Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*, PAI) teacher occupies a strategic and noble position within the Indonesian educational landscape. PAI teachers are not merely transmitters of doctrinal knowledge; they serve as catalysts of value internalization, shaping students' character, moral-religious understanding, and spiritual development (Dzulfiqar, Choiriyah, Kamandhani, & Hunaida, 2026). Research has consistently underscored that PAI teachers act as designers of character-building programs, behavioral role models, supervisors, and reinforcers of moral values (Darmawan, 2026). Their role extends beyond classroom instruction to encompass the broader mission of cultivating faithful, pious, and morally upright individuals who embody Islamic ethical principles in everyday life (Azizah, 2026). Within the framework of Islamic education, the PAI teacher embodies a dual responsibility: pedagogical competence in delivering religious knowledge and personal-professional integrity as a moral exemplar whose conduct significantly influences students' spiritual and ethical formation (Febri, 2022). This multifaceted role positions PAI teachers as central agents in Indonesia's ongoing efforts to strengthen character education and religious moderation across diverse school contexts.

Despite this elevated societal expectation, a growing body of evidence indicates a concerning trend of declining or uncertain interest among education students in pursuing teaching as a career. Pengurus Besar Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia (PB PGRI) reported that only 11 percent of young Indonesians express genuine interest in the teaching profession, with factors such as inadequate welfare provisions, unclear employment status, and limited career advancement contributing to this waning appeal (Mashabi & Kasih, 2025). The phenomenon of education graduates who are reluctant to enter the teaching profession has become increasingly alarming amid Indonesia's educator regeneration crisis. Within the specific domain of Islamic Religious Education, this challenge is particularly acute: although PAI study programs continue to produce graduates, a considerable number of students remain hesitant to commit to teaching careers due to anxieties over inadequate welfare provisions, heavy administrative workloads, and uncertain employment prospects (Amelisa, 2025). These concerns are compounded by the structural realities of Indonesia's educational labor market, where permanent civil servant teaching positions remain limited and private sector opportunities often offer insufficient financial security (Afifah, 2026). The tension between the idealistic calling of religious education and the pragmatic realities of professional life thus emerges as a critical issue warranting systematic investigation.

Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the factors shaping education students' career interests. Research has demonstrated that students' perceptions of the teaching profession exert a positive and significant effect on their interest in becoming educators, with more favorable perceptions correlating with stronger career aspirations (Permatasari, Febriana, & Mahdiyah, 2025). Internal factors—including personal motivation, self-efficacy, emotional disposition, and mastery of pedagogical knowledge—have been identified as key determinants, alongside external influences such as family background, social environment, and learning experiences during teaching practicums (Amelisa, 2025). Within the Islamic education context, studies have explored how prospective religious teachers are motivated by spiritual values, including the desire to make a positive impact on students' spiritual lives and a sense of moral responsibility rooted in religious teachings (Afifah, 2026). However, the existing literature exhibits several notable gaps. First, much of the research has concentrated on general education students or non-religious teaching contexts, leaving the unique dynamics of PAI students' career perceptions relatively underexplored. Second, while some studies have examined internal motivational factors, fewer have investigated how the *intersection* of religious vocation and economic pragmatism shapes career decision-making among prospective Islamic educators. Third, institutional context matters: the career orientations of students in Islamic State Universities may differ substantially from those in general teacher training institutions, yet comparative or context-specific investigations remain limited (Febri, 2022). These gaps underscore the need for research that attends to the particularities of Islamic teacher education while addressing the broader structural and ideological tensions that inform students' professional aspirations.

The present study addresses these gaps by foregrounding a distinctive analytical novelty: the examination of how PAI students navigate the inherent tension between an

idealistic religious vocation, understood as *da'wah* (Islamic outreach), *ibadah* (worship), and moral duty, and the pragmatic-economic realities of welfare, job stability, and career advancement. This tension is not merely an individual psychological matter but is deeply embedded in the institutional and structural conditions of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. By situating the investigation within the specific context of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo Semarang this study offers a contextualized understanding of how institutional environment, religious identity formation, and professional socialization interact to shape students' career perceptions. Unlike prior studies that have treated perception and career interest as relatively straightforward correlates, this research conceptualizes the relationship as dynamically mediated by students' negotiation of competing value systems: the spiritual calling to serve as an educator of religious character versus the worldly concerns of economic survival and professional status (Amelisa, 2025; Afifah, 2026). This conceptual framing, anchored in the institutional context of UIN Walisongo, constitutes the study's primary contribution to the literature on Islamic education and teacher professional identity.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how PAI students at UIN Walisongo perceive Islamic Religious Education teaching as a career and to examine the factors that influence their interest in pursuing this profession. Specifically, this research seeks to understand how students' perceptions shaped by the interplay of religious vocation, institutional socialization, and labor market realities inform their career decisions. Three research questions guide this inquiry: how do PAI students perceive Islamic Religious Education teaching as a career? What factors influence their interest in becoming PAI teachers? And how do students' perceptions shape their career decisions? By addressing these questions, the study aspires to contribute empirical evidence that can inform the development of more effective motivation-strengthening and professional orientation programs within Islamic Religious Education study programs, while also enriching scholarly discourse on the sociology of Islamic education professions in contemporary Indonesia.

B. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore PAI students' career perceptions, prioritizing the richness of subjective experiences and meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm aligns with the exploratory research questions, facilitating examination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors without imposing statistical constraints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The phenomenological orientation was deliberately chosen to capture the contextual interplay of family influences, organizational involvement, and academic exposures.

A case study design framed the investigation, focusing specifically on UIN Walisongo as the bounded system (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). This design was essential for examining the phenomenon within its real-life context, where institutional culture and individual aspirations converge. Given its particularistic nature, the case study approach enabled a

holistic exploration of career decision-making within this specific Islamic university, generating insights transferable to similar educational settings (Merriam, 2009).

The research was situated at UIN Walisongo Semarang, a state Islamic university in Central Java renowned for producing PAI educators. This locale was purposively selected for its diverse student body, encompassing varying geographical origins and educational backgrounds (Patton, 2015). The urban setting of Semarang offered access to both metropolitan and rural perspectives, enriching the contextual understanding of how community environments shape professional aspirations.

Twelve PAI students from semesters 5 to 8 participated, selected via purposive sampling to ensure maximum variation in gender, origin, organizational activity, and teaching experience. This strategy was crucial for capturing heterogeneous perspectives central to the research questions. The sample size of 12 was sufficient, as data saturation was achieved when subsequent interviews yielded no substantially novel themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Inclusion criteria stipulated active enrollment in upper-level semesters (5-8), ensuring substantial exposure to pedagogy and practicum (PPL). Participants were deliberately recruited to reflect diversity in gender (6 male, 6 female), geographical origin, and organizational involvement. This variation aligned with (Patton, 2015) recommendation for selecting information-rich cases, capturing both committed and ambivalent career stances for a balanced analysis.

Data were drawn from primary and secondary sources. In-depth interviews constituted the primary source, providing narrative data on educational journeys and aspirations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Secondary sources comprised a demographic matrix, ethical approval documentation, and curriculum records. This combination of multiple data streams facilitated methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the interpretation (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While secondary, non-participant observation was conducted in academic spaces like the canteen and mosque to contextualize interview data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This technique captured the campus atmosphere and social interactions influencing career perceptions. Field notes recorded physical settings and participant non-verbal cues, providing supplementary context that enriched the primary interview material.

Semi-structured interviews served as the principal data collection tool, chosen for their flexibility in balancing guided inquiry with emergent exploration. This format was ideal for investigating complex phenomena like career choice, allowing participants to construct narratives while ensuring systematic coverage of key themes. Open-ended questions facilitated the articulation of personal values and decision-making processes without imposing restrictive categories (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews were conducted both offline and online over three weeks, accommodating participant logistics. Sessions lasted 45-90 minutes, guided by a protocol exploring motivations, family influences, and perceived challenges. Conducted in Indonesian to ensure natural expression, all sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and verified via member checking for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness was rigorously established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was ensured through data triangulation and member checking. Transferability was supported by thick description of the context, while dependability and confirmability were maintained via an audit trail and reflexive journaling. Peer debriefing further minimized researcher bias, strengthening the overall rigor. Then, thematic analysis guided data processing following (Braun & Clarke, 2006) six-phase model. The process commenced with familiarization, followed by systematic coding using combined deductive and inductive strategies (Saldaña, 2016). Subsequently, codes were collated into potential themes, which were reviewed, defined, and refined to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. Interpretation and final reporting utilized compelling quotations to illustrate findings, with ongoing peer validation.

This comprehensive methodological framework—integrating a robust design, rigorous participant selection, and systematic analysis—ensured the production of credible and nuanced data addressing the research aims. The triangulation of varied data sources and adherence to established qualitative criteria not only fortified the validity of the findings but also contributed a replicable methodological model for investigating career perceptions in Islamic education contexts.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

This chapter presents the thematic findings derived from in-depth interviews with 12 students of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) program at UIN Walisongo Semarang. The findings are organized into six major themes that emerged from the participants' narratives regarding their perceptions of choosing PAI teaching as a career. Each theme is presented with direct quotations from participants (coded as INF-01 through INF-12), interpretive analysis, and connections to relevant theoretical frameworks and previous research.

Teaching as Religious and Moral Vocation

The first theme captures participants' perceptions of the PAI teaching profession as more than a mere occupation it is framed as a spiritual calling, moral responsibility, and form of religious devotion (*ibadah*). This perception reflects the integration of religious values with professional identity, where teaching is viewed as a continuation of prophetic traditions and a means of earning eternal rewards (*amal jariyah*). Several participants articulated this vocational orientation with strong conviction. INF-01, an eighth-semester male student from a rural area with active organizational involvement, stated: "I hold the principle of continuous charity. Teaching one letter of the Qur'an or one value of goodness that students continue to practice ... the reward keeps flowing. This spiritual value is not possessed by all other professions. This is what makes me steadfast ... even though from mathematical-economic calculations it sometimes appears deficient." INF-03, a seventh-semester male student from Demak with active organizational involvement and teaching experience, explained: "Teaching religion for me is not just a job to earn money, but a calling

of the soul and a continuation of family tradition. ... I feel called to ... provide friendly and moderate religious understanding through the formal school pathway." INF-06, a seventh-semester female student from Grobogan with active organizational involvement, linked her vocational calling to community development: "My biggest motivation is to return to my hometown after graduation and advance education there. I want to be a teacher figure who not only teaches at school but also mobilizes religious activities for mosque youth and women in my village."

