

The Exemplary Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Shaping Students' Moral Values at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hayatuddiniyah, Kalibasar Village, Tanah Laut

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Abstract

This study examines the exemplary role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in shaping students' moral values at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hayatuddiniyah, Kalibasar Village, Tanah Laut. The study employed field research with a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with credibility strengthened through triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that teacher exemplarity is expressed through discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious conduct, and constructive social interaction. Moral internalization develops through imitation, identification, and internalization and is reflected in honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social concern among students. Religious school culture, consistent habituation, teacher modeling, and family support strengthen the process, while social media, digital exposure, family circumstances, and peer environments present challenges. The novelty of the study lies in conceptualizing teacher exemplarity as a contextual pedagogical mechanism through which moral values move from observable conduct to students' habitual behavior in a rural Madrasah Ibtidaiyah setting.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Teacher Exemplarity, Moral Values

Introduction

Education is fundamentally concerned with the development of the whole person rather than the transmission of academic knowledge alone. At the primary level, intellectual development needs to be accompanied by moral, spiritual, and social formation. Students therefore need learning experiences that help them understand values and practice those values in concrete situations. Recent studies of elementary education emphasize that Islamic Religious Education can function as a foundation for honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and respect when it is connected with students' lived experiences (Samsudin, 2025). This perspective places moral formation within the everyday culture of the school rather than limiting it to formal lessons. Accordingly, the quality of moral education is closely related to how teachers embody the values that they expect students to develop.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah occupies a distinctive position because Islamic learning is integrated with the broader educational development of children. Students at this stage are still developing stable habits, patterns of interaction, and understandings of right and wrong. Values that are repeatedly encountered in the school environment can therefore become part of students' behavioral repertoire. Research on religious character education

in elementary schools shows that habituation is strengthened when teachers consistently demonstrate the expected behaviors (Solihah et al., 2024). The school environment consequently becomes a social space in which moral meanings are learned through both instruction and observation. In this context, the teacher's daily conduct can be as pedagogically significant as the content presented in the classroom.

Within Islamic educational thought, exemplary conduct is closely associated with the concept of *uswah hasanah*. The Qur'an presents the Prophet Muhammad as an exemplary model whose conduct provides a concrete reference for believers (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). The educational significance of this principle lies in the movement from abstract moral instruction toward visible and repeatable conduct. Recent scholarship on Qur'anic exemplarity argues that the example embodied in the Prophet provides a pedagogical basis for moral learning through observation and imitation (Azis, 2024). Teachers in Islamic schools therefore have a responsibility to translate moral principles into behavior that students can observe in ordinary school interactions. Teacher exemplarity is consequently not an additional component of Islamic education but one of its practical expressions.

Islamic Religious Education teachers carry a dual responsibility as instructors and moral educators. They introduce religious concepts while also helping students connect those concepts with everyday decisions and relationships. This dual role requires consistency between what teachers say and what they do. Studies of IRE teachers indicate that their role in character formation includes modeling, motivation, guidance, and the reinforcement of religious habits (Judrah et al., 2024). When students repeatedly encounter consistency in teachers' behavior, moral concepts become easier to interpret as standards for action. Teacher behavior can therefore operate as a form of implicit curriculum that communicates expectations about honesty, discipline, respect, and responsibility.

Teacher exemplarity becomes especially important because children frequently learn through social observation. Students notice how adults respond to mistakes, communicate with others, manage time, and participate in religious activities. These observations provide behavioral cues that can be reproduced in students' own conduct. Recent research on role-model teachers in Islamic education similarly emphasizes the significance of teacher behavior in translating religious values into practical conduct (Amanullah et al., 2023). Modeling is particularly relevant at the elementary level because students are still developing the capacity to regulate behavior independently. The teacher's visible consistency can thus support the transition from external direction toward more autonomous moral behavior.

Contemporary schooling also faces challenges from the expansion of digital media and changing patterns of social interaction. Children may encounter behaviors, language, and value systems through social media and digital content that differ from those promoted by the school. Such exposure does not automatically produce negative behavior, but it creates a more complex environment for moral formation. Research on Islamic education in the digital era identifies social media and broader digital culture as important contextual factors in religious and character development (Rochim & Khayati, 2023; Komalasari et al., 2025). Schools therefore need approaches that make moral values visible and meaningful within students' everyday realities. Teacher exemplarity is relevant to this challenge because it provides students with a stable interpersonal reference within an increasingly diverse social environment.

Moral education also cannot be separated from the quality of relationships within the classroom. Students learn moral expectations through the way teachers communicate,

correct mistakes, distribute attention, and respond to differences among learners. A respectful teacher-student relationship can create conditions in which moral rules are experienced as meaningful rather than merely coercive. Research on religious character formation indicates that teacher modeling, peer interaction, and family collaboration reinforce the effectiveness of character education (Samsudin, 2025). This means that moral development is supported by a relational environment in which values are enacted consistently. The teacher therefore functions not only as a model of behavior but also as a facilitator of social learning.

