Strategy for Strengthening Moral Values in Islamic Education Institutions through Exemplary and Habituating Models

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening the moral values of students is the main challenge in Islamic education in the modern era which is full of moral crises and value disruptions. This study aims to analyze the strategy of strengthening moral values in Islamic educational institutions through the model of example and habituation as the main approach in the formation of Islamic character. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design in two Islamic educational institutions in Central Java, involving ten key informants consisting of school principals, PAI teachers, and students. Data collection techniques are carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, while data analysis is carried out thematically through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the exemplary model shown by educators in the aspects of attitudes, speech, and daily behavior is able to form a positive culture in the school environment, while the habituation of moral values such as discipline, responsibility, and honesty is carried out through daily routine activities, strengthening religious programs, and integrating values in the curriculum. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that the strategy of exemplary and habituation is an effective and sustainable approach in shaping the moral character of students, and makes an important contribution to the development of a holistic and contextual Islamic education model.

INTRODUCTION

The moral crisis that hits the young generation is a major concern in the dynamics of contemporary Islamic education, both at the national and global levels. This phenomenon is reflected in the increasing cases of deviant behavior, weak personal integrity, and declining respect for social and religious values among students. In the local context, Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia are required to not only teach the cognitive aspects of Islam, but also actively inculcate moral and spiritual values

inherent in daily life. These challenges are increasingly complex amid the growing influence of digital culture and secularism, which leads to inequality between the mastery of science and the practice of values. UNESCO even emphasizes that the global education system requires a more integral character approach to answer the moral challenges of the current generation (Hasan, 2023).

A number of studies have been conducted to respond to this problem, but there are still gaps in the approaches used. (Aswanda et al., 2023) study shows that the teacher model has a positive influence on the formation of students' character, but has not discussed how the model can be systematically integrated with other strategies that are more behavior-oriented. Meanwhile, (Sholikah et al., 2025) highlights the effectiveness of habituation strategies through routine religious activities, but has not studied in depth the synergy between habituation and exemplary in forming moral values as a whole in the formal education environment. Research that comprehensively combines these two approaches in a strategic framework is still limited, so an in-depth study is needed that is able to offer a more integrated, adaptive, and contextual model.

This research explicitly aims to analyze strategies to strengthen moral values in Islamic educational institutions through exemplary and habituation models. The main focus lies in how these two approaches are implemented simultaneously, as well as how they impact the process of internalizing Islamic moral values on students. The research also seeks to examine the dynamics of interaction between teachers, students, and the school environment in the process of forming Islamic character collectively.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic education by presenting an integrative approach in moral development based on exemplary practices and habituation. The model developed is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic character education, especially in the context of primary and secondary education. Practically, the results of this research can be a reference for Islamic educational institutions in designing moral development strategies that are more systematic, applicative, and contextual, as well as providing input for policy makers in developing a character education curriculum that is responsive to the challenges of the times.

The model of example in Islamic education is firmly rooted in the tradition of the prophet, where the Prophet PBUH is the main figure who is used as a uswah hasanah (good example) in all aspects of life (Ruswandi et al., n.d.). The example of teachers as educational agents is not only symbolic, but also the main instrument in transmitting moral values to students. In practice, the success of exemplary behavior depends heavily on the consistency of attitudes, the harmony between words and deeds, and the quality of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. However, example alone is not enough without reinforcement in the form of habituation, which functions to form a positive behavior routine through structured and repetitive activities in students' daily lives.

The habituation strategy in the context of Islamic education serves to strengthen the attachment of moral values in real actions (Pratama et al., 2025). Activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'an readings, and the culture of greeting, smiling, and greeting are part of efforts to internalize values that are carried out collectively and continuously. Habituation that is carried out consciously, systematically, and supported by a conducive social environment is able to strengthen the affective and psychomotor dimensions of students, beyond the theoretical cognitive dimension. Therefore, the combination of example and habituation is not only a choice of strategy, but a must in building a complete and deep Islamic character.

