

# More Than Teaching Values: Teacher Exemplarity and Moral Formation through the Figurative Learning Model

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## Abstract:

*This study aims to examine the implementation of the Figurative Learning Model as an exemplar-based pedagogical approach to addressing moral challenges among adolescents. The research is grounded in concerns over declining moral behaviors among students, including low levels of discipline, responsibility, empathy, and politeness, despite their immersion in an Islamic educational environment. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving school leaders, Islamic education teachers, guidance counselors, and students. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the implementation of the Figurative Learning Model significantly enhances students' moral awareness and behavior, particularly in terms of discipline, social empathy, responsibility, and respectful conduct. Teachers' consistent role modeling, emotional engagement, and daily moral habituation function as powerful mechanisms for moral internalization among students. These findings align with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, emphasizing learning through observation and lived experience. The study concludes that exemplar-based moral education constitutes an effective, contextual, and sustainable strategy for fostering adolescent character development in Islamic secondary education settings.*

**Key Words:** Moral Education, Figurative Learning Model, Teacher Role Modeling, Adolescent Character, Madrasah

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## INTRODUCTION

The moral development of adolescents remains a central concern for educational systems worldwide, as emerging evidence indicates a pervasive decline in ethical behavior and prosocial values among students, particularly in formal schooling contexts. This trend has been attributed to multiple systemic influences, including rapid digitalization, weakened community norms, and insufficient emphasis on values internalization within curricula (Høydal & Haldar, 2022; Shahjahan et al., 2024; Timotheou et al., 2023). In many educational settings, schools have traditionally prioritized cognitive achievement and standardized assessment outcomes over the cultivation of character and moral

agency. Which has led to students exhibiting diminished discipline, responsibility, empathy, and respect — core attributes of civic responsibility and social cohesion (Abiddin et al., 2024; M. Hasan, 2025; Moller et al., 2025). In Indonesia, this phenomenon is especially pronounced in secondary education such as *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic senior high schools), where despite strong religious identity and community expectations, teachers face challenges in effectively nurturing students' moral dispositions beyond formal religious instruction. Empirical reports suggest that without intentional pedagogical strategies that foreground moral learning through lived experience and social modeling, students may internalize normative behaviors superficially rather than as reflective moral commitments (Purwaningsih, 2024; Sanderse, 2024b, 2024a). Thus, understanding how moral education can be enacted through structured pedagogical models that emphasize teacher exemplification is crucial for addressing moral deficits among adolescents in school environments.

Recent scholarship in moral and character education highlights the role of teaching approaches that extend beyond didactic instruction to include more embodied, experiential, and relational strategies. Moral education research emphasizes that the development of ethical conduct and moral reasoning are facilitated not solely by curricular content, but by pedagogical processes that integrate moral action, emotional engagement, and contextual relevance (Meyer, 2024; Robichaux et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with the conceptualization of *moral learning* as a dynamic process where students acquire values dispositions, including judgments of right and wrong, through social interaction and reflective meaning-making (Kartal et al., 2024; Kim, 2022; Purwaningsih, 2024). Such a framework underscores the need for educational practices that cultivate moral agency — that is, learners' capacity to enact moral values in real-life contexts. Within this domain, teacher role modeling has been identified as a powerful mechanism for moral formation: educators, through consistent demonstration of moral virtues such as honesty, discipline, and empathy, serve as salient exemplars that students observe and internalize (ak Bujang et al., 2025; Grande et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2025). Empirical and theoretical literature further suggests that character formation is optimized when teachers' behaviors are congruent with the moral values they espouse, offering students lived examples that complement formal instruction and support experiential moral learning (Khanna, 2023; Le et al., 2023; Zulkarnain et al., 2025). However, despite this recognition, existing approaches to moral education often inadequately specify how teachers can systematically enact their role as ethical exemplars in ways that are pedagogically effective, contextually adaptive, and responsive to contemporary moral challenges, especially in diverse cultural settings.