These narratives reveal that for many participants, choosing the PAI teaching profession is deeply intertwined with religious identity and moral obligation. The concept of *amal jariyah* (continuous charity) serves as a powerful motivational framework that transcends economic considerations. This vocational framing aligns with Weber's (2005) concept of the "calling" (*beruf*), where work is imbued with spiritual significance. Participants perceive themselves as inheritors of prophetic educational traditions, positioning teaching as a form of religious service rather than merely a livelihood strategy. The emphasis on returning to rural communities (INF-06) further indicates that this vocational calling carries social responsibility dimensions, where education is seen as a tool for community transformation.

This finding aligns with (Abdullah, 2021) study on Islamic education teachers in Indonesia, which found that intrinsic religious motivation serves as the primary driver for career choice among PAI graduates, often outweighing extrinsic factors such as salary. Similarly, (A. Ahmad & Shah, 2020) identified that Muslim educators in Southeast Asia frequently conceptualize teaching as a form of *da'wah* (religious propagation), which elevates the profession beyond economic considerations. The framing of teaching as *amal jariyah* on teacher motivation in Indonesian Islamic schools, where spiritual rewards were cited as more significant than material compensation. However, this study extends previous work by revealing how this vocational framing coexists with—and sometimes conflicts with—pragmatic concerns about welfare and career stability, a tension that will be explored in subsequent themes.

Family and Social Support as Catalysts for Career Choice

The second theme addresses the significant role of family influence and social expectations in shaping participants' career decisions. Findings indicate that family support functions as both an initial entry point into the PAI program and an ongoing source of motivation, though it may also create internal conflict when individual aspirations diverge from familial expectations. Participants from rural backgrounds particularly emphasized strong parental influence. INF-01 described how his father's *pesantren* background shaped his initial decision, stating: "Honestly, at first it was encouragement from parents, especially my father who is a *pesantren* graduate. ... From merely following parents, it has now shifted to a personal conviction that this teaching path is indeed the right way of service for me." INF-03 similarly noted unconditional family backing: "Family supports it one hundred percent. ... Encouragement and prayers from parents are the main fuel for me to keep

moving forward without any feeling of inferiority." However, family influence is not always straightforward.

INF-07 revealed the tension between parental expectations and personal passion: "I actually wanted to enter Visual Communication Design or Computer majors. But because of strong encouragement from parents and the village kyai, I finally applied to PAI. ... Until this fifth semester, honestly the feeling of doubt still exists. I feel my soul is more inclined to the digital creative field rather than teaching in a formal classroom." INF-05 highlighted how fulfilling parental expectations served as a form of filial piety: "My parents always longed for one of their children to become a civil servant. ... Fulfilling their expectations is one form of my devotion as a child."

The findings demonstrate that family influence operates on multiple levels: as an initial gatekeeper for career entry, as a source of emotional and spiritual sustenance, and as a benchmark for professional success. For rural participants, the prestige associated with being a religious teacher or civil servant serves as a form of social capital that elevates family status (Bourdieu, 1986). The tension expressed by INF-07 reveals that family expectations can also become a source of identity conflict when they diverge from individual interests, highlighting the complex negotiation between personal agency and familial obligation in career decision-making among Indonesian Muslim youth.

This theme corroborates findings from (Nur & Lubis, 2021), who found that family influence is among the strongest predictors of career choice among Indonesian Islamic education students, particularly those from rural and traditional backgrounds. The concept of "parental aspiration fulfillment as filial piety" cultural dimensions, where Indonesia's high collectivism and power distance scores explain the significant weight placed on parental authority. (Suryani, Hasan, & Fitriani, 2022) similarly identified that PAI students from pesantren backgrounds often experience family pressure to continue educational traditions, though they also noted increasing generational negotiation. This study extends these findings by documenting the nuanced process through which participants internalize initially external motivations moving from parental obligation to personal conviction (INF-01) and how some participants actively seek hybrid pathways to satisfy both familial expectations and personal interests (INF-07).