At the level of moral theory, character formation involves more than knowing what is right. Students need opportunities to recognize moral values, develop positive dispositions toward those values, and translate them into action. Recent research on elementary religious character education distinguishes moral knowing from the broader process of habituation and self-development (Susilowati et al., 2023). This distinction is important because a student may be able to explain honesty or responsibility without consistently practicing them. Teacher exemplarity can help close this gap by presenting a visible connection between moral understanding and actual conduct. Repeated observation and practice can gradually strengthen the coherence between what students know, feel, and do.

The moral values relevant to primary education include honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, empathy, and social concern. These values are interconnected because responsible behavior often depends on honesty, while social concern requires respect and empathy. In an Islamic educational setting, such values are also connected to religious obligations and *akhlak*. Studies of IRE in elementary schools report that values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, and social concern are among the outcomes associated with consistent religious education and habituation (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The formation of these values should therefore be understood as a multidimensional process. It involves classroom learning, teacher conduct, school routines, peer relationships, and family support.

The local school context is equally important in understanding moral development. Educational practices are shaped by the culture, routines, relationships, and resources of each institution. A model that works in one school may require contextual adjustment in another school because students' experiences and social environments differ. Recent qualitative studies emphasize that school culture and institutional commitment are important conditions for sustaining religious character formation (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). Consequently, research on teacher exemplarity needs to attend to the actual routines through which values are lived in a particular school. A case study of MI Hayatuddiniyah can therefore provide contextual insight that broader descriptions of teacher roles may overlook.

The preliminary observations reported in the source manuscript indicate that students at MI Hayatuddiniyah still display several behaviors requiring moral guidance. These include inconsistent discipline during learning, talking while teachers explain lessons, incomplete responsibility for assignments, and teasing or bullying among students. Such behaviors are presented as developmental challenges rather than evidence that students have no moral awareness. They instead indicate that moral understanding has to be strengthened through continuous guidance and consistent examples. Contemporary research similarly notes that character education requires sustained interaction among teachers, students, school culture, and family environments (Ilham et al., 2025). This context makes teacher exemplarity particularly relevant to the school under study.

The source manuscript reports that the PAI teacher at MI Hayatuddiniyah demonstrates discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious conduct, and positive social interaction. These forms of conduct are expressed through punctuality, participation in religious activities, the 5S culture of smiling, greeting, addressing, politeness, and courtesy, and attention to students. Such practices transform moral concepts into observable routines. The significance of this pattern is consistent with recent studies that identify teachers as role models whose daily conduct reinforces religious and moral learning (Marwiah et al., 2024). Students can observe the relationship between a teacher's values and actions without relying solely on verbal explanation. The classroom and school environment thus become practical spaces for moral learning.

Moral internalization in this study is described as a gradual process involving imitation, identification, and internalization. Imitation occurs when students observe and reproduce visible behaviors such as greeting, handshaking, politeness, discipline, and participation in religious activities. Identification develops when students begin to understand the meaning of those behaviors and accept them as desirable. Internalization occurs when the values become habitual and are enacted without constant external direction. This progression corresponds with contemporary character-education research emphasizing the movement from moral understanding toward embodied practice (Susilowati et al., 2023). It also illustrates why teacher exemplarity must be accompanied by repetition and habituation rather than isolated demonstrations.

Religious school culture provides an institutional context that can reinforce teacher modeling. At MI Hayatuddiniyah, the reported activities include Qur'anic and religious recitation, congregational prayer, public speaking activities, and a weekly religious program. Such activities create repeated occasions for students to practice discipline, cooperation, respect, and religious commitment. Research on religious habituation in elementary schools shows that repeated religious routines can support the development of students' religious character when they are consistently guided by teachers (Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023). The effectiveness of these routines depends on their integration into everyday educational relationships. Teacher exemplarity helps prevent habituation from becoming merely mechanical because students can see the values embodied by adults.

Family involvement is another important dimension of moral education. Children move continuously between school and home, and the behavioral expectations of these environments may either reinforce or weaken one another. The source manuscript identifies family support as a supporting factor while also noting limited family supervision and family circumstances as challenges. Recent studies similarly emphasize that collaboration among school, family, and community is necessary for sustained religious character formation (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). This suggests that teachers cannot reasonably be expected to carry the entire responsibility for students' moral development. Instead, teacher exemplarity should operate as part of a wider educational ecology.

Peer relationships also influence the practical expression of moral values. Students learn not only from adults but also from how classmates behave and respond to social situations. Positive peer interaction can reinforce empathy, cooperation, and respect, whereas teasing and bullying can undermine these values. The source manuscript specifically identifies teasing or bullying and peer environment as concerns requiring continued attention. Recent elementary-school research likewise describes school culture and peer interaction as important mechanisms in the reinforcement of character education (Samsudin, 2025). Teacher exemplarity can contribute by modeling respectful conflict management and establishing clear expectations for interpersonal conduct.

