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## **The role of islamic religious education teachers' exemplary behavior in shaping students' religious character at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the role of teacher exemplary behavior in shaping students' religious character at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in its real-life context. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, students, and parents, as well as documentation. The findings reveal that teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' religious character through daily examples of commendable behavior, such as performing congregational prayers, showing sincerity, honesty, patience, and humility. The habituation programs implemented at the school include daily activities (e.g., Sholat Dhuha, Sholat Dzuhur, infaq), weekly activities (e.g., Friday kultum, extracurricular religious activities), and annual activities (e.g., Islamic holiday celebrations, religious competitions). Supporting factors in shaping students' religious character include cooperation between families, schools, and the surrounding environment, while inhibiting factors involve lack of parental attention, negative peer influence, societal conditions, and technological distractions. This study concludes that teacher exemplary behavior, combined with well-structured habituation programs and collaboration among all stakeholders, significantly contributes to the development of students' religious character.

**Keywords:** teacher exemplary, student character, religious character, student habituation program, qualitative study.

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### **Introduction**

Education, in general, is a life process in which individuals develop themselves to live and sustain their lives at a better standard of living. Education is an inseparable part of human life and is a series of processes that empower the potential and competence of individuals to become fully developed human beings throughout their lifetime. Through education, we can gain knowledge, and with knowledge, we can change our mindset and perspective in facing the various challenges that we will inevitably encounter in the future (Rohmat, 2012). Ideally, education in schools should produce students who not only possess cognitive abilities or intellectual skills but are also accompanied by noble morals. This will serve as a provision for them when they grow up, enabling them to have strong character and be beneficial to the nation. This is also emphasized in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 3, which states that national education functions to develop capabilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the nation's life. It aims to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who: 1) have faith

and devotion to God Almighty, 2) have noble character, 3) are healthy, 4) knowledgeable, 5) capable, 6) creative, 7) independent, and 8) become democratic and responsible citizens. Therefore, an educational process must be carried out so that these values (character) can be instilled in students (Furqon Hidayatullah, 2010).

Schools play an important role as a place where students seek their identity. If they are in a negative school environment, it will affect them adversely. Therefore, a positive school environment is needed to guide students to become good individuals. To make a meaningful contribution in shaping the students' religious character as expected, all educators and education staff must create a supportive school environment.

Teachers must be able to become good role models and have noble character as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so that learning becomes effective and students' character can be directed towards goodness. Teachers' exemplary behavior includes: 1) Piety to Allah SWT, 2) Noble character, 3) Fairness, honesty, patience, and objectivity, 4) Discipline in all matters, and 5) Understanding students individually and collectively. From a teacher, new generations will emerge with high quality and noble character. Therefore, teachers must teach religious character education to students at school, either directly through the delivery of material during learning activities or through habituation inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and even outside the school. In Islam, having noble morals is the essence of the purpose of Islamic education. Muhammad Qutub, as cited in Jamaluddin, argues that the goal of Islamic education is to shape true human beings as described in the Qur'an. A true human being, according to him, is one who genuinely devotes himself to God, carrying out all His commands and avoiding His prohibitions (Dindin Jamaludin, 2013).

The influence of teachers in schools throughout all educational activities is a determinant of educational success through their performance at the institutional, instructional, and experiential levels. This means that teachers have a strategic position at the forefront of nation-building efforts. The teacher's personality becomes a balancing point between knowledge about education and the skills to carry out the teaching profession, especially in learning and character formation (Zakiah Daradjat, et al., 2012).

The challenge for teachers is to thoroughly examine their actions, methods, and words. Everything received by students and the positive reflections shown by the teacher will help students shape themselves into *insan kamil* (perfect individuals) with noble character. Teachers play an active role in providing students with examples of both religious and social values manifested in daily activities at school and in society. As a role model, teachers must maintain themselves with full trust, wisdom, and integrity so that students find it easier to emulate teachers with good personalities. As stated in Law No. 14 of 2005 Article 1 (1): "A teacher is a professional educator with the main tasks of educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in early childhood education, formal education, primary education, and secondary education." From these duties and responsibilities, it can be understood that character formation in students can be achieved through the exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers. Exemplary behavior is crucial in the educational process; ideally, if a teacher has good morals, students will also develop good morals, and vice versa. Therefore, teachers are not only facilitators and sources of knowledge but also educators who should guide, motivate, and assist students in shaping their personalities and developing character. In addition, they should foster and develop students' faith and devotion through good examples shown in speech, behavior, and appearance.

