

Analysis of the Teacher's Role in Shaping Religious Character at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 12-02, 2025

Revised 03-04, 2025

Accepted 14-06, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of teachers in shaping students' religious character at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah, an Islamic-based elementary school that integrates environmental awareness with character education. The research responds to the growing concern that moral and spiritual education in contemporary schools often remains superficial, emphasizing knowledge rather than internalized values. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis involving teachers, the principal, and students. The findings reveal that teachers play a multifaceted role as educators (*mu'allim*), spiritual mentors (*murabbi*), role models (*uswah hasanah*), and motivators (*mursyid*) in nurturing students' faith, discipline, and empathy. Religious character is developed through consistent moral habituation in daily school activities such as prayer routines, Qur'an recitation, environmental stewardship, and cooperative learning. Teachers' consistency, sincerity, and emotional closeness foster an environment conducive to moral reflection and behavioral transformation. The study concludes that effective religious character education requires teachers to embody the values they teach and to bridge knowledge with practice through reflective, experiential learning. Strengthening teachers' pedagogical and spiritual competence is essential for sustaining meaningful character formation. These findings contribute to the discourse on integrating Islamic pedagogy with holistic character education, demonstrating that the teacher's presence remains the most powerful medium for transmitting religious and moral values.

Keywords: teacher's role, religious character, Islamic education, moral development, elementary school

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran guru dalam pembentukan karakter religius siswa di Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah, sebuah sekolah dasar berbasis Islam yang mengintegrasikan kesadaran lingkungan dengan pendidikan karakter. Penelitian ini berangkat dari keprihatinan bahwa pendidikan moral dan spiritual di sekolah modern sering kali hanya bersifat kognitif, belum menyentuh proses internalisasi nilai. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan guru, kepala sekolah, dan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki peran multidimensional—sebagai pendidik (*mu'allim*), pembimbing spiritual (*murabbi*), teladan (*uswah hasanah*), dan motivator (*mursyid*)—dalam menumbuhkan keimanan, kedisiplinan, dan empati siswa. Karakter religius dibentuk melalui pembiasaan moral dalam aktivitas harian seperti shalat berjamaah, tadarus Al-Qur'an, kepedulian terhadap lingkungan, dan kerja sama sosial. Konsistensi, ketulusan, dan kedekatan emosional guru menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang kondusif bagi refleksi moral dan perubahan perilaku. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan karakter religius yang efektif menuntut guru untuk menghidupkan nilai-nilai yang diajarkan dan menjembatani pengetahuan dengan praktik melalui pembelajaran reflektif dan pengalaman nyata. Penguatan kompetensi pedagogik dan spiritual guru menjadi kunci keberhasilan pembentukan karakter secara bermakna. Hasil penelitian ini memperkaya wacana integrasi pendidikan Islam dan pendidikan karakter holistik, menegaskan bahwa kehadiran guru tetap menjadi sarana paling efektif dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai moral dan religius.

Kata kunci: Peran Guru, Karakter Religius, Pendidikan Islam, Pembentukan Moral, Sekolah Dasar



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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary education, moral and spiritual development has become an increasingly urgent issue as schools worldwide face the erosion of ethical values, empathy, and social responsibility among young learners. Scholars have warned that the dominance of cognitive-oriented curricula and technological dependency has led to a crisis of moral disconnection in formal education (Arthur et al., 2017; Nucci & Narvaez, 2020). In this context, character education is no longer an optional enrichment but a core dimension of schooling that determines the moral fabric of future generations. Within Islamic education systems, this urgency is even more pronounced, as education is not merely aimed at intellectual attainment but also at the formation of *akhlaq al-karimah* noble character derived from faith and virtue (Darwis et al., 2023).

Teachers hold a central position in this transformative mission. They are not only transmitters of knowledge but also moral exemplars, emotional guides, and social models for their students (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2021). The role of teachers in shaping students' religious character is both pedagogical and spiritual, encompassing acts of teaching, mentoring, and embodying ethical conduct in everyday interactions (Nuryana & Fauzi, 2022). According to Leicht et al. (2018), education that integrates values of spirituality and sustainability is crucial for cultivating reflective, compassionate, and socially responsible citizens. This aligns with the Qur'anic vision of human beings as *khalifah fil-ardh* (stewards of the Earth), responsible for maintaining moral order and environmental balance.