Although the role of the teacher is central, moral development should not be interpreted as a simple causal effect of teacher behavior. Students bring prior experiences, family influences, peer relationships, and digital exposure into the school environment. Teacher exemplarity is therefore better understood as one mechanism within a broader process of social and moral learning. Recent qualitative evidence from Indonesian elementary schools similarly portrays character formation as collaborative and continuous rather than dependent on a single educational actor (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). This perspective avoids reducing moral education to classroom instruction alone. It also supports the need to examine supporting and inhibiting factors alongside teacher behavior.

Based on this context, the present study focuses specifically on the exemplary role of the PAI teacher at MI Hayatuddiniyah. The study examines how teacher conduct is manifested, how moral values are internalized, what values become visible in students' behavior, and what conditions support or hinder the process. The focus is deliberately contextual because moral education takes shape through concrete interactions rather than abstract principles alone. Recent studies have examined teacher roles, religious habituation, and character education in elementary schools, but contextual accounts of teacher exemplarity in a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah setting remain valuable (Putri & Husmidar, 2021; Ilham et al., 2025). The present study therefore contributes a case-based account of how teacher modeling operates within a particular madrasah culture. Its practical significance lies in identifying forms of teacher behavior that can be integrated into everyday moral education.

The study is expected to contribute conceptually to Islamic education by positioning teacher exemplarity as a pedagogical process rather than merely a personal virtue. It also contributes empirically by describing the relationship among modeling, habituation, school culture, and students' moral behavior in a specific Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. For practitioners, the findings can support reflection on how teachers embody the values they teach. For school leaders, the findings can inform efforts to build consistent religious and moral routines across the school environment. At the same time, the study recognizes that digital culture, family circumstances, and peer environments complicate the work of moral formation. Teacher exemplarity is therefore presented as a central but collaborative component of moral education rather than a standalone solution.

Literature Review

Teacher exemplarity refers to the pedagogical significance of teachers' observable conduct in the learning environment. It differs from the general idea of being a good person because the teacher's behavior is continuously encountered by students within an institutional relationship. Students can observe punctuality, communication, fairness, responsibility, and religious practice as concrete expressions of values. Recent research describes the teacher as a model through which moral values can be transmitted from abstract principles to social behavior (Albu, 2022; Marwiah et al., 2024). This perspective makes teacher conduct part of the hidden curriculum of the school. Teacher exemplarity is therefore particularly important in settings where moral and religious formation are explicit educational aims.

In Islamic education, exemplarity has a strong normative foundation in the concept of *uswah hasanah*. The Prophet Muhammad is presented in the Qur'an as a model of exemplary conduct, establishing a pedagogical principle in which values are demonstrated through lived behavior. This principle is relevant to teachers because students need concrete models for translating religious knowledge into action. Azis

(2024) explains that Qur'anic exemplarity can be understood as an educational method in which observation and imitation facilitate value formation. The principle also emphasizes coherence between speech and conduct. For PAI teachers, therefore, personal example is closely connected to professional responsibility.

Social learning theory provides a psychological explanation for why teacher behavior can influence students. Learning does not occur only through direct instruction because individuals can acquire behavioral patterns by observing models. In school, teachers occupy a highly visible position and can become salient models for students' conduct. Recent studies of teacher role modeling in Islamic education continue to use this perspective to explain how religious and moral behaviors are learned (Amanullah et al., 2023; Marwiah et al., 2024). Observation alone, however, does not guarantee internalization. The observed behavior needs to be meaningful, repeated, socially reinforced, and connected with students' own experiences.

Character education literature also distinguishes knowledge, affective disposition, and action. Students may know a moral rule while still experiencing difficulty applying it in real situations. Effective character education therefore provides opportunities for students to practice values repeatedly. Susilowati et al. (2023) show that religious character education at the elementary level involves moral knowing as well as self-development and broader habituation. This supports an understanding of teacher exemplarity as an experiential form of moral education. The teacher's conduct provides a bridge between moral concepts discussed in class and behavior encountered in daily life.

Habituation is closely related to teacher exemplarity because repeated exposure makes values more predictable and actionable. Daily greetings, punctual attendance, orderly participation, prayer, respectful speech, and responsibility for tasks can become routines through repetition. However, habituation is pedagogically stronger when students understand why a behavior matters. Research on religious habituation indicates that repeated activities can strengthen students' religious character when teachers provide consistent direction and example (Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023). Teacher modeling gives meaning to the routine by showing that the adult educator also practices the expected value. Thus, exemplarity and habituation should be treated as mutually reinforcing processes.

Religious character is broader than ritual observance because it includes moral behavior toward other people. Honesty, responsibility, respect, empathy, and social concern are dimensions of character that can be expressed in ordinary school interactions. Studies of IRE in elementary schools identify these values as outcomes of religious and character education when learning is contextual and reflective (Samsudin, 2025). This is important because moral values become educationally meaningful when they are visible in behavior. The teacher's role therefore extends beyond leading religious activities to modeling interpersonal ethics. PAI learning can consequently become a framework for connecting worship, personal discipline, and social responsibility.