In facing the challenges of today's multidimensional character education, a model of moral strengthening is needed that is able to bridge the demands of Islamic values and the actual needs of students (Ibrahim et al., 2024). This study tries to answer this need by presenting an in-depth analysis of exemplary practices and habits that have been applied in Islamic educational institutions, as well as exploring the factors that support and hinder their implementation. Thus, the results of this research are not only descriptive, but also provide strategic input for the development of Islamic values-based character education policies that are relevant to the current social context.

Strengthening moral values in Islamic education is an integral part of the goals of national education and more specifically in the mission of Islamic education itself, which is to form people of faith, piety, and noble character. In classical and contemporary literature, moral development has become the main focus of study in Islamic education because it is believed to be the main foundation of individual spiritual and social success (Surbakti et al., 2024). Moral values are not only understood as norms of good behavior, but also as a reflection of the internalization of the teachings of monotheism, which shape human relationships with Allah, fellow humans, and the environment. Therefore, the strategy of strengthening moral values requires an approach that touches on affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects simultaneously.

One of the approaches that is widely highlighted in the study of Islamic education is the exemplary model (uswah hasanah). In Bandura's social learning theory, the modeling process has a significant influence on student behavior through observation and imitation of figures that are considered credible (REPEN, 2021). In the context of Islam, the example of teachers is the main instrument in conveying moral values in a concrete way. Research by (Khoirunnisa, 2025) shows that teachers' exemplary in speaking, behaving, and acting have a positive impact on students' discipline and honesty in madrasas. However, the limitations of this study lie in the unexplained systemic dimension and sustainability of exemplary as part of the institutional strategy.

In addition to examples, habituation is an important strategy in shaping the moral character of students. This concept refers to behavioristic learning theory, specifically reinforcement, which emphasizes the repetition of actions to form habits (Maarif et al.,

2024). In the context of Islamic education, the habituation of values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and tolerance is carried out through routine practices such as congregational prayers, tadarus activities, daily adab programs, and strengthening Islamic school culture. (Nasruddin & Duran, 2025) research shows that habituation carried out consistently in the pesantren environment has succeeded in increasing students' attitude of responsibility and manners. However, habituation approaches tend to be technical in nature and have not been widely studied in a strategic framework integrated with exemplary approaches.

Another study by (Hidayat & Hidayat, 2024) emphasized the importance of synergy between exemplary models and habituation in the character education process, but their research is still limited to theoretical approaches and has not yet revealed field practice in depth. This indicates a research gap, namely the need for studies that are able to empirically explain how these two approaches are implemented simultaneously, as well as how the interaction between teachers, students, and the educational environment forms a sustainable ecosystem of moral values.

Taking into account the strengths and limitations of previous studies, this study is directed to fill these gaps by examining exploratically and contextually strategies for strengthening moral values through an integrated approach of exemplary and habituation. This study is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the development of a character education model in Islam that is not only normative, but also operational and applicative.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Approach and Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design (Makri & Neely, 2021). This approach was chosen because it is considered the most appropriate to explore in depth the meaning, strategy, and dynamics of the implementation of moral values in the daily context of Islamic educational institutions. Case studies are used to contextually reveal real practices in the field, not to generalize results, but to understand the peculiarities of exemplary strategies and habituation in internalizing moral values in certain educational units. This approach allows researchers to reach out to latent dimensions such as motivation, meaning, and perceptions of educational actors in depth.

Location and Research Subject

The research was carried out in two private Islamic educational institutions in the Central Java region that have a reputation in Islamic-based character education. The selection of the location is based on the consideration that these institutions have implemented exemplary and habituation programs in teaching and learning activities and school life in a systematic manner. The subjects of the study include school

principals as policy makers, Islamic Religious Education teachers as the implementers of value development programs, and students as parties who receive and directly experience the process of strengthening moral values.