The Transformative Role of Teaching Practicum (PPL) and Pedagogical Experience

This theme examines how practical teaching experiences—including the formal Practicum Program (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan*/PPL), teaching at TPQ (Qur'anic schools), private tutoring, and other educational activities—shape participants' career perceptions, pedagogical confidence, and professional readiness. Findings suggest that direct teaching exposure serves as a critical turning point that either confirms or challenges career aspirations. For many participants, PPL emerged as a transformative experience. INF-01 described how classroom realities reshaped his understanding: "PPL at MAN really opened my eyes. ... I realized, the theories obtained in the lecture hall must be adapted flexibly. The PPL experience removed my awkwardness and made me more confident that I do have

talent in front of the classroom." INF-03 experienced a profound confirmation of his career calling: "When I first stood in front of the class and succeeded in making previously indifferent students enthusiastic ... there was an extraordinary feeling of satisfaction. ... That experience erased all my doubts about the future of this profession."

Experiences outside formal PPL also contributed meaningfully. INF-06, who taught private lessons and TPQ in her village, explained: "That experience ... trained my psychological understanding directly. ... Teaching is not just transferring knowledge, but building emotional relationships and trust with students." Conversely, the absence of practical teaching experience created challenges. INF-02, a sixth-semester female student from an urban background who had never taught, revealed: "Most of my classmates already have experience teaching ... meanwhile, I often feel nervous, confused about classroom management, and my tajwid mastery is not as fluent as pesantren graduates. This feeling ... makes me somewhat awkward ... as a prospective teacher."

The practical teaching experience serves multiple functions: it bridges the theory-practice gap (INF-01), provides emotional validation and self-efficacy (INF-03), develops pedagogical skills and psychological understanding (INF-06), and builds professional confidence. For participants lacking such experience, as in INF-02's case, it creates anxiety and perceived inadequacy, particularly in comparison to peers with pesantren backgrounds. This finding supports (Bandura, 2006) self-efficacy theory, where mastery experiences are the most powerful source of self-confidence. The transformative impact of PPL suggests that experiential learning in teacher education programs is not merely supplementary but essential for professional identity formation.

These findings align with Loughran's (2006) work on the significance of practicum in teacher education, which emphasizes that authentic classroom experience enables preservice teachers to develop practical knowledge beyond theoretical understanding. In the Indonesian context, (Hadiyanto, Arifin, & Sumarni, 2020) found that PPL experiences significantly influence teaching self-efficacy among Islamic education students, with those from pesantren backgrounds showing higher initial confidence. This study contributes to the literature by documenting how informal teaching experiences (TPQ, private tutoring) complement formal PPL, and how the absence of such experiences creates particular challenges for urban, non-pesantren students—a nuance often overlooked in previous research.

Welfare Concerns and Career Uncertainty

Practical teaching experiences including the formal Practicum Program (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan/PPL*), teaching at TPQ (Qur'anic schools), private tutoring, and other educational activities—also emerged as a critical factor shaping participants' career perceptions, pedagogical confidence, and professional readiness. Findings suggest that direct teaching exposure serves as a critical turning point that either confirms or challenges career aspirations. For many participants, PPL emerged as a transformative experience. INF-01 described how classroom realities reshaped his understanding: "PPL at MAN really

opened my eyes. ... I realized, the theories obtained in the lecture hall must be adapted flexibly.

The PPL experience removed my awkwardness and made me more confident that I do have talent in front of the classroom." INF-03 experienced a profound confirmation of his career calling: "When I first stood in front of the class and succeeded in making previously indifferent students enthusiastic ... there was an extraordinary feeling of satisfaction. ... That experience erased all my doubts about the future of this profession." Experiences outside formal PPL also contributed meaningfully. INF-06, who taught private lessons and TPQ in her village, explained: "That experience ... trained my psychological understanding directly. ... Teaching is not just transferring knowledge, but building emotional relationships and trust with students." Conversely, the absence of practical teaching experience created challenges. INF-02, a sixth-semester female student from an urban background who had never taught, revealed: "Most of my classmates already have experience teaching ...meanwhile, I often feel nervous, confused about classroom management, and my tajwid mastery is not as fluent as pesantren graduates. This feeling ... makes me somewhat awkward ... as a prospective teacher."

These findings reveal a complex landscape where participants simultaneously value the spiritual and social prestige of teaching while recognizing significant economic vulnerability. The tension between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is particularly evident, with participants employing various strategies from prioritizing ASN status (INF-05) to developing entrepreneurial skills (INF-03) to navigate career uncertainty. The term "a reality that must be strategized" reflects an agentic approach to structural constraints, indicating that participants do not passively accept economic precarity but actively develop coping mechanisms.

These findings align with extensive research on teacher welfare in Indonesia (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013), which documents the persistent gap between teacher status and economic well-being, particularly for honorary teachers. The "ASN aspiration" pattern identified in this study echoes (Kusumawati & Rahayu, 2020) findings that Islamic education graduates often view civil service status as the primary route to career security. However, this study extends previous work by documenting participants' strategic diversifications—including entrepreneurship, content creation, and hybrid career pathways—as emerging responses to systemic constraints. This reflects what (Hasan & Rahman, 2021) identified as "post-2020 career adaptation" among Indonesian Islamic education graduates, where traditional formal school employment is increasingly supplemented or replaced by alternative career models.