School culture provides the institutional structure within which teacher exemplarity operates. A teacher may model positive conduct, but the effect can be weakened if school routines communicate contradictory expectations. Consistent rules, shared religious activities, and supportive relationships can create a coherent moral environment. Samsudin (2025) emphasizes the importance of alignment among curriculum, pedagogy, school culture, teacher modeling, and family collaboration. This suggests that individual teacher behavior is strengthened when supported by institutional

norms. School leadership therefore has a role in creating conditions that make exemplary conduct sustainable.

Family involvement is another major dimension of character formation. Students interpret school expectations through the experiences they encounter at home. When parents reinforce honesty, discipline, responsibility, and respect, school-based moral learning can be consolidated. Conversely, inconsistent supervision or family difficulties may complicate the internalization process. Syamsuriah et al. (2026) identify parental involvement as a supporting factor while also noting differences in family background as a challenge. Teacher exemplarity should therefore be understood as part of a school-family partnership rather than an isolated classroom strategy.

Digital culture has added complexity to the formation of children's moral identities. Students can encounter influential models through social media, entertainment, online communities, and digital communication. These models may not share the moral assumptions promoted by the school. Research on IRE in the digital era highlights the need for teachers to strengthen character education through contextual pedagogy and positive role modeling (Rochim & Khayati, 2023; Komalasari et al., 2025). The response is not simply to reject technology but to provide students with stronger interpretive and behavioral resources. Teacher exemplarity can offer a stable real-world model within this changing media environment.

Moral values are also shaped by classroom interaction. The teacher's manner of correcting students can communicate whether discipline is understood as punishment or as responsible self-regulation. Likewise, the way teachers listen to students can model respect and empathy. Recent research portrays IRE teachers as educators, motivators, and spiritual mentors who support moral internalization through guidance and exemplary behavior (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). These roles demonstrate that character education occurs through relational practices as well as formal activities. Teacher communication is therefore itself a form of moral instruction.

Research on elementary-school religious character formation repeatedly identifies habituation as a practical mechanism. Religious routines create repeated contexts in which students can practice discipline, cooperation, and spiritual awareness. Febriyanti and Supriyadi (2023) found that religious habituation activities can support character development both inside and outside the classroom. Such findings are relevant to madrasah environments where religious routines are embedded in school life. Nevertheless, routines become more meaningful when teachers participate as active models rather than merely supervisors. The relationship between habituation and exemplarity is therefore central to the present study.

Studies of IRE teachers also demonstrate that teacher roles are multidimensional. Teachers can simultaneously function as educators, role models, motivators, facilitators, and evaluators. Ilham et al. (2025) found that teacher role modeling, habituation, and motivation were associated with improvements in religious behavior among elementary students. This suggests that exemplarity does not replace other pedagogical strategies but interacts with them. Students may need explanation, encouragement, correction, and opportunities to practice alongside observation. An effective moral pedagogy therefore combines example with intentional instructional support.

Research has also examined the role of contextual and reflective learning. Students are more likely to understand moral values when those values are connected with situations they recognize in their own lives. Samsudin (2025) reports that storytelling, moral dialogue, and experiential activities can strengthen moral awareness when integrated with Islamic values. This finding complements teacher modeling because

the model provides a concrete reference while reflection helps students interpret the meaning of the behavior. Consequently, moral education should not rely exclusively on passive observation. It should combine modeling, dialogue, practice, reflection, and reinforcement.

Teacher exemplarity can also be examined through the relationship between religious identity and professional conduct. A teacher's religious behavior becomes pedagogically meaningful when it is reflected in patience, fairness, responsibility, and respect. Students may notice discrepancies when a teacher's verbal instruction conflicts with observed behavior. Research on teachers as models of Islamic values emphasizes the importance of consistency between ethical instruction and lived conduct (Ihwani et al., 2023). This consistency supports students' trust in the moral message of education. The teacher's credibility is therefore an important dimension of moral pedagogy.

Previous research further suggests that character formation is not uniform across students. Students differ in family background, social experience, developmental readiness, and exposure to digital environments. These differences can influence how quickly students move from imitation to internalization. Syamsuriah et al. (2026) specifically note differences in family backgrounds and external environments as challenges to religious character formation. This reinforces the importance of contextual qualitative inquiry. A case study can reveal processes that may be hidden when character formation is measured only through general outcomes.

The literature also indicates that the role of the teacher must be interpreted within a broader educational ecosystem. School culture, family involvement, peer interaction, leadership commitment, and religious routines can strengthen or weaken teacher modeling. Recent elementary-school studies consistently report that character formation requires cooperation among these actors (Samsudin, 2025; Syamsuriah et al., 2026). This means that a teacher's exemplary behavior is necessary but not sufficient by itself. The most useful analysis therefore examines both the teacher and the surrounding conditions. The present study follows this ecological perspective by analyzing supporting and inhibiting factors.