Based on initial observations conducted by the researcher at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi, it was found that the school has made efforts to instill moral and religious values through activities such as *sholat dhuha*, congregational *dzuhur* prayers, Friday *infaq* collection, and commemorations of Islamic holidays. Teachers also encourage students to follow school rules, behave politely, and show empathy toward others. However, several issues remain, such as students' lack of discipline in religious

activities, lack of respect for teachers, and behaviors that do not reflect good religious character. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at this school have acted as role models by demonstrating good attitudes, speech, and behavior, but external environmental influences present additional challenges. This condition indicates that the exemplary role of PAI teachers has not been fully effective in shaping students' religious character.

Previous studies have shown that PAI teachers' exemplary behavior has a significant influence on shaping students' character. Research by Rahmawati (2023) found that consistent exemplary behavior by PAI teachers can improve students' discipline and faith at the high school level. Similarly, Fadilah (2022) stated that teachers who serve as role models through speech, attitudes, and daily behavior are more successful in instilling religious values in students. However, research specifically examining the role of PAI teachers' exemplary behavior at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi is still limited. This shows a research gap that needs to be addressed to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's role in this school context.

Based on the above explanation, the research problem in this study is how the exemplary role of Islamic Religious Education teachers contributes to shaping students' religious character at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi. The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers' exemplary behavior in shaping students' religious character at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it can enrich knowledge in the field of education, especially regarding the role of PAI teachers' exemplary behavior in shaping students' religious character, and serve as a reference for future studies. Practically, this research is beneficial for several parties. For PAI teachers, the findings can provide insights and reflections to improve their role as models in fostering students' religious character. For schools, this research can serve as a consideration for developing more effective character education programs. Meanwhile, for other researchers, the findings can serve as a reference and foundation for further research in the field of character education and teacher exemplary behavior.

With a strong theoretical foundation, empirical facts from the field, and support from previous studies, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the exemplary role of PAI teachers shapes students' religious character at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi.

### **Method**

This type of research is field research with a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe and understand phenomena in depth, particularly regarding the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' exemplary behavior in shaping students' religious character at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi. More specifically, this research is categorized as a case study, which is a study conducted in detail and depth on a particular institution or phenomenon in its real-life context (Purwanto, 2010).

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument directly involved in the process of data collection, observation, and analysis. The researcher is assisted by supporting instruments such as interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation tools such as a camera and voice recorder. Data collection was carried out using a triangulation technique, which combines various techniques and data sources to increase the validity of the data (Sugiatno, 2008).

According to Arikunto, data is the result of processing all facts and figures that can be used as material for compiling information, while information is the result of data processing. The data sources used in this study are as follows:

1. Primary data, which are data sources that directly provide data to the researcher. In this case, the primary data sources include the principal, staff, teachers, and parents, while the objects of this research are the students.

2. Secondary data, which are data sources that do not directly provide data to the researcher. In this study, the secondary data include school documents and data related to the research problem (Suhaimi Arikunto, 2004).
3. The researcher also sought information from students who actively participated in extracurricular and religious activities to obtain supporting research information.

To collect the main and supporting data, the researcher used data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly observe the activities of PAI teachers, their interactions with students, and the implementation of religious activities at school. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, PAI teachers, students, and parents to gain a broader understanding of the teachers' exemplary role in shaping students' religious character. Documentation was used to collect secondary data such as photos of activities, schedules of religious events, school rules, and other official documents.

The data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation were then analyzed to be easily understood. The data analysis technique in this research used the qualitative data analysis model by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (P. Joko Subagiyo, 2004). In the first stage, the researcher reduced data that were relevant to the focus of the research, namely the role of PAI teachers' exemplary behavior in shaping students' religious character. In the second stage, the reduced data were presented in the form of narratives, tables, or charts to make it easier for the researcher to understand the patterns and relationships between the data. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the analyzed data and conducting verification to ensure that the conclusions were truly valid and accountable.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study used source and technique triangulation, which involves comparing data obtained from various informants and methods so that the research results are more valid and reliable.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of this research are described based on interviews with research informants and direct observations at the research site. The findings will be presented according to the focus of the research problems as follows:

### **The Role of Teacher Exemplary Behavior in Character Building of Students**

The role of teacher exemplary behavior greatly influences the formation of students' religious character. When teaching, teachers must be wise in maintaining their behavior to set the best example, teach moral values during lessons, be honest with themselves and open about mistakes, carry out their duties with full responsibility and awareness, and be polite and respectful, among others. Thus, students' behavior at school cannot be separated from the role of the teacher, because what students do reflects what their teacher demonstrates. Ultimately, student learning outcomes will determine whether, after participating in the learning process, they change for the better or otherwise, both in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

In Islamic education, there are many methods that can be applied in shaping students' religious character. Among the methods used by teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi are the exemplary method and habituation method. The exemplary method involves providing good role models to students in their daily lives. This method serves as a guide for actions in realizing the goals of education. Students tend to imitate their teachers, which should be done by all educators because, psychologically, students enjoy imitating not only good behaviors but also bad ones (Ahmad, 2011).