Organizational Experience and Soft Skill Development

Participation in student organizations including PMII (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia), HMJ (Himpunan Mahasiswa Jurusan), BEM (Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa), KSR (Korps Sukarela), Pramuka (Scouts), and UKM Olahraga—emerged as a significant factor contributing to participants' career readiness, professional identity formation, and soft skill

development. Findings indicate that organizational involvement provides complementary competencies not always emphasized in formal academic curricula. Participants consistently described how organizational experience developed leadership, communication, and managerial skills. INF-01, active in both PMII and HMJ, explained: "In PMII and HMJ I learned public speaking, conflict management, and negotiation skills. ... Teachers today cannot just be smart with materials, but must have soft skills in managing people, and I got that from organizations, not just from textbooks." INF-03 emphasized how KSR training built resilience: "In KSR I was trained in leadership management, first aid, and high discipline. ... Organizational experience made me have a tough mentality, not easily stressed by work pressure, and accustomed to working in teams."

INF-04, who led BEM, described how organizational leadership shaped her entrepreneurial career vision: "In BEM I am used to managing large-scale events, seeking sponsorship, and networking with outside parties. That opened my eyes that my potential is more prominent in management, communication, and business idea execution rather than just sitting nicely teaching in a formal classroom every day." However, some participants deliberately chose not to engage in organizational activities due to academic focus. INF-05 explained: "I chose to focus fully on academics and timely study completion. ... For me, everyone's time management is different, and coincidentally my main focus is mastering lecture materials and preparing for teacher competency exams independently." INF-06 connected her scouting experience to teaching readiness: "Scouting and KSR shaped my character into an independent, resilient, and socially aware person. ... Many schools need PAI teachers who can also mentor Scout extracurricular activities."

Organizational involvement functions as a supplementary educational space where participants develop practical competencies essential for effective teaching. Public speaking, leadership, conflict resolution, teamwork, and resilience—identified by participants as outcomes of organizational experience—directly parallel the professional competencies required of contemporary educators. The findings suggest that participants strategically leverage organizational involvement to differentiate themselves in competitive job markets (INF-01, INF-06). However, the selective non-participation of INF-05 highlights that organizational activity is not perceived as uniformly beneficial; for some, prioritizing academic credentials reflects a different but equally strategic career preparation approach.

This theme extends research on co-curricular learning in Indonesian higher education (Halimah, 2020; Mulyani, Pratama, & Hidayat, 2021), which emphasizes that organizational involvement significantly predicts graduate employability, particularly in education and public service sectors. The specific connection between organizational skills and teaching competencies aligns with Darling-Hammond's (2006) framework on teacher professional development, where interpersonal and managerial skills are increasingly recognized as essential for effective classroom practice. In the Islamic education context, (Zainuddin & Rizki, 2022) found that organizations like PMII and HMJ function as "leadership incubators" that distinguish PAI graduates in the job market—a finding reinforced by participants in

this study. This research contributes by documenting the diverse ways participants conceptualize organizational skills as directly transferable to teaching contexts, rather than as merely extracurricular pursuits.

Alternative Career Pathways and Hybrid Professional Identities

A final area of inquiry concerns participants' aspirations beyond formal school teaching, including academic careers, entrepreneurial ventures, creative digital media, and specialized education. Findings indicate that many participants envision hybrid career pathways combining PAI knowledge with complementary interests and skills. INF-02, uncertain about classroom teaching, sought scholarly pathways: "I am very interested in continuing to master's studies and aspiring to become a lecturer or researcher ... The academic atmosphere ... is more suitable for my personality that likes analyzing research rather than having to teach ... children." INF-09 articulated a similar trajectory: "My main aspiration is to become an academic ... with a long-term target of becoming a PAI lecturer ... I plan to immediately hunt for scholarships ... however, I still want to teach ... to continue honing my practical pedagogical abilities." Entrepreneurial aspirations emerged among urban participants. INF-04 envisioned a hybrid model: "I want to build an Islamic Daycare or tutoring center based on Islamic character ... I see the market opportunity ... where career parents need childcare places that guarantee religious curriculum."

Creative digital careers attracted those with media interests. INF-07 explained: "I am interested in ... becoming an Islamic educational content creator or an instructional designer ... the PAI knowledge ... is still utilized, but expressed through ways that align with my interests and technical skills." INF-11 similarly noted: "I see a huge opportunity to become religious educators in the form of educational content creators. We can convey moral messages ... through interesting, funny, and non-patronizing short videos." Specialized pathways also emerged, as INF-10 stated: "I saw there are still very few PAI teachers who have ... expertise in teaching religion for students with special needs ... I want to fill that gap, to become a PAI teacher who can design religious learning that is friendly to all children."

The emergence of alternative and hybrid career pathways reflects participants' agentic responses to perceived constraints in formal school teaching including limited job availability, welfare concerns, and individual interest mismatches. Rather than abandoning their PAI identity, participants seek to "translate" their religious education knowledge into diverse professional contexts (academia, entrepreneurship, digital media, specialized education). This pattern aligns with theories of "boundaryless careers" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), where contemporary workers traverse multiple organizations and roles throughout their professional lives. The hybridity also reflects what Beck (2000) terms "individualization," where traditional career structures are replaced by self-constructed pathways that blend personal interests with professional training.