The research gap becomes clearer when these studies are considered together. Existing literature has established the importance of IRE teachers, religious habituation, school culture, and teacher role models. However, fewer studies provide a detailed account of how teacher exemplarity is experienced as a sequence from observable behavior to student imitation, identification, and internalization in a specific Madrasah Ibtidaiyah context. The source study addresses this gap through a case study of MI Hayatuddiniyah in Kalibasar Village, Tanah Laut. Its analytical focus is therefore not simply whether teachers influence character but how exemplary behavior is enacted and connected with students' moral values. This process-oriented focus constitutes the central contribution of the present research.

Method

The study employed field research with a qualitative approach and a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand teacher exemplarity and students' moral development within their natural educational setting rather than reduce the phenomenon to numerical variables. The case study design focused on the specific case of Islamic Religious Education teacher exemplarity at MI Hayatuddiniyah, Kalibasar Village, Tanah Laut. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation so that teacher conduct, student behavior, school routines, and relevant institutional evidence could be examined from multiple sources. This design

is consistent with recent methodological discussions that emphasize contextual interpretation, researcher engagement, and multiple sources of evidence in qualitative educational research (Fadli, 2021; Waruwu, 2024). The methodological orientation also follows the source manuscript's description of qualitative case study research as a means of understanding educational phenomena in natural conditions (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2022).

Observation was used to identify observable forms of teacher exemplarity and students' moral behavior in the school environment. The observation focused on behaviors relevant to discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious practice, social interaction, and the implementation of religious routines. Interviews were used to obtain contextual explanations concerning the teacher's role, students' moral development, and factors that supported or constrained the process. Documentation was used to complement observational and interview evidence and to provide contextual information about school activities. Using these three techniques enabled the study to compare what was observed, what participants explained, and what was represented in available documents. Such triangulation strengthens the interpretive basis of qualitative educational research because findings are not dependent on a single form of evidence (Jailani, 2023; Waruwu, 2024).

Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing information relevant to teacher exemplarity, moral internalization, moral values, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Data display was used to organize the emerging patterns so that relationships among teacher behavior, student responses, and school context could be interpreted systematically. Conclusion drawing was conducted by comparing patterns across the available evidence and checking their consistency with the research focus. Data credibility was strengthened through source triangulation and member checking, allowing interpretations to be compared across sources and clarified with participants where necessary. This procedure follows the qualitative research orientation described in the source manuscript and is consistent with contemporary methodological guidance for qualitative educational inquiry (Haryono, 2023; Waruwu, 2024).

Results and Discussion

Overview of the Main Findings

The findings show that teacher exemplarity is a visible component of moral education at MI Hayatuddiniyah. The PAI teacher demonstrates discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious conduct, and positive social interaction in everyday school life. Examples reported in the source include punctuality, participation in religious activities, implementation of the 5S culture, and attention to students. These behaviors make moral values observable rather than leaving them at the level of verbal instruction. The finding is consistent with research showing that IRE teachers can function as educators, role models, motivators, and spiritual mentors in elementary Islamic education (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The teacher's daily conduct therefore operates as an important component of the school's moral learning environment.

Discipline is one of the most visible forms of teacher exemplarity identified in the study. Teacher punctuality communicates that time is a form of responsibility and that school routines deserve consistent commitment. For students, such conduct provides a concrete reference for interpreting discipline as a practiced value rather than merely a rule. The finding aligns with recent research that associates teacher role modeling and habituation with religious and character formation in elementary schools (Solihah et al., 2024). Discipline is particularly important because students at the primary level are still

developing self-regulation. Consistent adult behavior can therefore support students' movement from externally directed compliance toward more stable habits.

Responsibility is another dimension of exemplarity visible in the teacher's interaction with students. Responsibility is demonstrated when the teacher carries out instructional and religious duties consistently and responds to students' needs. This behavior communicates that responsibilities should be completed even when they require sustained effort. Research on elementary IRE identifies responsibility as one of the moral values that can be strengthened through contextual and value-based religious education (Samsudin, 2025). In the present case, responsibility is not presented as an isolated lesson but as a pattern of teacher conduct. This makes responsibility accessible to students through observation and repeated interaction.

Politeness and respectful communication constitute another important element of teacher exemplarity. The source manuscript reports the use of the 5S culture, consisting of smiling, greeting, addressing others, politeness, and courtesy. Such practices create a relational environment in which respect becomes visible in everyday communication. Recent research likewise identifies respect, politeness, and social awareness as important outcomes of teacher-guided religious character education (Ilham et al., 2025; Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The significance of the 5S practice lies in its repetition and simplicity, because students encounter it in ordinary interactions rather than only during formal lessons. Over time, these interactions can help students understand respectful behavior as a normal part of school life.