A review of prior studies on moral and character education reveals important thematic patterns and limitations. First, research underscores the centrality of teachers in facilitating moral development, with studies indicating

that teacher behaviors, interactions, and explicit moral exemplification significantly influence students' moral awareness and character outcomes (Daumiller et al., 2025; Fernández Espinosa & Domingo, 2025; Ma et al., 2025). Nevertheless, much of this work remains descriptive, focusing on the correlational presence of teacher virtues rather than analytically exploring the pedagogical mechanisms through which teacher exemplars shape moral conduct in adolescents. Second, existing literature often emphasizes established moral development theories such as Kohlberg's stages or social cognitive perspectives that explain how students internalize values through observation and imitation, yet there remains a gap in articulating pedagogical frameworks that integrate these theories into classroom practice in structured models of moral learning (Abdullah et al., 2024; Botes & van Niekerk, 2025; Moody-Adams, 2025). Third, there is an evident paucity of research that situates teacher role modeling within marginalized educational contexts or within faith-based schooling environments — contexts where moral frameworks are both normatively emphasized and empirically underexplored. These gaps suggest a need for qualitative inquiry that elucidates the lived experiences of teachers and students engaging with a moral learning model that explicitly positions teachers as exemplars, thus providing interpretive depth and contextual nuance that quantitative surveys cannot capture.

Accordingly, the present research aims to explore the effectiveness of the Figurative Learning Model in addressing moral challenges among adolescents in a *Madrasah Aliyah*. Specifically, the study seeks to describe how teacher exemplification practices influence students' moral development — including dimensions of discipline, empathy, responsibility, and respect — through in-depth qualitative inquiry involving teachers, administrators, and learners. By doing so, this research intends to contribute to the academic discourse on moral education by offering interpretive insights that expand existing frameworks beyond abstract theorization to actionable pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform educational policy and teacher professional development, particularly in contexts where moral education is both a curricular priority and a lived ethical imperative.

The core focus of this research is to understand how a moral learning model that emphasizes teacher role modeling operates within everyday educational practice to foster moral growth in students. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study examines how teachers' moral actions and interactions with students facilitate the internalization of ethical values, and how students interpret these moral exemplars in their own lives. In doing so, the research foregrounds interpretive depth and contextual richness, which are central to qualitative inquiry, thereby offering a comprehensive account of the processes through which moral values become embodied in educational environments. Such insights are poised to bridge theoretical conceptions of moral learning with grounded pedagogical practice, fostering a

more holistic understanding of character development in adolescent education. This lays the foundation for subsequent sections of this article, including methodological considerations that operationalize qualitative exploration of moral exemplification in school settings.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The approach of this research is qualitative with a type of case study research that focuses on students at MAN 1 Probolinggo, a formal Islamic educational institution that represents an effort to integrate religious values and general education. This location was chosen because even though it has a strong religious vision, the madrasah still faces significant challenges in the moral development of students. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the implementation *Figurative Learning Model* or an exemplary-based learning model in shaping character and improving the moral quality of students (Alkaabi, 2025; Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022; Renjith et al., 2021). The case study was chosen so that the researcher could in-depth examine the local context, especially how the interaction between teachers and students in the practice of character education takes place. Information was collected from several respondents, consisting of madrasah heads, PAI subject teachers, BK teachers, and students with diverse backgrounds both in terms of religious understanding and academic achievement. This diversity is a rich and contextual source of data to be analyzed thoroughly.

The data collection technique goes through three stages, namely, in-depth interviews, observation and documentation (Botes & van Niekerk, 2025; Islamic et al., 2024; Khoa et al., 2023). Observations are carried out inside and outside the classroom to capture real behavior and interaction between teachers and students related to character formation. The interview aims to explore the views and experiences of teachers and students in applying exemplary values in the madrasah environment. As well as documentation, such as student work programs, lesson plans, and extracurricular notes, which can be used to strengthen findings and provide a formal framework related to the implementation of character education.