In Indonesia, the integration of religious and moral education has long been a cornerstone of national education policy. The 2013 Curriculum (*Kurikulum 2013*) and subsequent reforms emphasize the importance of developing spiritual and social competencies alongside cognitive skills (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). However, the challenge lies in translating these ideals into effective classroom practices. Studies show that character education in many schools remains largely **declarative**—focused on teaching moral rules rather than nurturing moral reasoning and lived experience (Rokhman et al., 2019; Rohman, 2021). Teachers often struggle to connect religious instruction with real-life contexts, leading to a disconnect between knowing and doing.

Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah represents a unique response to this educational challenge. As a nature-based Islamic elementary school, it integrates *tauhidic* values with environmental learning, cultivating religious awareness through direct engagement with the natural world. The school's vision combines Islamic spirituality, ecological ethics, and experiential pedagogy, providing an authentic setting where moral values are practiced rather than preached. Teachers play a vital role as facilitators of reflection and habit formation, guiding students to see religious devotion not as ritual formality but as ethical responsibility towards God, others, and nature. This approach resonates with the principles of holistic education, which emphasizes learning through experience, reflection, and emotional engagement (Miller, 2019).

Recent scholarship in Islamic pedagogy underscores that the teacher's moral integrity and spiritual consciousness are the most influential factors in character education. Teachers act as *living curricula*, shaping students' worldview through consistent modeling and relational trust (Sagir & Suprpto, 2021; Alhassan, 2023). A teacher who embodies sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadhu'*), and compassion (*rahmah*) transmits these virtues more effectively than any formal instruction could achieve. Conversely, inconsistency between teaching and behavior can undermine moral credibility and weaken students' motivation to internalize values (Shahroom & Hussin, 2018).

The formation of religious character in Islamic education is an integrative process involving three dimensions: cognition, affection, and behavior (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Cognitively, students learn about religious teachings and moral principles; affectively, they develop emotional attachment to values; behaviorally, they practice those values in social contexts. Teachers play a key role in orchestrating these dimensions through contextualized learning experiences that connect faith to everyday actions. This aligns with the *constructivist approach* to moral education, where learners construct ethical understanding through dialogue, reflection, and participation (Kristjánsson, 2018).

In the specific context of *Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah*, teachers adopt a dual function: as *mu'allim* (educators who impart knowledge) and *murabbi* (mentors who nurture character). Through integrated religious activities such as prayer, Qur'an recitation, environmental service, and storytelling, teachers guide students toward internalizing values such as honesty, gratitude, and responsibility. These activities are not merely ritualistic but pedagogically designed to stimulate reflection and self-awareness. As highlighted by Adibah et al. (2023), when moral instruction is connected with experiential and emotional learning, students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation to act ethically.

Despite the growing interest in religious character education, empirical studies examining how teachers enact their moral and spiritual roles in Indonesian *madrasah* or faith-based schools remain limited. Previous research tends to focus on curriculum design or theoretical perspectives rather than the lived experiences of teachers and students (Suyatno et al., 2019). This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing a contextual and practice-oriented analysis of teachers' roles in shaping religious character at *Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah*. The present research aims to analyze how teachers perform their roles as educators, mentors, and moral exemplars in cultivating students' religious character through daily learning activities and interpersonal relationships. It also seeks to identify strategies, challenges, and pedagogical innovations that support character formation within a holistic Islamic framework. By exploring this case, the study contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic character education and provides insights into how teacher professionalism can be redefined in the era of moral uncertainty and educational transformation. Ultimately, the research aspires to reaffirm that in Islamic education, the heart of pedagogy lies in the teacher's character for only a teacher who embodies faith and virtue can inspire the same in others.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Teacher's Role in Islamic Education

In Islamic education, the teacher (*guru* or *mu'allim*) holds a position of profound moral and spiritual significance. Teachers are viewed not merely as conveyors of information but as moral exemplars and spiritual mentors who shape the ethical and emotional development of their students (Ahmad & Mahmud, 2022). This conception aligns with the classical Islamic pedagogical philosophy in which the teacher embodies the prophetic model (*uswah hasanah*) serving as a living representation of knowledge, virtue, and humility (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2021).