Religious conduct provides a further dimension of teacher modeling. The teacher participates in religious activities and demonstrates that religious values are connected with everyday behavior. This is important because students may otherwise perceive religious education as separate from ordinary social and academic life. Research on elementary Islamic education emphasizes that character formation becomes stronger when religious learning moves beyond ritual instruction toward contextual and experiential practice (Samsudin, 2025). In the present study, teacher participation helps connect religious routines with visible adult behavior. The result is a learning environment in which students can observe the practical expression of religious commitment.

Positive social interaction between teacher and students also contributes to moral formation. The teacher's attention to students provides an interpersonal model of care and responsibility. Students can observe how an adult responds to their needs while maintaining expectations for appropriate behavior. Such relational modeling is consistent with literature emphasizing that teachers shape moral learning not only through formal instruction but also through everyday interaction (Marwiah et al., 2024). The social dimension is important because moral values such as empathy and concern for others cannot be learned fully through definitions. They require repeated experiences of respectful and caring relationships.

Teacher exemplarity is reinforced by the religious culture of the madrasah. The source manuscript reports regular activities including recitation of Surah Yasin, Asmaul Husna, Aqidatul Awam, congregational dhuha and dhuhr prayers, muhadharah, and Friday Taqwa activities. These routines create repeated opportunities for students to practice religious discipline and social participation. Research on religious habituation in elementary education similarly finds that recurring religious activities can strengthen students' character when supported by consistent teacher guidance (Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023). The significance of these activities is therefore not limited to religious knowledge. They also provide structured contexts in which moral habits can be practiced.

The findings indicate that moral internalization develops through a sequence of imitation, identification, and internalization. At the imitation stage, students observe and reproduce behaviors such as greeting, handshaking, politeness, discipline, and participation in religious activities. At the identification stage, students begin to understand the meaning and value of the behavior rather than merely copying its outward form. At the internalization stage, the behavior becomes more habitual and can occur without continuous teacher direction. This sequence is compatible with character-education literature emphasizing movement from moral understanding toward action and self-development (Susilowati et al., 2023). The finding highlights the importance of consistency because internalization cannot reasonably be expected from a single demonstration.

Honesty emerges as one of the moral values identified in the students' development. Although honesty is an abstract ethical principle, students encounter it through practical situations involving communication, responsibility, and interaction with others. Teacher behavior can make honesty concrete when teachers communicate truthfully and handle students' behavior consistently. Recent elementary-school research identifies honesty as a core character value associated with effective Islamic Religious Education (Samsudin, 2025). In the present study, honesty is part of the broader moral environment rather than a separate instructional topic. This indicates that teacher exemplarity can contribute to moral values that are expressed across different school activities.

Discipline is also visible in students' daily conduct. The source manuscript describes students as increasingly practicing rules, completing tasks, participating in activities, and following school routines. Such behaviors suggest that discipline is supported by both teacher modeling and institutional habituation. Research on teacher roles in religious character formation similarly identifies discipline as a value reinforced through modeling, motivation, and repeated religious practices (Ilham et al., 2025). Discipline therefore appears to be a relational and institutional achievement rather than an individual student trait produced by instruction alone. The teacher's example provides the behavioral standard, while the school routine provides opportunities for practice.

Responsibility develops through students' engagement with tasks, cleanliness, participation, and school obligations. The source manuscript notes that students demonstrate responsibility by completing assignments, maintaining cleanliness, and following expectations. These behaviors connect moral education with ordinary school duties. Research on character education in elementary schools similarly identifies responsibility as a central value when religious learning is connected to contextual practices (Samsudin, 2025). The teacher's consistent fulfillment of responsibilities provides a model that students can observe. Repeated practice then creates opportunities for students to transform external expectations into personal habits.

Politeness is reflected in students' respectful language and interactions with teachers and peers. The practice of greeting and communicating courteously creates a social norm that can be reproduced across the school environment. Teacher behavior is important because students see how respect is enacted rather than simply defined. Recent studies of teacher role modeling emphasize that respectful social conduct is part of the broader character formation associated with religious education (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The finding also suggests that moral education is embedded in communication practices. Politeness thus becomes a daily behavioral expression of Islamic moral education.

Social concern is another value identified in the students' behavior. The source manuscript describes students helping peers who experience difficulties and showing

concern for others. Such conduct reflects a movement beyond self-regulation toward interpersonal responsibility. Research on IRE and character education similarly highlights empathy and social concern as important outcomes of value-based elementary education (Samsudin, 2025). Teacher exemplarity can support this process by modeling attentiveness and care toward students. When such conduct is repeated within the school culture, students receive multiple social cues supporting prosocial behavior.

The findings also indicate that teacher exemplarity does not operate independently from school culture. Religious routines, shared expectations, and repeated activities provide a broader structure in which the teacher's example can be observed and practiced. This institutional reinforcement helps prevent moral learning from becoming dependent on isolated classroom moments. Studies of elementary religious character education emphasize that teacher modeling is most effective when aligned with curriculum and broader school culture (Samsudin, 2025). The case of MI Hayatuddiniyah illustrates this alignment through the combination of teacher conduct and religious school activities. The result supports an ecological understanding of moral formation.

