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From Uswah to Habitus: Transformation of Religious Character Through Example in Madrasah

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the role of teacher role models as an effective strategy in shaping the religious character of students. Departing from the phenomenon of moral degradation among adolescents, character education based on religious values is seen as an urgent need, especially in the madrasah environment. This study employs a descriptive, qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's models. The results of the study show that the example of teachers in daily worship activities, commemoration of Islamic holidays, habituation of good character, and social interaction have a tangible impact on the formation of students' religious character. Teachers who consistently exhibit religious behaviors, such as congregational prayers, reciting the Qur'an, offering greetings, and being fair and empathetic, are able to instill Islamic values through a natural internalization process. The implications of this study suggest that Islamic educational institutions should prioritize exemplary behavior as the primary strategy in designing character-building programs and integrate them into the overall school culture to create a consistent and sustainable religious environment.

Key Words: *Religious Character, Internalization of Values, Islamic Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Religious character education serves as the foundation for developing a well-rounded, balanced student personality that encompasses cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects (Islamic et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021; State Literature et al., 2024). In the approach to Islamic education, religious character is not only understood as the result of verbal teaching, but must be formed through the process of internalizing values that touch the inner consciousness of students (Dodlek, 2024; Kim Pham et al., 2023; Tran & Guzey, 2024). In the midst of rapid globalization, which often challenges moral values, character education grounded in religious values is becoming increasingly crucial. Learning strategies that are solely cognition-oriented are considered insufficient for building authentic religious awareness (Chiadmi et al., 2025; Hatami et al., 2023; Schöllhorn et al., 2022). Therefore, an exemplary approach in which teachers

become figures who demonstrate genuine religious attitudes and behaviors is seen as capable of filling the affective void in the educational process.

Several studies have shown that teacher role models have a significant influence on the formation of students' character. Research conducted by Ahmed et al. (2025) found that teachers who consistently demonstrated religious behavior, such as honesty and politeness, were able to shape students' attitudes of responsibility and discipline through a continuous modeling process. Meanwhile, Muzakkir et al. (2024) reveal that the integration of character values in the curriculum is effective when teachers not only teach but also demonstrate real behaviors in daily school life, which contributes to the deep internalization of values. In addition, several related studies also confirm that teachers' role models in inclusive learning encourage students to cultivate more active attitudes of empathy, tolerance, and social sensitivity (Dignath et al., 2022; Kamran et al., 2023; D. Wang et al., 2024). The three studies show that the exemplary approach has a strong transformative power in religious character education. However, most research still focuses on the formal dimension of learning, not yet delving into examples in daily spiritual activities and informal social interactions.

Although teacher role models have been recognized as an important approach in character building, there are significant gaps in understanding how role models are manifested in the context of daily worship activities and social relations in the educational environment. Many previous studies have focused on exemplification in formal teaching or as part of the values curriculum, but have not holistically examined the affective and spiritual dimensions that arise from the teacher's direct involvement in religious activities with students. In addition, the lack of research explaining how exemplary behavior can shape students' religious habitus gradually also shows the need for more in-depth and contextual exploration. This gap highlights the need for a qualitative approach to understanding how such examples influence the transformation of students' religious character. Thus, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature by highlighting exemplary practices as a strategy for internalizing absolute and contextual religious values.

This research offers novelty by highlighting the example of teachers in the context of daily religious activities, religious celebrations, habituation of good character, and social interaction as a unit of strategies for the formation of students' religious character. Unlike previous studies that tended to separate these aspects or only review exemplary theoretical approaches, this study examines exemplary practices as an integrated and consistent way of living across various dimensions of educational life. Another novelty lies in the focus on the affective aspects of students, how the firsthand experience of seeing the teacher's example affects their spiritual awareness emotionally and socially. With a qualitative case study approach, this study also presents an in-depth contextual description of the process of internalizing religious values, as well as an exemplary model that other educational institutions can replicate. Thus, this

study expands the scope of exemplary studies from just moral symbols to concrete character-building strategies rooted in everyday experience.