Furthermore, the data obtained was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's theory through three stages (Karimi-Ghartemani et al., 2022), namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The analysis was carried out with a narrative meta-analysis approach, which relates field findings to theories and previous research on moral education through example. With this approach, the research is not only descriptive but also analytical, thus making a real contribution to the development of moral education strategies in the Islamic school environment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of the interview conducted at MAN 1 Probolinggo give an idea that the problems of students in this madrasah are still generally not serious. The problems that often occur are still within reasonable limits and do not show a big impact such as students often coming late to the madrasah and impolite attitudes towards teachers. However, this is only done by a few students, not as a whole. Delays often occur due to the density of activities before leaving for the madrasah, due to the background of students, the majority of whom are active students living in Islamic boarding schools. In the face of this, teachers and madrasahs can understand and show a swift response in handling the violations committed, even with minor violations. This is done as a form of good attention to students in the formation of their character. By using a direct approach to students, teachers not only convey and reprimand verbally but also through example in attitudes and daily interactions between teachers and students such as, teachers consistently arrive early in the madrasah before students come to warmly welcome them at the gate of the madrasah through the habit of greetings, smiles, and greetings. This practice not only creates a warm atmosphere, but also becomes an exemplary strategy to instill positive habits and form disciplined and noble character in students.

The following is a visualization of data in the form of a table regarding the views of madrasah heads, PAI teachers, Guidance and Counseling teachers, and students about moral conditions in MAN 1 Probolinggo using a figurative approach in learning.

**Table 1. Interview Results of the Implementation of *Figurative Learning Model* on Student Morale in Madrasah**

Informants	Key Findings
Principal	The morale of learners is generally good, violations occur only in a small fraction of them
Good Teacher	There are students who behave impolitely, but are coached directly by the teacher
BK Teacher	The problem of low discipline arises, but it is dominated by the reason of the domicile of students from Islamic boarding schools, whose activities are dense
Students	Learning is considered to be still theoretical, not touching the affective aspect as a whole
Conclusion	There is no major moral crisis, teachers are expected to be role models and positive figures for students

This table briefly summarizes the results of interviews with various parties who are directly involved in the educational process and character development of students in the madrasah. By referring to the results of the interviews presented in the form of a table, it can be seen that there is no significant moral crisis at MAN 1 Probolinggo. Minor violations are only



committed by some students.

The statement of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Counseling Guidance (BK) teachers that when students commit minor violations, the teacher quickly follows up on it, to prevent the impact of greater violations. Meanwhile, according to the students, they feel that education in madrasahs in general is still more focused on theory and less touching in behavioral aspects. From the results of in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that teachers have a very important role in fostering and encouraging students' moral growth. Teachers are expected not only to teach theory, but also to be good role models in daily behavior, especially in the madrasah environment.

Based on data information from the results of interviews and tables, it can be seen that there is a tendency among informants who stated that students' morale can still be managed and is not in a crisis condition. However, all parties agree on character development that must be strengthened and continuously carried out, where teachers are the main example for students in this process. Whenever there is a moral violation that occurs, such as arriving late to the madrasah and being impolite, it immediately gets direct attention from the teacher and the madrasah. It is important for teachers to set an example in behavior, both in terms of communication ethics, and mutual respect for others. The information from this data shows a deep understanding of the importance of a figurative approach, where teachers play the role of role models for students. This approach is taken not only to improve morale in a short time, but also as a first step towards preventing a negative environment in madrasahs in the future.

Meanwhile, based on the results of observations conducted at MAN 1 Probolinggo, there is a significant difference in the moral behavior of students, between classes that use figurative learning models and classes with conventional learning models. Observation took place in different classes, focusing on observation indicators that included discipline, politeness, and other habits of good behavior. Classes that use a figurative learning model that positions teachers as role models in the teaching and learning process show that students' circumstances are better than before, they are more responsive in moral and social aspects. It can be seen from the condition of the students that shows an increase in mutual respect. Teachers who always speak politely and empathetically encourage students to imitate similar behaviors, such as listening to friends' opinions, respecting differences, and avoiding interrupting conversations. Thus, learning in the classroom takes place in an orderly and conducive manner.

This shows that *the Figurative Learning Model* not only affects the cognitive aspect, but is also effective in shaping students' positive character and attitudes. Meanwhile, classes that use conventional learning models show that they tend to lack initiative and mutual respect between others, as can be seen from their behavior that does not support the learning process. They often do not pay attention to the teacher's instructions, tend to joke in class, and pay minimal

attention to the subject matter. In addition, students also often interrupt the teacher's conversation when delivering explanations, so that the learning atmosphere becomes less conducive.