Family support is identified as a supporting condition for moral development. When family expectations reinforce school values, students receive consistent messages across educational environments. The source manuscript also identifies limited family supervision and particular family circumstances as challenges. These findings correspond with recent evidence that parental involvement supports religious character development while differences in family backgrounds can complicate the process (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The implication is that school-based teacher exemplarity should be connected with communication and cooperation with families. Moral education is strengthened when students encounter compatible expectations across home and school.

Digital media and social environments constitute important inhibiting factors. Students may encounter language, behaviors, and value systems that differ from those promoted by the madrasah. The source manuscript identifies social media, the digital world, and peer environments as challenges to moral development. Recent research likewise highlights digital culture as a significant contextual challenge for Islamic and religious character education (Rochim & Khayati, 2023; Komalasari et al., 2025). The finding does not imply that digital technology is inherently harmful. Rather, it indicates that students need sustained guidance to interpret and manage the values encountered in digital and social environments.

The presence of teasing or bullying among students highlights the need for continued moral guidance. Such behavior can coexist with students' developing understanding of politeness and social concern, demonstrating that moral formation is not linear. Teacher exemplarity can help address the issue by modeling respectful disagreement, patience, and non-humiliating correction. Research on character education stresses the importance of school culture and interpersonal relationships in sustaining moral values (Samsudin, 2025). The finding therefore supports continued reinforcement rather than assuming that once a value has been introduced it is permanently established. Moral education requires monitoring, feedback, and repeated opportunities for better behavior.

The overall findings can be organized into a connected process from teacher behavior to student moral practice. The teacher first provides observable models through discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious practice, and social care. Students then encounter these behaviors through repeated interaction and religious routines. Through imitation and identification, students begin to attach meaning to the observed conduct, while habituation provides opportunities for internalization. The resulting values include

honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social concern. This process represents the central pattern identified in the case and provides the basis for the study's proposed conceptual interpretation.

The following table summarizes the principal findings and their interpretation. The table distinguishes the form of teacher exemplarity, the student value associated with it, the process through which it is reinforced, and the contextual conditions identified in the study. This organization makes it possible to see that moral development is not produced by a single intervention. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of teacher modeling, habituation, religious culture, and social support. The table also makes visible the challenges created by family, peer, and digital environments. These relationships are subsequently discussed in greater analytical detail.

Dimension	Observed Form	Moral Value	Internalization Process	Contextual Factors
Teacher discipline	Punctuality and consistent routines	Discipline and responsibility	Observation → imitation → habituation	Religious school culture
Teacher responsibility	Consistent instructional and religious duties	Responsibility	Imitation → identification	School routines and expectations
Teacher politeness	5S: smiling, greeting, addressing, politeness, courtesy	Respect and politeness	Observation → imitation → internalization	Teacher–student interaction
Religious conduct	Participation in religious activities	Religious commitment and discipline	Imitation → habituation	Religious programs
Social care	Attention and concern for students	Empathy and social concern	Identification → practice	Peer and classroom relationships
Student moral values	Honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, social concern	Integrated moral character	Internalization in daily conduct	Family, peers, digital environment
Supporting factors	Religious culture, teacher example, family support	Consistency of moral expectations	Reinforcement	School–family synergy
Inhibiting factors	Social media, digital exposure, family supervision, peer environment	Inconsistent moral cues	Interruption or weakening of habituation	External social environment

The table demonstrates that teacher exemplarity is not limited to a single behavior but consists of a cluster of observable practices. Discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious conduct, and social care mutually reinforce one another. A teacher who is punctual but communicates disrespectfully would provide an incomplete model of moral conduct. Conversely, consistent and respectful behavior creates a more coherent moral message. This multidimensional character of exemplarity is consistent with recent descriptions of IRE teachers as educators, role models, motivators, and spiritual mentors (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The case therefore supports understanding teacher exemplarity as a holistic pedagogical pattern.

The relationship between teacher modeling and student imitation is central to the findings. Students at the primary level are particularly attentive to visible adult behavior because many social expectations are still being learned. When a teacher repeatedly performs a behavior, students receive a stable model that can be observed and reproduced. However, imitation is only the initial stage because students also need to understand the meaning of the behavior. This distinction corresponds with the difference between moral knowing and deeper character development discussed in recent elementary-school research (Susilowati et al., 2023). The study therefore supports a process view in which imitation is necessary but not sufficient for internalization.

The 5S culture is particularly significant because it transforms politeness into a routine interactional practice. Smiling, greeting, addressing others appropriately, and speaking politely require little material infrastructure but depend strongly on adult consistency. When teachers practice these behaviors, students receive repeated demonstrations of respectful communication. Students can then reproduce the same pattern with teachers and peers. Recent research on teacher role models emphasizes that everyday interactions are important vehicles for embedding Islamic values and ethics in education (Ihwani et al., 2023). The 5S practice therefore illustrates how a simple school routine can function as moral pedagogy.