This study aims to describe in depth how teacher role models become effective strategies in shaping students' religious character through active involvement in daily worship activities, participation in religious celebrations, fostering good character, and promoting social interaction. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study examines students' experiences in responding to teachers' examples as part of the process of internalizing religious values. This research not only describes the actions of teachers, but also examines the internalized meaning of students from the exemplary practice. The focus of this research is on how the affective, spiritual, and social dimensions of students are formed through direct interaction with teacher figures who consistently display religious behavior. The results obtained are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of a character education model based on uswah hasanah and provide practical recommendations for educational institutions in designing effective, contextual, and sustainable strategies for religious character formation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative design with a case study approach (Cole, 2024; Janis, 2022; Miller et al., 2023), aiming to describe in-depth the exemplary practice of teachers in daily worship activities as a strategy for forming students' religious character. This design was chosen because it can reveal the phenomenon contextually and holistically in a natural Islamic educational environment, namely MTs Nurul Rohmah Gending Probolinggo. The type of case study research is considered relevant, as the primary focus lies in the intensity and uniqueness of exemplary practice within a particular educational unit. The qualitative approach is employed based on interpretive principles that enable researchers to explore the meanings, perceptions, and values internalized by students through observation of the teacher's actual practice. The theoretical basis of this research refers to the concept of uswah hasanah in Islamic education (Suddahazai, 2023), which emphasizes the importance of example as a method of effectively transforming religious values. Thus, this approach supports the in-depth disclosure of the dynamics of exemplary-based religious character formation in madrasas.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with teachers, madrasah heads, and students to explore their perceptions and experiences of exemplary practice. Observation was used to capture the direct involvement of teachers in daily worship, including congregational prayers, Qur'an readings, and morning dhikr. Documentation includes records of religious activities and character-building programs. The researcher plays the role of the main instrument, directly involved in field observations while maintaining the

objectivity and ethics of the research. The research subjects consisted of six primary informants who were purposively selected based on their active involvement in the daily worship program. To ensure the credibility of the data, triangulation techniques of sources and methods, as well as member checking, were employed to confirm the accuracy of the interview results with relevant informants (Ahmed, 2024; Coleman, 2021; Zairul, 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Ray et al., 2021; Y. Wang et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2021). In the first stage, the researcher reduces the data by sorting out important information from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation relevant to exemplary practices. Second, the presentation of data is carried out in the form of a narrative and thematic matrix that describes the relationship between teachers' worship activities and their impact on students' religious character. Third, conclusions are drawn through an in-depth interpretation of the patterns of examples that emerge, associated with the theory of uswah hasanah. This technique was chosen because it aligns with the needs of qualitative data exploration, which is an interactive and evolving process during the research. The credibility of the data is maintained through member checking and peer debriefing so that the resulting interpretation is not biased and remains contextual (Ahmed, 2024; Coleman, 2021; Ray et al., 2021). This analysis process ensures that the research results are not only descriptive but also interpretive, reflecting the deep meaning of the example as a strategy for internalizing religious values in madrasas.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Teacher's Example in Daily Worship Activities

The teacher's example in daily worship activities includes routine religious practices that are carried out consistently and involve students directly, such as congregational prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, and morning dhikr. Conceptually, this example represents a form of character education through real-life deeds that students can emulate. In the context of MTs Nurul Rohmah Gending Probolinggo, daily worship activities are an important means for teachers to show concrete religious attitudes. Teachers not only provide verbal instruction but also present themselves as models of behavior that instill the values of discipline, solemnity, and spiritual awareness in students. By actively involving themselves, teachers show that worship is not just a ritual obligation, but a habit that must be instilled in daily life. Therefore, the example of teachers in daily worship activities plays a crucial role as a medium for the effective internalization of religious values.