Sampling and Participant Techniques

The purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who are considered the most relevant and have a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Selection criteria include experience, direct involvement in exemplary and habituation programs, and strategic position within the school's structure. The number of participants interviewed consisted of 2 principals, 4 PAI teachers, and 4 students from the upper class (grades 5 and 6 or equivalent), so that there were a total of 10 main informants. This number is considered adequate for exploratory qualitative studies that prioritize data depth over breadth.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted to explore the perspectives and direct experiences of the informants on the exemplary strategies and habits applied in schools. The interview guidelines are developed based on indicators of Islamic moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect. Observations were made on daily activities at school, both formal (learning processes, ceremonies) and informal (interaction between school residents), in order to understand the context of real value implementation. Documentation includes analysis of the school's visions and missions, curriculum, rules of conduct, and documentation of religious activities. The validity of the instrument was tested through expert judgement by lecturers who are experts in Islamic education and qualitative methodology experts.

Research Implementation Procedure

The research was conducted in five stages: (1) the pre-field stage which included literature study, location determination, and licensing management; (2) field orientation stage to build relationships with participants and recognize contextual situations; (3) the main data collection stage through interviews, observations, and documentation; (4) the stage of data reduction and categorization based on initial findings and emerging themes; and (5) the stage of preparing the report by integrating all findings in a relevant theoretical framework.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out inducively using the thematic analysis method with a six-step approach from Braun and Clarke, namely: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) theme search, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) outcome narrative preparation. The entire analysis process is assisted by NVivo 12

software to facilitate data grouping, compiling coding trees, and visualizing relationships between themes.

Data Validity Test

To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, source triangulation techniques (comparing information from principals, teachers, and students), triangulation techniques (comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation), and time triangulation (making observations in various different time situations) were used. In addition, member checking was carried out by asking participants to re-verify the researcher's interpretation of their statements to prevent interpretive bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data analysis from two Islamic educational institutions in Central Java, it was found that the strategy of strengthening moral values through the model of example and habituation was carried out simultaneously, although there were differences in implementation and effectiveness in each institution. The findings of this study are grouped into several main themes: (1) the form of teacher example, (2) the habituation of moral values, (3) the impact on students, and (4) the challenges and factors supporting implementation.

Form of Teacher Example

Teachers in both Islamic educational institutions play a central role as role models in daily life. Exemplary behavior is reflected in the aspects of dress, speech, politeness, and social interaction in the school environment. One of the informants stated:

"We try to always greet students with a smile, say hello, and speak softly. It's a simple way, but they imitate it quickly", (IN-01, June 2, 2025 interview).

In addition, the teacher's consistency in being punctual, showing a fair attitude, and maintaining cleanliness also provides concrete examples that can be observed directly by students. The strategy of strengthening moral values in Islamic educational institutions in this study places the example of teachers as the main approach in shaping the Islamic character of students. Example is a strong foundation in instilling moral values in the midst of the challenges of ethical crises and value disruptions that accompany the modern era. Teachers not only function as conveyors of teaching materials, but more than that, they appear as concrete moral models through consistent attitudes, speech, and daily behavior. In the school environment, teachers always maintain politeness in speaking, show respect and empathy, and show integrity in carrying out their duties (Mardiana et al., 2022). All of this creates a positive atmosphere that forms a culture of morality in the educational environment.

This example is not passive or purely symbolic, but actively forms a direct experience for students in seeing and imitating positive behavior. Teachers who are disciplined, fair, responsible, and gentle are a reflection of the moral values that are

instilled in reality every day (PRAKTINIS, 2023). This attitude not only provides a moral message, but at the same time fosters good habits that are naturally accepted by students as part of school life.

On the other hand, the example of teachers can also be seen in the way they respond to challenging situations, such as resolving conflicts between students wisely, making decisions fairly, and providing moral guidance without judgment (Henriksen et al., 2025). All of these practices reflect the core values of Islam, such as justice, compassion, patience, and social responsibility. Therefore, the exemplary model in the context of Islamic educational institutions is not only part of the teaching strategy, but becomes a transformational force in instilling moral values in a contextual and sustainable manner. This finding confirms that exemplary is an essential element in building students' character thoroughly and deeply in the midst of the challenges of the times (Haluti & Mufarrihah, 2024).