The following is a visualization of observation data in the form of a table, which compares four moral indicators (discipline, responsibility, empathy, and manners) between classes with the conventional approach and classes with *the Figurative Learning Model* approach:

**Table 2. Results of Observation of the Implementation of Figurative Learning Model on Student Morale in Madrasah**

Moral Indicators	Conventional Class (%)	Figurative Class (%)
Discipline	62%	85%
Responsibilities	60%	82%
Empathy	54%	77%
Manners	65%	90%

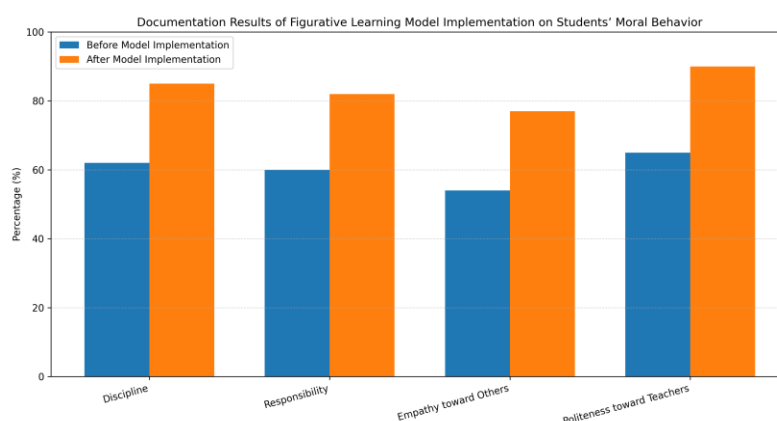
The table shows that classes managed using a figurative learning approach have increased in each indicator. The aspect of manners occupies the highest score up to 90%, and discipline at 85%. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the score in the conversational class, manners was in the range of 65%, and discipline was 62%. This data was obtained from the results of intensive observation of student behavior in the same period of time when teaching and learning activities took place. The table provides a clear picture of the figurative approach that is able to improve the moral values of students in madrasahs.

From the table, a fairly consistent pattern is drawn, where all moral indicators have increased significantly for classes that apply figurative learning models. All indicators have not experienced stagnation or decline. This pattern shows that learning methods using the example of teachers are very effective in shaping the overall character of students, which can be seen from the pattern of discipline and politeness as the indicator that increases the most. This shows that the behavior that is directly exemplified by the teacher is very close and easy to follow by the students. In addition, students' empathy and responsibility experience significant development when teachers play an active role in providing real examples and showing concern in various social activities in the madrasah. This pattern illustrates that students learn not only from verbal instruction, but also from observing the behavior of teachers they see every day.

Furthermore, the results of the documentation at the research site show that the application of *the Figurative Learning Model* at MAN 1 Probolinggo is able to bring good changes to the morale of students, especially for students who previously tended to show a bad attitude. These changes are recorded in the teacher's diary, counseling guidance book and daily activity monitoring report. Previously, some students were often late, showed disrespectful behavior to teachers and lacked discipline, now they have begun to improve their behavior gradually, have begun to be disciplined and show better behavior. Based on

reports from teachers about improvements in the formation of good character in students' daily behavior, that development has become very consistent with the application of an example-based learning model. This shows that an approach that makes teachers an active role model in students' daily lives is able to encourage character changes that touch more on their emotional and affective aspects.

To see more clearly the changes in students during the implementation of the *Figurative Learning Model*, the following data is presented in the form of a bar chart that contains a comparison before and after the application of this model: To see more clearly the changes in students during the implementation of the *Figurative Learning Model*, the following data is presented in the form of a bar chart that contains a comparison before and after the application of this model. Where this is as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Implementation of *Figurative Learning Model* on Student Morale in Madrasah**

The data was obtained from the results of documentation at the madrasah for six months. The analysis proved that all moral indicators improved after the application of the learning model. This improvement shows that the change has a continuous nature which is a process of character formation through example.