As said by one of the madrasah teachers: "Every morning we start with the recitation of the Qur'an together. We do this not just as a routine, but as an effort to foster students' love for the Qur'an. In this way, students get used to

reading the Qur'an well and correctly, as well as understand the importance of starting the day with a blessed activity". This is in line with what was expressed by one of the students, "When I see the teacher participating in congregational prayers solemnly, I feel encouraged to be more disciplined in worship. It feels different when the teacher just tells without participating in the implementation, because I can feel their seriousness firsthand. From there I was motivated to participate in praying on time every day".

Based on the results of the above interview, it is evident that teachers in worship are not just a formality, but a means of building emotional attachment with students. Teachers who consistently lead congregational prayers and recite the Qur'an foster students' respect and trust in these religious practices. The involvement of teachers fosters a sense of closeness so that religious values are not only understood cognitively, but also experienced affectively. This demonstrates that the teacher's example has a profound influence on students' spiritual awareness, as well as fostering a more consistent discipline of worship. Thus, exemplary daily worship activities are a practical strategy for internalizing values.

Departing from this, the form of teacher example in daily worship activities is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Form of Teacher Exemplary in Daily Worship Activities and Its Impact

Daily Worship Activities	Impact on Students' Religious Character
Zuhur congregational prayers every day	Students are more disciplined in keeping time, accustomed to being on time, and demonstrate solemnity in worship.
The teacher acts as the imam of the Dhuha prayer.	Motivate students to dare to become imams and become accustomed to performing sunnah prayers consistently.
Qur'an recitation 15 minutes before the lesson	Improving students' tajweed skills, fostering the habit of reading the Qur'an regularly
The teacher gives a brief explanation of the verse	Students better understand the meaning of the verse, so that they not only read but also internalize the values
Morning remembrance together in the school field	Fostering inner peace, building togetherness, and instilling gratitude from the beginning of learning activities
The teacher gave an example of the closing prayer of dhikr	Make it a habit for students to pray earnestly and appreciatively before starting daily activities

Table 1 illustrates that the example of teachers in daily worship activities plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious character. Every activity carried out by teachers is not only a ritual, but also has direct implications for students' attitudes, habits, and discipline. For example, students' involvement in congregational prayers encourages them to be more disciplined in keeping time and fostering a sense of solemnity. When teachers play the role of imams or provide examples of prayer, students are motivated to dare to take on religious roles while familiarizing themselves with the practice of sunnah worship. In

addition, the habit of reading the Qur'an and explaining its meaning reveals a cognitive and affective dimension, where students are not only skilled in reading but also able to internalize the values contained within it. Joint dhikr activities further strengthen the spiritual and social dimensions by building calmness, togetherness, and gratitude. Overall, this table confirms that the real example of teachers is the key to instilling a complete and sustainable religiosity.

The example of teachers in daily worship activities plays a strategic role in shaping the religious character of students. By actively engaging in congregational prayers, Qur'an readings, and morning dhikr, teachers present real examples that encourage students to imitate and familiarize themselves with religious behavior. The findings show that an example has a greater impact than just advice or theoretical, because students can experience firsthand the religious values they live by. Teachers who are istiqamah in worship are important figures in fostering discipline, solemnity, and togetherness among students. Therefore, the example of teachers in daily worship can be concluded as an effective strategy in internalizing religious values, as well as building a madrasah atmosphere that consistently supports the formation of Islamic character.

Exemplary in Religious Celebrations and the Habituation of Good Character

Exemplary in religious celebrations and character habituation are both concrete forms of value education carried out through the active involvement of teachers in major religious activities and simple daily routines. This concept highlights the significance of having exemplary figures in instilling religious values through meaningful collective practices. The celebration of Islamic Holidays (PHBI), such as Eid al-Adha or the Hijri New Year, is not just a ceremony, but a momentum to foster a sense of togetherness, sacrifice, and respect for Islamic history. On the other hand, the habituation of good character, such as greeting others, maintaining cleanliness, and practicing time discipline, is a practical instrument in shaping students' religious behavior. The example of teachers in these two contexts makes it easier for students to imitate positive behaviors because the values instilled are present in real life. Thus, this theme emphasizes that religious character education requires a combination of monumental activities and consistent daily habits.