Habituation of Moral Values

Habituation activities are carried out through routine programs such as congregational prayers, morning tadarus, joint prayers before and after study, as well as the culture of greetings and handshakes before entering class. A PAI teacher revealed:

"Habituation starts from small things, for example, every morning students are obliged to say greetings and kiss the teacher's hand. We consider this activity to be very effective in fostering respect and discipline", (IN-03, June 6, 2025 interview).

The habituation program is also integrated in thematic learning and extracurricular activities such as flash Islamic boarding schools, Islamic adab competitions, and daily moral journals. The habituation of moral values in Islamic educational institutions is the second pillar in the strategy of strengthening the character of students (Alvi et al., 2024). In contrast to exemplary and contextual in nature, habituation functions as a process of internalizing values through structured and systematic repetitive practices. Habituation activities are carried out through daily and weekly routine programs that have been institutionalized, such as congregational prayers, reciting the Qur'an every morning, praying together before and after learning, as well as the application of the culture of greeting and shaking hands before entering class. This habit is not just a routine, but an effective means to instill the values of discipline, responsibility, and respect for teachers and others.

The habituation activity provides a space for students to directly experience the application of moral values in daily life in the school environment (Iqbal, 2023). For example, by making it a habit to greet and kiss the teacher's hand every morning, students not only show respect, but also foster an emotional closeness that strengthens the educational relationship between teacher and student. This process is also a medium to strengthen the affective dimension in character education, where values are not only understood cognitively, but also lived and felt (Dhony et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the habituation of moral values is also thoroughly integrated into thematic learning activities and extracurricular programs. Practices such as Islamic boarding schools, Islamic adab competitions, and daily moral journals are reflective and applicative means that encourage students to understand and apply morals in a broader context (Mau, 2024). In addition, these activities also provide space for students to evaluate themselves and improve behavior independently. This strategy shows that habituation that is designed consistently and contextually can strengthen the formation of moral character in a sustainable and comprehensive manner, as well as foster a religious culture that supports the vision of holistic Islamic education.

Impact on Students

The implementation of exemplary and habitual strategies has a positive impact on the formation of students' character, especially in the aspects of responsibility, manners, and honesty. One student shared his experience:

"From the fourth grade, I have been used to waking up early for Fajr prayers because at school we are always asked if the prayer is complete or not. So it will become a habit at home for a long time.", (IN-08, June 10, 2025 interview).

Many students show improvements in discipline and ability to control emotions through direct guidance from teachers as well as daily reflection activities conducted on weekends. The implementation of exemplary and habituation strategies in Islamic educational institutions shows a real and positive impact on the formation of student character. Through a structured and continuous approach, students experience behavioral changes that reflect the values of morality, especially in the aspects of responsibility, manners, and honesty. Consistent teacher examples have a strong influence on students' attitudes in daily life, both in the school environment and at home. Positive attitudes such as greeting with greetings, respecting teachers and friends, and maintaining a clean environment are beginning to form as part of students' identity.

Habits that are carried out regularly, such as congregational prayers and weekly moral reflections, also strengthen the process of internalizing values. This activity helps students build self-awareness and foster a sense of responsibility, for example in maintaining the consistency of worship or fulfilling personal obligations without having to be reminded. In addition, habituation activities encourage the formation of stable and sustainable patterns of behavior, as these values are instilled through repeated experiences in a spiritually and emotionally supportive atmosphere (Nasution, 2025).

Another positive impact can be seen in improving students' discipline and ability to manage emotions. Direct interaction with teachers who instill values with a personal and empathetic approach encourages students to learn to express their opinions politely and solve problems without confrontation (Abubakar, 2024). Moral reflection activities

on weekends are also a space for introspection that encourages students to recognize their shortcomings and commit to improving themselves. Overall, the implementation of this strategy not only shapes good individual behavior, but also creates a school culture conducive to the growth of a strong and sustainable Islamic character.