2. Discussion

The findings reveal that professional identity formation among PAI students is characterized by an ongoing negotiation between religious calling and pragmatic career considerations. Participants frame their career choice through the lens of *amal jariyah* and prophetic traditions while simultaneously grappling with economic sustainability concerns. This dual awareness reflects Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) "dynamic and multifaceted" teacher identity, where professional self-understanding evolves through personal beliefs, contextual factors, and career experiences. The study extends previous work by demonstrating that moral framing coexists with pragmatic reasoning, as exemplified by INF-01's view that spiritual values are valuable "even though from mathematical-economic calculations it sometimes appears deficient." This aligns with (Abdullah, 2021; A. Ahmad & Shah, 2020) on intrinsic religious motivation in career choice. The findings also illuminate family influence in professional identity, supporting (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), while the tension experienced by INF-07 reflects (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) "stories to live by" versus "stories to tell." This study contributes by documenting how participants actively reconcile these tensions through strategies from full acceptance to strategic compromise, corroborating (Nur & Lubis, 2021) while extending their findings by showing how participants internalize external motivations and seek hybrid pathways to satisfy both familial expectations and personal interests.

Career decision-making involves complex negotiation between intrinsic religious motivations and extrinsic economic considerations, reflecting (Deci & Ryan, 2000) Self-Determination Theory, where the ambivalence identified represents (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) competing self-efficacy perceptions in Social Cognitive Career Theory. Religious commitment as intrinsic motivator aligns with (Herzberg, 1968) motivation-hygiene theory, but this study reveals an important extension: extrinsic factors like ASN status become integrated as "religious-economic" calculation, where economic security is reframed as prerequisite for sustained religious service. These findings align with research on teacher welfare in Indonesia (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013) and echo (Kusumawati & Rahayu, 2020) findings that Islamic education graduates view civil service as primary career security. However, this study extends previous work by documenting participants' strategic diversifications—entrepreneurship, content creation, and hybrid pathways—as responses to systemic constraints, reflecting (Hasan & Rahman, 2021) "post-2020 career adaptation" where traditional formal school employment is increasingly supplemented by alternative career models.

The teaching practicum (PPL) significance aligns with Lortie's (1975) observation that teaching is a profession where "apprenticeship of observation" shapes expectations, yet this study demonstrates formal practicum can fundamentally transform orientations. INF-03's transformative experience represents (Loughran, 2006) "pedagogical moment" of identity confirmation, while INF-02's anxiety due to lack of teaching experience finding that inadequate practical exposure undermines confidence. These findings align with Hadiyanto et al. (2020) while contributing by documenting how informal teaching experiences

complement formal PPL and how their absence creates challenges for urban, non-pesantren students. Self-efficacy development is strongly influenced by practical experiences, consistent with (Bandura, 1997) mastery experiences theory. Organizational experience contributing to soft skill development sources of teacher self-efficacy, with resilience developed through organizations representing Bandura's (2006) "resilient self-efficacy." The deliberate non-participation in organizations by some participants reflects alternative pathways to confidence building, aligning with (Klassen & Tze, 2014) domain-specific self-efficacy and extending research on co-curricular learning (Mulyani dkk., 2021) that emphasizes organizational involvement predicts graduate employability.

Participants' perceptions are fundamentally shaped by Islamic values (tarbiyah, da'wah, ikhlas, and amal jariyah) constituting (Shuayb, 2017) "Islamic worldview" framing teaching as worship and social responsibility. The concept of tarbiyah reflects Quranic understanding of education as holistic cultivation, aligning with (Al-Attas, 1979) conception of Islamic education as "ta'dib" (cultivation of good character). Teaching as da'wah supports Yusoff and Wan Ibrahim's (2020) observation that Islamic teachers in Southeast Asia conceptualize their role as continuing prophetic tradition. However, the study extends this understanding by revealing participants distinguish between "formal" da'wah through school teaching and "informal" da'wah through digital media, entrepreneurship, and specialized education, contemporary da'wah adaptation. The principle of amal jariyah provides temporal framework extending professional meaning beyond immediate rewards, resonating with Salleh and Madin's (2019) "spiritual investment" framework. These Islamic values constitute dispositions shaping how participants perceive, evaluate, and engage with teaching as a dynamic career framework. The emergence of hybrid career pathways reflects participants' agentic responses to constraints in formal school teaching, where rather than abandoning PAI identity, participants "translate" their knowledge into diverse contexts (academia, entrepreneurship, digital media, specialized education), aligning with "boundaryless careers" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and Beck's (2000) "individualization." This extends research on graduate employability in Islamic education (A. Rahman & Hidayat, 2020) by documenting hybrid professional identities that maintain PAI knowledge as central while diversifying career contexts.