Religious activities also function as contexts for moral practice rather than merely ritual observance. Recitation, congregational prayer, muhadharah, and weekly religious activities require punctuality, cooperation, attention, and respectful participation. These behavioral demands create opportunities for students to practice moral dispositions alongside religious knowledge. Research on religious habituation supports the importance of repeated activities in shaping elementary students' religious character (Febriyanti & Supriyadi, 2023). The present case adds the insight that teacher participation makes those activities more strongly connected with exemplary conduct. Thus, religious routines and teacher modeling should be understood as mutually reinforcing components.

The findings concerning honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social concern indicate that moral development extends beyond explicitly religious behaviors. These values appear in assignments, communication, cleanliness, relationships, and assistance to peers. Such patterns are important because Islamic moral education is concerned with the integration of religious commitment and everyday akhlak. Recent elementary IRE research similarly identifies honesty, responsibility, empathy, respect, and discipline as important character outcomes (Samsudin, 2025). The case therefore illustrates the practical breadth of moral education within a madrasah. Teacher exemplarity helps connect religious learning with these ordinary dimensions of student life.

The role of school culture becomes particularly clear when considering the supporting factors. A religious school culture provides repeated institutional cues about desirable behavior. Teacher exemplarity then gives those cues a human and observable

form. Family support can further stabilize the same expectations outside school. Recent evidence indicates that school culture, teacher modeling, and family collaboration are important for sustained character education (Samsudin, 2025; Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The case consequently suggests that moral formation is strongest when these factors operate in the same direction.

The inhibiting factors demonstrate that moral formation remains vulnerable to competing social influences. Social media and digital content expose students to diverse models of speech, behavior, and social interaction. Peer environments can also normalize behaviors that conflict with school expectations. Family circumstances may affect the consistency of supervision and reinforcement. Recent studies similarly identify digital culture and differences in family background as challenges for religious character development (Rochim & Khayati, 2023; Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The appropriate response is therefore sustained guidance and collaboration rather than reliance on one-time moral instruction.

The finding concerning family circumstances should be interpreted carefully because the study does not establish deterministic effects. Family difficulties may create contextual challenges, but they do not by themselves determine a student's moral behavior. School relationships, teacher support, peer interaction, and religious routines can provide additional sources of positive modeling. This is consistent with an ecological understanding in which several environments interact in shaping development. Recent qualitative research likewise emphasizes collaboration among schools, families, and communities rather than attributing character outcomes to a single factor (Syamsuriah et al., 2026). The implication for practice is to strengthen supportive relationships rather than stigmatize students or families.

The study also has implications for the professional identity of PAI teachers. Religious knowledge alone does not fully establish the teacher as a moral educator. Students encounter the teacher's character through punctuality, communication, emotional responses, responsibility, and social conduct. Research on PAI teacher roles supports the idea that teachers function as role models in addition to delivering religious content (Judrah et al., 2024). Professional development should therefore include reflection on how teachers embody the values they teach. Teacher self-reflection can help align instructional messages with daily practice. The novelty of the study lies in connecting teacher exemplarity with a concrete internalization sequence in a specific Madrasah Ibtidaiyah context. Previous studies have established the importance of teacher roles, religious habituation, and character education. The present case emphasizes how observable teacher behavior becomes a reference point for imitation, identification, and eventual internalization. It also places this process within the interaction of religious school culture, family support, peer relationships, and digital exposure. This process-oriented interpretation adds depth to descriptions that focus only on teacher roles or lists of student character values. The study therefore contributes a contextual model of moral formation grounded in everyday practice.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the exemplary role of the Islamic Religious Education teacher is an important component of moral formation at MI Hayatuddiniyah, Kalibasar Village, Tanah Laut. Teacher exemplarity is manifested through discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious conduct, and positive social interaction. These behaviors provide students with observable models that can be reproduced through imitation and gradually interpreted through identification. The moral values identified in students include honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social concern. The process becomes stronger when teacher modeling is reinforced by religious school culture and consistent habituation. At the same time, family circumstances, peer environments, social media, and digital exposure demonstrate that moral development is shaped by multiple contexts. The principal contribution of this study is its interpretation of teacher exemplarity as a contextual pedagogical mechanism linking visible teacher behavior with the gradual internalization of students' moral values. The findings imply that PAI teachers should treat daily conduct, communication, religious participation, and social interaction as integral components of their educational practice. Madrasah leaders can strengthen this process by creating consistent religious routines and supporting cooperation between teachers and families. Moral education should also respond to students' digital and social environments through sustained guidance rather than isolated warnings. Because the study is a qualitative case study of one madrasah, its findings should be understood as contextual insights rather than universal causal claims. Further research could compare several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah settings to examine how teacher exemplarity interacts with different school cultures, family contexts, and digital environments.

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