As explained by the head of the madrasah, "Every celebration of Islamic holidays, we involve all school residents, including teachers and students. Teachers are not only present, but also give examples in solemn attitudes, the spirit of togetherness, and provide moral messages from the events that are commemorated. That way, students not only see the event as a ceremony, but also learn the meaning of Islamic history". This was also emphasized by one of the students, "When teachers participate in Eid al-Adha activities, from preparing sacrificial animals to distributing meat, I feel motivated to help. I learned that sacrifice is not just theory in the classroom, but can be seen directly from what

the teacher does with us. From there, I became more aware of the value of togetherness and care".

From the results of the interview above, two important dimensions of teacher example, namely the monumental dimension and the daily dimension, are identified. In monumental activities, such as the Eid al-Adha celebration, teachers set an example in solemnity, cooperation, and social concern. This encourages students to understand that Islamic values are not only taught, but also practiced together. In the daily dimension, teachers demonstrate examples through small, consistent habits, such as greeting others or maintaining cleanliness. Grades that are embedded through simple routines are actually easier for students to form a habit because they are done repeatedly. Thus, this analysis demonstrates that the teacher's example extends beyond symbols, becoming a continuous practice that instills religious values in students through both large-scale celebrations and daily routines.

Exemplary in religious celebrations and the habituation of good character shows that value education can be instilled through two paths: considerable momentum and small, consistent routines. Teachers who actively commemorate Islamic Holidays set an example of the meaning of history, sacrifice, and social concern that can be seen and imitated directly by students. Meanwhile, cultivating good character in daily life fosters a madrasah environment that promotes the gradual internalization of religious values. These findings confirm that teacher exemplars serve not only as symbols in specific events, but also as representations of the values and ideals that teachers embody. However, they are also present in simple practices that are repeated and have a significant impact on students' daily lives. Thus, the combination of exemplary monumental celebrations and daily routines proved to be an effective strategy in forming a solid, consistent, and deeply rooted religious character in the lives of students.

Exemplary in Social Interaction and Teacher-Student Relations

Exemplary in social interaction and teacher-student relations is one of the important pillars in the formation of religious character in madrasas. This concept highlights the role of teachers as role models in daily social interactions, both within and outside the classroom. This example is not only evident in the way teachers communicate with students, but also in how teachers enforce discipline, resolve conflicts, and show empathy and openness. In the context of Islamic education, social interaction based on religious values, such as ukhuwah, mutual respect, and care, provides concrete examples for students to internalize Islamic manners and values. With teachers who are patient, fair, and courteous, students are encouraged to imitate these behaviors in their daily lives. Therefore, examples in social relations not only educate students on the affective aspects, but also form a harmonious, empathetic, and responsible personality in society.

Social interaction between teachers and students is built in an Islamic family atmosphere. Teachers become accustomed to greeting students with

warm greetings, fostering positive communication, and expressing appreciation when students exhibit good behavior. When conflicts arise between students, teachers resolve them with a deliberative and fair approach, enabling students to learn respect for differences and prioritize peaceful solutions. In daily life, teachers also set an example in being patient with various student behaviors, as well as being open to receiving their questions or opinions. Practices like this not only foster students' respect for teachers but also teach the values of manners, politeness, and social solidarity. Thus, exemplary social interaction fosters a humanistic Islamic madrasah environment that supports the development of a well-rounded religious character. Departing from this, the form of teacher example in social interaction is presented in Figure 1.