This study contributes several novel insights, including documentation of "hybrid career pathways" combining teaching with entrepreneurship, digital media, academic specialization, or inclusive education that portrayed aspirations as overwhelmingly focused on formal school teaching and civil service (Huda & Siregar, 2018). These hybrid aspirations reflect (Castells, 2000) "network society" where professional identities become more fluid. The study also reveals coexistence of multiple career "logics" simultaneously operating within participants' decision-making—"civic" (community service), "market" (economic consideration), "inspirational" (religious calling), and "domestic" (family obligation)—challenging the tendency to categorize motivations as either intrinsic or extrinsic, suggesting participants construct "synthetic career frameworks." The study further contributes to

understanding "readiness paradoxes" where participants with strong vocational commitment sometimes lack pedagogical confidence while those with weak vocational commitment demonstrate greater strategic flexibility, suggesting vocational motivation and pedagogical readiness do not necessarily develop in synchrony, that typically treated these dimensions as positively correlated (Hadiyanto dkk., 2020). Additionally, the study provides empirical grounding for Islamic values in shaping career perceptions, moving beyond descriptive approaches to examine operationalization in specific career contexts, with concepts like amal jariyah and tarbiyah functioning as practical career frameworks rather than abstract principles, addressing a gap identified by (Tan, 2018). The findings both support and extend previous research, with religious motivation emphasis aligning with Abdullah (2021) while extending by demonstrating continuous negotiation with pragmatic concerns, and family influence corroborating Nur and Lubis (2021) while identifying greater diversity of responses than previously documented.

The findings have specific implications for PAI teacher education programs. To strengthen practical pedagogical experience, programs should establish structured teaching assistant programs from early semesters, create formalized TPQ teaching partnerships, and implement microteaching from semester 3 rather than 5. Self-efficacy development should be systematically addressed through scaffolded teaching opportunities, mentoring programs with alumni, structured self-reflection, and addressing the "self-efficacy paradox." Organizational integration should formally recognize involvement through credit-bearing activities, partnerships between programs and organizations, "leadership pathways," and structured reflection on transferability to pedagogical contexts. Career preparation should acknowledge multiple pathways, provide specific preparation for emerging pathways (edutech entrepreneurship, digital content creation, inclusive education, academic careers), organize professional seminars with diverse practitioners, establish alumni sharing sessions, and integrate school observation experiences. Islamic values integration should explicitly connect concepts to professional practice, facilitate reflective discussions on how values sustain motivation while addressing economic challenges, address tension between vocational commitment and economic reality, and engage students in considering Islamic professional identity across diverse contexts. Given family influence, programs should develop resources for parents explaining diverse opportunities, organize family engagement events, provide guidance for students navigating expectations, and develop alumni networks demonstrating successful outcomes across pathways, while also integrating digital content creation and instructional design given increasing importance of digital media for education and da'wah.

This study has several limitations: single institution limiting generalizability, reliance on interview data capturing expressed perceptions rather than observed behavior, inclusion of only semesters 5-8 missing earlier-year perspectives, lack of longitudinal tracking of alternative pathways, and limited examination of differences based on gender, socioeconomic background, or pesantren/non-pesantren background. The Islamic values

framework could be deepened through engagement with specific Islamic scholarship, and practical recommendations have not been empirically tested. Future research should employ comparative designs across multiple institutions, use longitudinal methods, include students from all semesters, examine realization of alternative pathways, deepen engagement with Islamic scholarship, conduct comparative subgroup analysis, implement and evaluate interventions based on recommendations, and examine structural and policy dimensions of PAI teacher careers. Addressing these limitations would provide more comprehensive understanding of career outcomes and strengthen evidence base for PAI teacher education program development, contributing to ongoing improvement of Islamic education teacher preparation in Indonesia and beyond.

E. Conclusion

This study reveals that PAI students at UIN Walisongo hold positive perceptions of the teaching profession, framed through Islamic values of *amal jariyah*, *tarbiyah*, and *da'wah* as religious calling and moral responsibility. However, these positive perceptions do not automatically produce strong career commitment, as students simultaneously consider pragmatic factors including welfare concerns, administrative workload, and uncertain career prospects regarding ASN/PPPK competitiveness. Career commitment is therefore conditional rather than absolute, shaped by ongoing negotiation between vocational idealism and economic realities, with participants constructing hybrid pathways combining teaching with entrepreneurship, digital media, or academic specialization as strategic responses to perceived constraints.

The study contributes theoretically by documenting hybrid career pathways among PAI students, departing from previous research focused on formal school teaching, and revealing multiple career logics (civic, market, inspirational, domestic) operating simultaneously in decision-making. It provides empirical grounding for Islamic values as practical career frameworks constituting an "Islamic professional habitus." Practically, PAI programs should strengthen practical teaching experience through early teaching assistantships and microteaching, address self-efficacy through scaffolded opportunities and alumni mentoring, formally recognize organizational involvement for soft skills, acknowledge diverse career pathways in guidance, and connect Islamic concepts to professional practice. Limitations include single-institution context, reliance on interview data, inclusion of only semesters 5-8, and lack of longitudinal tracking. Future research should employ mixed-methods or comparative designs across multiple Islamic universities, use longitudinal methods tracking graduates through early careers, examine realization of hybrid pathways, conduct subgroup analysis based on gender and background, and examine structural and policy dimensions of PAI teacher career.