Challenges and Supporting Factors

Some of the obstacles faced by schools in the implementation of this strategy include time constraints, inconsistency of all teachers in being role models, and lack of systematic character evaluation. The Principal said:

"We have a good program, but not all teachers run it with the same enthusiasm. When students see that difference, they can be confused about which grades to follow.", (IN-02, June 3, 2025 interview).

However, the main supporting factors that strengthen this strategy are the visionary leadership of the principal, the Islamic school culture, and the involvement of parents in moral development at home (Widodo, 2025). In its implementation, the strategy of strengthening moral values through example and habituation is inseparable from various dynamics that affect the effectiveness of the program. On the one hand, there are a number of supporting factors that significantly strengthen the implementation of this strategy, such as the leadership of the principal who is visionary and committed to character education. This leadership is reflected in the ability of school principals to initiate value-based programs, provide moral examples, and build a good coordination and communication system with teachers and parents. In addition, the existence of an Islamic school culture which is reflected in a religious atmosphere, polite social interaction, and collective habits with spiritual nuances is a supportive environment that accelerates the process of internalizing values. The active involvement of parents in moral development at home also strengthens the continuity between school education and family life, creating synergy in the formation of students' character (Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024).

However, the implementation process also faces several challenges that need to be observed. One of the main obstacles is the limited time in the implementation of the comprehensive habituation program, especially when the academic curriculum load is quite dense. This often causes character-building activities to get a limited portion. In addition, inconsistency in teacher examples is also a crucial problem. Not all teachers show behavior that is in line with the values they want to inculcate, causing confusion among students about the standards of behavior they should follow. Disharmony in the delivery of values can hinder the internalization process and decrease the overall effectiveness of the program (Mahdiyyah & Jasminto, 2025).

Another obstacle lies in the lack of a structured and sustainable character evaluation system. The evaluation of moral values is still informal and depends on the subjective observation of the teacher, so it is not able to provide a comprehensive

picture of the development of students' character. Therefore, although the strategy of example and habituation has had a positive impact, strengthening managerial aspects, consistency of implementation, and a more systematic monitoring system are important needs for this strategy to run effectively and sustainably within the framework of holistic Islamic education (Budiman et al., 2025).

Table 1.

Model of Exemplary Strategy and Habituation of Morals in Islamic Education

Strategy Aspects	Real Implementation	Visible Impact
Teacher Example	Greetings, smiles, moral consistency, resolution of ethical conflicts	Imitation of positive behavior, teacher-student closeness
Daily Habituation	Joint prayer, tadarus, handshake, greetings, moral questions and answers	Religious routines and manners are formed
Thematic Activities	Lightning Islamic Boarding School, Moral Journal, Adab Competition	Reflection on moral values and increased self-awareness
School Culture	Moral posters, reward system, Islamic environment	Supporting ecosystem for character building
Parent Involvement	Value education at home, teacher-parent coordination	Consistency of values between home and madrasah

Discussion

The findings in this study provide significant reinforcement to the social learning theory put forward by Albert Bandura (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Within this framework, the formation of behavior does not only occur through direct teaching, but more through the process of observation of figures who are considered credible and worthy of imitation. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, teachers appear as central figures whose existence is not just as a conveyor of knowledge, but as a representation of values. The example of teachers in behaving, speaking, and acting is the main medium in transmitting moral values to students. They become a real reference for students in understanding and imitating behaviors that reflect morals. This process takes place naturally, as students more easily absorb value from what they see and experience firsthand, rather than simply from what is theoretically taught.

On the other hand, habituation strategies applied through routine activities such as congregational prayers, morning tadarus, and daily moral journals, are in line with the basic principles of behaviorism developed by B.F. Skinner. In this view, the reinforcement of positive behavior through repetition and reinforcement will form a

habit that is firmly embedded in the individual (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Habituation that is carried out in a structured and consistent manner has been proven not only to affect the psychomotor dimension, but also to strengthen the affective aspects of students—namely moral awareness and ethical sensitivity. Students are gradually able to internalize the values that are practiced repeatedly, until they become part of their identity.