From this explanation, it is clear that providing good examples to students can help shape their religious character. All teachers must be able to consistently model good behavior to their students every day, as students like to imitate the actions, words, and attitudes of their teachers.

a. Teacher Exemplary Behavior in Forming Students' Religious Character

Exemplary behavior is commendable conduct that is appreciated by everyone because it aligns with values of goodness and truth. Practicing exemplary behavior is essential for educators in motivating students to study harder to achieve desired goals.

The results of interviews and observations with teachers regarding exemplary behavior at school are as follows: *"Exemplary behavior means setting a good example for students. If teachers want students to be disciplined and behave well, then teachers must first set the example, such as arriving at school on time, entering and leaving the classroom according to the schedule, being polite and respectful, dressing neatly, and engaging in other positive activities. We cannot expect to form students with good character if our own personality is lacking. Therefore, applying exemplary behavior must start with ourselves, beginning with small things so that the students can follow our lead."*

The interview results were then confirmed with the school principal regarding teacher exemplary behavior at school: *"Teacher exemplary behavior must come from within the teacher. Exemplary behavior involves taking good examples from teachers, so we must set good examples for students for instance, arriving at school on time, greeting others, performing dhuha prayers and dzuhur prayers in congregation. Additionally, teachers are often sent to attend training to expand their knowledge, and the school frequently holds meetings with teachers to discuss school and student-related issues."*

Furthermore, similar questions were asked to students regarding teacher exemplary behavior at school: *"The teachers here come to school on time and enter class to teach. In the morning, teachers gather and line up to greet us as we arrive at school. They greet us with salam, and at the beginning of every class session, we start by reciting the Qur'an. On certain days, we perform dhuha prayers and give infaq together."*

From the interviews and observations above, it can be concluded that teachers must first develop noble personal character because, from the students' perspective, everything teachers do is seen as good. Thus, students naturally regard teachers as role models.

b. Instilling Student Character

The role and responsibility of a teacher as an educator include teaching and guiding, helping students reach maturity. In the learning process, teachers not only serve as instructors but also as mentors. Teachers must understand all aspects of their students' personalities, both physical and psychological, as well as their development levels, needs, abilities, mental health, and so on.

The results of interviews and observations with teachers regarding their duties and responsibilities in shaping students' character at school are as follows: *"Besides teaching, teachers have the duty to educate. The role of teachers in shaping students' character is not limited to the classroom; outside the classroom, they must also educate students to develop good behavior. With full awareness, students should fulfill their duties as Muslims by performing obligatory acts of worship such as the five daily prayers, reading the Qur'an, performing sunnah prayers, and others."*

Similarly, students were asked about the role of teacher exemplary behavior in shaping religious character at school: *"The role of teachers at school, besides teaching and educating, is to set a good example for students. Teachers also deliver lessons on subjects they fully master. They must be able to change students' behavior according to correct teachings, provide motivation and encouragement,*

*and become a source of energy for students. Usually, when some students lack enthusiasm during lessons, teachers introduce games or ice-breaking activities to increase motivation.”*

From the interviews and observations above, it can be concluded that, apart from teaching, teachers have a significant duty and responsibility to set good examples so that students develop strong character traits. This becomes a foundation for them to avoid misbehavior or poor conduct.

#### c. Religious Character

Religious character involves values related to Allah SWT, oneself, fellow humans, the environment, and the nation, which manifest in thoughts, attitudes, feelings, words, and actions based on religious norms, laws, etiquette, culture, and traditions.

The results of interviews with homeroom teachers regarding religious character development at school are as follows: *“The students here are well-behaved, disciplined, respectful and obedient to teachers, greet others with salam, follow assignments given, are devout in worship, give infaq on Fridays, deliver dzuhur sermons, commemorate Islamic holidays, and offer condolences when someone in the school community experiences a loss.”*

From the interviews and observations above, it can be concluded that students’ characters at SMA Negeri 2 Kotabumi vary. However, the school community, especially the educators, work hard to develop students’ religious character by organizing various activities, such as dhuha prayers, dzuhur prayers in congregation, Friday infaq, and dzuhur sermons regularly. Students are also taught to respect and obey teachers, greet politely, and smile when passing by their teachers.