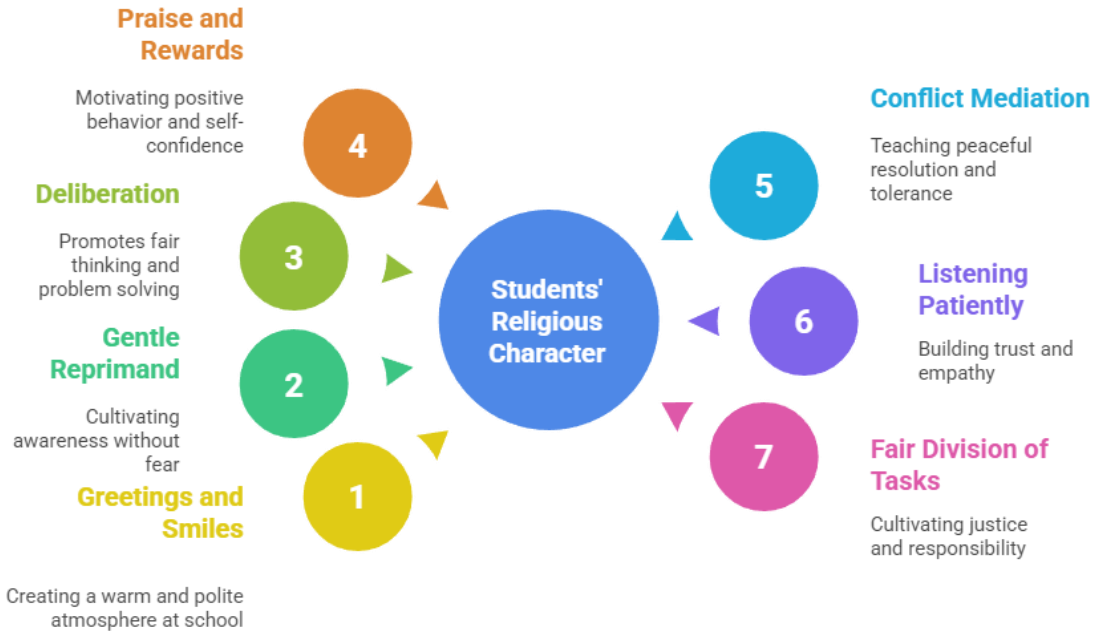


Figure 1. Shaping Students' Religious Character

Figure 1 illustrates that Various exemplary strategies and teacher interactions in daily life influence the formation of students' religious character. The elements displayed show a balance between affective, cognitive, and social aspects. For example, greetings, smiles, and gentle reprimands emphasize the importance of creating a warm atmosphere while fostering fearless awareness. Meanwhile, deliberation and conflict mediation teach students to think fairly, solve problems, and foster tolerance in resolving differences. Efforts to strengthen motivation can be seen in the use of praise and rewards, which foster confidence, and in patient listening, which builds empathy and mutual trust. The fair division of tasks emphasizes the dimensions of justice and responsibility. Overall, this picture emphasizes that the formation of religious character is not only through formal worship activities, but also through consistent, educational,

and exemplary daily interactions. Thus, this strategy produces students who are both religious and possess strong social character.

Discussion

This research confirms that the example of teachers in various aspects of madrasah life has a central role in shaping the religious character of students. The focus of this research is to identify effective strategies that can integrate religious values into students' daily lives through exemplary practices, including daily worship, religious celebrations, and social interactions. The significance of this finding is substantial in the context of the current moral challenges faced by adolescents, particularly in Islamic educational institutions such as MTs Nurul Rohmah Gending Probolinggo. An example is not only a symbol, but also a concrete and effective method of character education. Therefore, the following discussion will elaborate on the research findings in relation to the theory of uswah hasanah, as well as compare them with various previous studies to confirm their validity and contribution.