The results obtained in the bar diagram above can be concluded that the application of the *Figurative Learning Model* has a great influence on changes in attitudes and morals of students. Before this model was applied, the moral aspect tended to show a fairly low figure. However, once this model was implemented there was a clear improvement in all aspects. For example, the percentage of on-time attendance increased from 63% to 88%, while respect for teachers also increased from 60% to 87%. This shows that students begin to absorb the values observed from teachers every day. The information presented makes it easier for us to understand that the character of learners can be achieved through methods that emphasize concrete examples and emotional involvement in the defense process.



## Discussion

Positive changes that occur in students as data from the results of the documentation, show the impact of learning methods that touch the affective side of students. Learning by using *Figurative Learning Model* It is very affective in student learning because it involves the learning process through real examples. Students not only receive moral messages verbally, but also see firsthand how these values are exemplified by teachers in every day. In this case, teachers have a dual role, namely as teachers as well as shaping the character of students. The success of the application of the model shows that a teenager, especially students who live in a pesantren environment, is greatly influenced by daily interaction with adults. (El et al., 2020) When teachers are disciplined, wise and show affection, students will automatically do the same. In the explanation of this pattern, it can be seen that character education will be more effective if it is carried out comprehensively, where teachers do not only teach material but rather on attitudes that are exemplified every day.

The results of the study show that *Figurative Learning Model* has a significant impact on the formation of moral awareness of MAN 1 Probolinggo students. This is according to the results of research conducted by (Kurniawan et al., 2025) which states that the existence of an example in teachers has a great influence on the behavior of students in discipline and responsibility in the Madrasah environment. In addition, (Islami et al., 2025) shows that in theory *Social Learning* which was put forward by Bandura also strengthens this finding by emphasizing that students tend to observe teacher figures who are considered influential in the Madrasah environment. However, this study has a number of differences with previous researchers, which show that the influence of these figures is not only imitative, but also reflective, because students are able to assess and interpret the moral values exemplified. From the comparison, it is clear that *Figurative Learning Model* Not only as a means of imitating moral behavior, but also as a medium for internalizing values that involve the affective and cognitive awareness of students running at the same time.

The results of the study also showed that after applying *Figurative Learning Model*, students become more disciplined, polite and show higher responsibility in learning and social activities. These positive changes are due to strong exemplary and emotional factors between teachers and students. Teachers play the role of respected figures, where their attitudes and behaviors become an example for students in behaving and acting (Nuronia & Jannah, 2025). This is as supported by the idea of Ki Hajar Dewantara "ing ngarsa sung tuladha ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani". Which means that an educator must be an example and be able to raise enthusiasm and provide encouragement so that students develop well (Pratama et al., 2025). In addition, the madrasah environment that emphasizes religious values strengthens changes in the morals of students. When students see teachers consistent between their words and actions, they are encouraged to practice and imitate these values. As a result,

students become obedient to the school's requirements and understand the meaning behind these moral actions. This reinforces that the application of *Figurative Learning Model* In madrasahs it is very effective in instilling deep and long-term ethical values.

There is a significant change in the moral behavior of students after the implementation *Figurative Learning Model*, which can be seen in the aspects of discipline, manners, and empathy in each learning session. The implementation of this model is able to overcome moral problems that were previously a challenge among madrasah teenagers, such as low respect, lack of discipline, and individualistic behavior. These results are in line with research (Septantiningtyas & Palupi, 2025) which emphasizes that figure-based learning is able to improve the social ethics of students in the madrasah environment. This moral improvement proves that exemplary-based learning has a direct influence on the formation of student morals in a concrete way. This implication suggests that *Figurative Learning Model* can be an alternative character education strategy that is applicable and contextual in a pesantren-based madrasah environment. This model not only teaches students to know which is right, but also trains them to act correctly in socializing. Thus, the application of this model has a systemic impact on positive moral habituation in the school environment.

Student learning outcomes showed improvements in both cognitive and affective aspects. Cognitively, students are better able to understand the concepts of ethics, honesty and responsibility. Affectively, students show changes in manners, empathy and respect for others. This happens because the learning process applied not only focuses on cognition, but also combines psychomotor and affective aspects (Nurjadid et al., 2025). Students are guided to internalize moral values, live them emotionally and implement them in real behavior. Viewed from the cause-and-effect relationship, these findings show that figure-based and hands-on learning is more effective than conventional theoretical approaches (Rozi & Hafidz, 2024). Teachers play the role of facilitators who guide students through meaningful experiences, so that moral values are internalized in students' affective consciousness in a sustainable manner. This shows that moral education based on figures/examples has great potential to form the character of adolescents who are intellectually intelligent and have moral integrity.