Nevertheless, this study confirms that the effectiveness of the strategy cannot depend on one approach partially. Imitation without habituation will only form a perception without real behavior, while habituation without example risks losing an essential depth of value. Therefore, the integration between the two is the main key in forming characters holistically. Example provides a solid moral foundation, while habituation serves as a means to reinforce and stabilize those values through daily practice. This combination creates a transformative and sustainable value learning cycle.

Environmental factors also play an important role in strengthening or even hindering the implementation of this strategy. The school's culture with Islamic nuances, proactive and visionary leadership of the principal, and the involvement of parents in moral development at home are strategic elements that determine the success of the program. When these three components support each other, an educational atmosphere is created that is harmonious and conducive to the internalization of values (Alazmi, 2025). Conversely, when one or more of these factors are weak—for example, teachers who are less consistent in their role models, or lack of parental participation— then the effectiveness of the strategy will be significantly reduced. This shows that character formation is not only a matter of method, but also about the ecosystem that supports the course of the strategy.

In the perspective of Islamic education, this strategy of example and habituation resonates with an integral educational paradigm that emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Rifqi & Suwendi_, 2025). It is not enough to just convey values in the form of concepts, but must bring these values to life in the daily reality of students. Through this approach, students not only learn about honesty, responsibility, or good manners as a theory, but they experience, practice, and feel those values in social interactions at school as well as at home. This allows the formation of a complete Islamic character, inseparable between knowledge, attitudes, and actions.

The variation in results between institutions also provides important insight that the success of the strategy is greatly influenced by the quality of implementation in the field. The commitment of educational actors, the quality of communication between teachers, and the consistency of values displayed in daily interactions are real differentiating factors. In other words, the same strategy can produce different impacts if implemented with a level of commitment and quality that is not commensurate.

Therefore, regular teacher training and strengthening of internal institutional regulations are strategic steps to maintain the standards and continuity of moral formation programs.

Finally, it is necessary to realize that this study has limitations, especially in terms of scope. Only two institutions are the location of the study, and the social context is relatively homogeneous. Therefore, further research is highly recommended to expand the object of study in Islamic educational institutions in more diverse regions and levels. A mix-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data will also provide a more complete picture, while improving the validity of the findings. In addition, the urgency of developing a systematic and measurable character evaluation instrument is an important highlight. This instrument is needed so that every progress in the formation of student morals can be monitored objectively, so that exemplary and habituation strategies can continue to be developed dynamically and based on data.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the strategy of strengthening moral values through exemplary and habituary models in Islamic educational institutions has proven to be effective in shaping students' character holistically. The teacher's example of consistency in daily behavior becomes a strong moral foundation for students in imitating and internalizing the moral values of karimah. Meanwhile, the habituation of moral values through routine and structured activities serves as a reinforcement of the process of internalizing values, which gradually forms a pattern of positive and sustainable behavior.

This strategy has a real positive impact, especially in forming student attitudes of responsibility, manners, discipline, and honesty. These findings support social and behavioristic learning theories, which emphasize the importance of observation of role models and repetition in behavior formation. However, the effectiveness of the strategy is greatly influenced by the quality of implementation, the consistency of teachers in acting as role models, and the active involvement of principals and parents.

Some of the obstacles found include time constraints, inconsistencies in the implementation of exemplary by all teachers, and the lack of a measurable and sustainable character evaluation system. However, visionary leadership, a religious school culture, and synergy with families are key factors that strengthen the success of this program. Thus, the strategy of example and habituation is not only a method of moral teaching, but an integral approach that needs to be carried out consistently and collaboratively. Further research is suggested to expand the scope of educational institutions and levels, as well as to develop systematic character evaluation instruments to strengthen the implementation of this strategy in a more measurable and sustainable manner within the framework of comprehensive Islamic education.

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