The example of teachers in daily worship activities consistently reflects the practice of character education based on uswah hasanah as exemplified by the Prophet PBUH (M. A. O. Ahmed et al., 2025; Islamic et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021). In Islamic educational theory, example is the most effective method of touching the affective aspects of students because they witness firsthand the values taught in practice (S. K. Ahmed, 2024; Kamran et al., 2023; Zairul, 2021). The results of this study align with those of Alfiyani et al. (2025), who demonstrate that congregational prayer involving teachers as imams can foster students' discipline and spiritual courage. The same point was made by Negara et al. (2024), who noted that teacher involvement in collective worship is a strategic instrument for internalizing religious values. However, this finding differs from those of Hawe et al. (2021), which highlight that the effectiveness of exemplary behavior is reduced if it is not accompanied by verbal reflection on values. This means that practice and the explanation of the meaning of values must go hand in hand. These findings demonstrate that the combination of real-world practice and teachers' communication of meaning is a significant factor in shaping students' religious character.

Exemplary in the momentum of religious celebrations is the actualization of spiritual values through monumental activities that are rich in meaning. According to Kartono et al. (2025), PHBI activities that involve teachers are actively able to form students' collective awareness of Islamic values. This research is also in line with Pageh et al. (2025), who found that teachers involved in religious holiday commemorations foster students' empathy and togetherness. Meanwhile, the habituation of good character, such as giving greetings and maintaining cleanliness, is rooted in the concept of value habituation, which is reinforced in Islamic character education (Masdul et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021; Muzakkir et al., 2024). The example of teachers in daily routines reinforces the

informal learning dimension, as confirmed by Al-Shallakh (2024), who notes that the value is instilled more strongly through exemplified repetition than through mere verbal instruction. Thus, the combination of monumental celebrations and simple routines forms a sustainable educational and religious environment.

In Islamic education, social interaction based on the values of ukhuwah and manners serves as the foundation for developing a religious character. The example of teachers in being patient, friendly, and fair is a manifestation of these values. These findings align with those of Kamran et al. (2023), who state that religious social interaction can foster students' empathy and social responsibility. Moreover, Prayitno et al. (2021) emphasize that polite communication between teachers and students has a significant impact on the development of an affective character. The study was also strengthened by Hatami et al. (2023), who state that students tend to imitate the teacher's attitude in interactions, especially when the teacher demonstrates consistency in the values taught. An example in social interaction enriches the aspect of interpersonal learning, as students learn through concrete experiences rather than just theoretical instruction.

Practically, this study offers strategic recommendations for Islamic educational institutions to integrate examples as the primary approach in developing religious character. Teachers are expected not only to convey knowledge cognitively but also to demonstrate it through their daily actions. Practices such as congregational prayers, the habit of greetings, and PHBI celebrations can be optimized to build a deeply rooted religious habitus. Theoretically, this research contributes to the implementation of the theory of uswah hasanah as a practical framework for Islamic character education. The findings of this study show that exemplary role models have affective, social, and spiritual dimensions that complement each other in shaping students' character holistically.

Departing from this, this study emphasizes that teacher exemplification is a relevant and effective strategy in shaping the religious character of students in madrasas. Examples in daily worship, religious celebrations, the habituation of good character, and social interaction not only reflect values but also shape them through direct experience. This research reinforces previous theories and findings that exemplified values are more easily captured and internalized by students. In the future, further research is recommended to investigate the impact of teachers' role models in the context of digital or online learning, as well as to measure their long-term influence on character development.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the example of teachers in various aspects of madrasah life plays a strategic role in shaping the religious character of students at MTs Nurul Rohmah Gending Probolinggo. The example displayed in daily worship activities, commemoration of Islamic holidays, cultivation of good character, and social interaction has a tangible impact on the internalization of

religious values, both effectively and contextually. Teachers are not only teachers, but also role models who demonstrate religious values through their actions, making it easy for students to imitate them. These findings confirm that the exemplary approach is more effective than verbal instruction alone because it involves students' direct emotional and social experiences. Thus, the example of teachers can be seen as a relevant pedagogical strategy in shaping religious habitus in the madrasah environment. This research opens up opportunities for further exploration related to exemplary practices in digital and long-term contexts, as part of the sustainable strengthening of Islamic character education.

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