### **Student Habituation Programs at School**

The habituation programs implemented to build students’ religious character are divided into three types of activities:

#### a. Daily Activities

These include dhuha prayers, dzuhur prayers in congregation, and collective infaq.

#### b. Weekly Activities

These include Friday prayers for male students, Friday infaq, and activities of the Islamic Spiritual Organization (ROHIS).

#### c. Annual Activities

These include Islamic holiday celebrations, Ramadan short-term Islamic boarding school programs, religious competitions, and sacrificial animal slaughter during Eid al-Adha.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Developing Students’ Religious Character**

Based on interviews and observations, the researcher identified two main factors:

#### a. Supporting Factors

Supporting factors in developing students’ character include family, environment, and school. There must be strong cooperation between the school and parents to nurture students’ religious character.

##### a. 1. Internal Factors

These are the initial factors in shaping a child’s character. Good parents must serve as role models for their children. If parents demonstrate exemplary behaviors such as honesty, justice, patience, obedience in worship, wisdom, and being a friend to their children, it is likely the children will develop good behavior. Similarly, at school, when teachers display good attitudes and behaviors, students tend to imitate them.

##### a. 2. External Factors

External factors involve environmental influences. A positive environment provides children with positive sensory experiences that shape their development. Parents must be aware of their children's friends and social circles to prevent negative influences.

From these findings, it can be concluded that the environment significantly affects students' religious character development. For example, peer groups can easily influence students' behavior. Therefore, parents must monitor their children's friendships and interactions.

Schools also play a crucial role in developing students' religious character by teaching, educating, and training students in positive activities. Thus, collaboration between parents and schools is essential to foster students' religious development.

#### **b. Inhibiting Factors**

The inhibiting factors in developing students' religious character include several issues: families that neglect their children's attitudes and behaviors, negative peer influence, societal environment, and technology. Some students, for example, may want to appear trendy by bringing mobile phones to school.

Families can hinder character development when parents neglect their children's behavior, ignoring or allowing bad behavior to continue. This neglect may cause children to increasingly engage in deviant behavior. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and schools is necessary to guide students' character development.

Religious character development cannot be achieved by schools alone; families must also take part. Family is the most important factor in shaping students' character because students are born and spend most of their time with their families.

Based on the research findings, the researcher believes that in addition to teacher exemplary behavior, cooperation among all school stakeholders is essential to instill and nurture students' religious character. For instance, at the beginning of the academic year, the school should establish a joint commitment with parents and the school committee to monitor students' behavior both at school and at home. Character education cannot be one-sided; it requires collective effort. Moreover, proper strategies must be implemented, as strategies in education involve the art and science of delivering lessons effectively and efficiently to achieve predetermined goals.

### **Conclusion**

The description of the results and discussion above can be concluded as follows:

1. The role of teachers in providing exemplary behavior is very crucial in instilling religious character in students. The exemplary method demonstrated by teachers includes commendable actions carried out by teachers, such as performing congregational prayers daily, which is consistently practiced because of the role model set by the teachers themselves. The teachers' exemplary behavior is also reflected in their attitudes by displaying *al-akhlâq al-mahmûdah*, namely all commendable actions such as humility, patience, sincerity, honesty, trust in Allah (*tawakkal*), and avoiding *al-akhlâq al-madzmûmah*.
2. Students' characters vary; some display good behavior, while others exhibit less desirable behavior. However, the majority of students already demonstrate good conduct, such as love for Allah SWT, honesty, helpfulness, obedience in completing tasks, and respect for teachers. Teachers must first develop a noble character within themselves because, from the students' perspective, all actions performed by the teacher are considered good. Consequently, students view teachers as examples or role models to emulate. They imitate all the attitudes, actions, and behaviors of their teachers, whether in traits, speech, or actions.

3. The student habituation program at school has been running according to plan, consisting of daily programs such as Sholat Dhuha, congregational Sholat Dzuhur, and infaq. Weekly programs include Friday kultum and extracurricular Rohis activities. Annual programs involve commemorating Islamic holidays and other related activities aimed at instilling religious character in students.
4. Supporting and inhibiting factors are divided into two categories: internal and external factors. In addition, in shaping students' character, families, the environment, and schools must work together. The inhibiting factors in character development come from families who pay little attention to their children's attitudes and behaviors, as well as from peer influence, societal environment, and technology.

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