The improvement of student learning occurs because *the Figurative Learning Model* places direct experience and reflection as the core of learning. This learning process involves active interaction between teachers and students through example, behavioral reflection and value discussion according to *Experiential Learning* Kolb (1984), knowledge is formed through concrete experiences that are reflected and internalized into personal concepts. This means that students do not only learn through words, but through real examples that they experience outside the madrasah. Academically, this research has made a significant contribution to the formation of moral and character education

theories in madrasas. This study expands the understanding of the Figurative Learning Model as a method that combines affective, cognitive, and social elements. In addition, this study combines the framework between Kolb, Bandura, and Lickona's theories of modern Islamic education. Practically, the results of this study provide strategic implications for madrasah educators on how to make the learning process based on example, value reflection, and direct experience to improve and maintain adolescent morale.

Moral Changes of MAN 1 Probolinggo Students for the Better After Implementing *Figurative Learning Model*, where students no longer learn from theory but see concrete examples that are habituated by teachers in the Madrasah environment (Muslimah et al., 2024). Indirectly, this change is influenced by the habituation system that is applied consistently by teachers, such as teachers coming early from students, applying 3S (greetings, smiles, greetings) and enforcing rules wisely for students who arrive late. Environmental factors also support this result, because students are in a community that upholds morals, both in the madrasah environment and in the pesantren where they live (M. Z. Hasan & Abidin, 2024). In Bandura's theoretical point of view, this process is known as *Observational Learning* where the social environment and role models are the main factors in the formation of good character in students. Not only that, the sense of being appreciated and accepted by teachers fosters a deep moral awareness in students (Harisa & Fitriyah, 2025). Thus, the results of the observation illustrate a strong cause-effect relationship between exemplary and existential behavior and moral transformation of students.

The improvement in student learning outcomes occurs because the learning process applied not only focuses on cognition, but also combines psychomotor and affective aspects. (Nurjadid et al., 2025) Students are guided to internalize moral values, live them emotionally and implement them in real behavior. Viewed from the cause-and-effect relationship, these findings show that figure-based and hands-on learning is more effective than conventional theoretical approaches. (Rozi & Hafidz, 2024) Teachers play the role of facilitators who guide students through meaningful experiences, so that moral values are internalized in students' affective consciousness in a sustainable manner.

Academically, this research makes a significant contribution to the formation of moral education theory and the character of students in madrasas. This study expands the understanding of figurative learning models as methods that combine affective, cognitive, and social elements. In addition, this study combines the framework between Kolb, Bandura, and Lickona's theories of modern Islamic education. Practically, the results of this study provide strategic implications for madrasah educators on how to make a learning process based on example, reflection on values, and direct experience to improve and maintain adolescent morale.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that *the Figurative Learning Model* is effective in improving the moral behavior of students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Probolinggo. The findings were obtained from the results of interviews, observations and documentation collected and processed. According to this learning model, teachers are central figures for students because teachers are not only educators but also friends, supervisors, and *role models* for students. The application of this model shows a significant improvement in the discipline, empathy, honesty and manners of students. This research contributes to the concept of exemplary-based education, by emphasizing that this approach can be an effective approach to address moral problems that occur in adolescents in the modern era. In addition, this study uses an applicative and contextual approach to enrich the theory of Islamic moral educators.

This research has limitations because it is only carried out in one madrasah and for a limited period of time. Factors outside the madrasah environment, such as the influence of social media and family, have not been analyzed in depth, but have the potential to affect the morality of students. Therefore, for more general results, the study should be extended to several madrasahs with various features. To assess the sustainability of students' moral change will last in the long term, a long-lasting approach is also needed. To align with the demands of 21st century learning, future research may combine Figurative Learning Models with digital or project-based approaches. However, we must still maintain the principle of exemplary as the basis of moral education.

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