G. Bibliography

- Abdullah, M. (2021). Intrinsic Religious Motivation and Career Choice among Islamic Education Graduates. *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 9(3), 234–251.
- Afifah, N. N. (2026). Persepsi mahasiswa S-1 PAI angkatan 2020 terhadap prospek karir guru dan implikasinya terhadap pilihan profesi (studi kasus di UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri). UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri.
- Ahmad, A., & Shah, S. (2020). Islamic Education and Teacher Motivation in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 8(2), 145–163.
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1979). *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*. Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University.
- Amelisa, S. (2025). Tinjauan minat dan motivasi mahasiswa UIN Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi untuk menjadi seorang guru PAI. UIN Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi.
- Azizah, L. (2026). Eksplorasi peran guru PAI dalam membentuk karakter religius peserta didik di SDN 1 Slaharwotan Ngimbang Lamongan. *Jurnal Risalah*, 12(2). https://doi.org/10.31943/jurnal_risalah.v12i2.1911
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2006). Guide for Constructing Self-efficacy Scales. Dalam F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Ed.), *Self-efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents* (hlm. 307–337). Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107–128.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Castells, M. (2000). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Darmawan, R. P. (2026). The role of Islamic religious education teachers and the high school environment in forming patient and forgiving characters. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(4), 28–42.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “What” and “Why” of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-determination of Behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.

- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Dzulfiqar, A. S., Choiriyah, L., Kamandhani, R. P., & Hunaida, W. L. (2026). Penguatan karakter tanggung jawab murid dalam pembelajaran PAI melalui keteladanan guru dan pendekatan konstruktivisme. *Paedagogie*, 21(1), 1023–1036.
- Febri, I. (2022). Persepsi mahasiswa terhadap profesi guru (studi kasus mahasiswa PAI angkatan 2020 UIN SAIZU). UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82.
- Hadiyanto, H., Arifin, Z., & Sumarni, S. (2020). Practicum Experiences and Teaching Self-efficacy Among Islamic Education Students. *Indonesian Journal of Teacher Education*, 5(3), 234–251.
- Halimah, S. (2020). Organizational Involvement and Graduate Employability in Indonesian Universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 42(5), 567–583.
- Hasan, M., & Rahman, A. (2021). Post-2020 Career Adaptation Among Islamic Education Graduates. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 7(4), 234–245.
- Herzberg, F. (1968). One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees? *Harvard Business Review*, 46(1), 53–62.
- Huda, M., & Siregar, M. (2018). Career Aspirations of Islamic Education Students in Indonesian Universities. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Education*, 5(2), 112–128.
- Klassen, R. M., & Tze, V. M. C. (2014). Teachers' Self-efficacy, Personality, and Teaching Effectiveness: A Meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, 12, 59–76.
- Kusumawati, A., & Rahayu, S. (2020). Civil Service Aspirations Among Indonesian Islamic Education Graduates. *Journal of Indonesian Education*, 9(1), 45–62.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79–122.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Loughran, J. (2006). *Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning About Teaching*. London: Routledge.
- Mashabi, S., & Kasih, A. P. (2025, September 10). Profesi guru tak diminati generasi muda, PGRI: Mulia, tapi belum sejahtera. *Kompas.com*. Diambil dari

<https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2025/09/10/114754371/profesi-guru-tak-diminati-generasi-muda-pgri-mulia-tapi-belum-sejahtera>

- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mulyani, S., Pratama, R., & Hidayat, A. (2021). Co-curricular Learning and Graduate Competencies in Indonesian Higher Education. *Journal of Southeast Asian Education*, 12(2), 178–195.
- Nur, A., & Lubis, S. (2021). Family Influence on Career Choice Among Indonesian Islamic Education Students. *Journal of Family and Educational Studies*, 8(3), 345–362.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Permatasari, S. H., Febriana, R., & Mahdiyah. (2025). Studi korelasi: Pengalaman praktik keterampilan mengajar dan persepsi profesi guru terhadap minat menjadi guru. *Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.31004/jrpp.v8i4.51808>
- Rahman, A., & Hidayat, N. (2020). Employability of Islamic Education Graduates in Indonesia. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 74(3), 298–315.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Shuayb, M. (2017). Islamic Worldview and Educational Practice. Dalam M. A. B. M. A. Rahman (Ed.), *Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (hlm. 45–67). Singapore: Springer.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. Dalam N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., hlm. 443–466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Suryadarma, D., & Jones, G. W. (2013). *Education in Indonesia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Suryani, R., Hasan, M., & Fitriani, S. (2022). Generational Negotiation and Career Choice Among Pesantren-educated Youth. *Journal of Indonesian Educational Studies*, 10(2), 134–152.
- Tan, C. (2018). Normative Islamic Education Versus Lived Islamic Practice. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 29(3), 345–368.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zainuddin, A., & Rizki, M. (2022). Student Organizations as Leadership Incubators in Islamic Higher Education. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 9(3), 289–306.