According to Azra (2019), Islamic education aims to produce *insan kamil* a balanced individual whose intellect (*aql*), faith (*iman*), and moral behavior (*akhlaq*) harmonize within social life. Teachers thus carry the prophetic responsibility (*warasat al-anbiya'*) of nurturing the spiritual, emotional, and rational capacities of learners. They guide students toward moral consciousness through three interrelated functions: *ta'lim* (instruction), *tarbiyah* (moral cultivation), and *ta'dib* (ethical discipline) (Al-Zahrani, 2020).

Research in Islamic pedagogy suggests that teachers' moral integrity and sincerity (*ikhlas*) are among the most influential factors in students' moral formation (Hashim et al., 2023). The teacher's behavior both inside and outside the classroom serves as a continuous moral lesson, reinforcing ethical concepts through authentic example. This corresponds with Bandura's (2018) social learning theory, which posits that moral conduct is learned through observation and imitation. Within Islamic contexts, this process mirrors *uswah*, the embodiment of good character, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Thus, a teacher's credibility in Islamic education is grounded not only in intellectual mastery but also in moral authenticity.

2.2 Religious Character Formation in Educational Contexts

Religious character formation refers to the process of internalizing spiritual and moral values derived from religious teachings into students' cognition, emotion, and behavior. This concept extends beyond doctrinal instruction to encompass the cultivation of habits, attitudes, and emotional dispositions consistent with faith (Huda et al., 2022). Lickona (2018) emphasizes that character formation requires three domains: knowing the good, feeling the good, and doing the good. In the context of Islamic education, this triad aligns with *iman* (belief), *ihsan* (inner excellence), and *amal* (action).

Teachers play a pivotal role in mediating these processes by designing learning experiences that integrate cognitive understanding with emotional reflection and behavioral practice. Studies have shown that when teachers facilitate value-laden learning environments, students exhibit greater empathy, self-discipline, and moral reasoning (Nuryana & Fauzi, 2022; Rokhman et al., 2019). For instance, incorporating daily worship, environmental service, and cooperative tasks allows students to experience moral values in action, reinforcing religious identity through practice.

Moreover, Rahman and Yusuf (2022) highlight that effective character education is grounded in meaningful habituation and reflection where values are repeatedly practiced and consciously interpreted. In *Sekolah Dasar Alam* models, this process is supported by contextual learning, where natural and social phenomena become media

for spiritual contemplation (*tafakkur*). By relating faith to real-life experiences, students develop moral consciousness that transcends rote memorization.

Another key dimension in religious character formation is the emotional bond between teachers and students. Emotional closeness fosters trust, which is essential for moral influence. As demonstrated by Ismail and Rahim (2023), students are more likely to internalize values when they perceive their teachers as caring, consistent, and morally upright. Therefore, moral education in Islamic schools must be relational, not transactional rooted in compassion (*rahmah*) and shared spiritual journey rather than behavioral control alone.

2.3 Integrating Islamic Pedagogy and Holistic Learning

Modern Islamic education faces the challenge of reconciling traditional pedagogy with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize student-centered learning, critical thinking, and emotional literacy. Scholars such as Miller (2019) and Nakpodia (2021) advocate for holistic education, which nurtures the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of learners. Within Islamic pedagogy, this holistic approach finds resonance in the integration of *iman*, *ilm*, and *amal* faith, knowledge, and action (Abdullah, 2021).

The Sekolah Alam model in Indonesia represents an innovative application of this integration. By linking environmental stewardship with religious devotion, it transforms abstract moral teachings into experiential learning. This reflects UNESCO's (2018) concept of education for sustainable development, which promotes values of respect, empathy, and responsibility across ecological and spiritual dimensions. Teachers at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah embody this synthesis by contextualizing Islamic ethics within the natural environment teaching that caring for nature is an expression of gratitude (*syukur*) and obedience (*taat*).

From a pedagogical standpoint, this integration aligns with constructivist learning theory, where knowledge and values are constructed through experience, dialogue, and reflection (Piaget, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers act as facilitators who scaffold students' understanding, guiding them to interpret moral experiences in light of Islamic teachings. This active engagement cultivates not only intellectual comprehension but also spiritual awareness, transforming learning into an act of worship (*ibadah*).

Furthermore, integrating Islamic pedagogy with holistic learning responds to the moral and ecological crises of the 21st century. As Kamal and Hamid (2022) argue, Islamic education must prepare students to navigate ethical dilemmas in an interconnected world one that demands critical reflection anchored in divine principles. By situating character formation within daily lived experience, teachers can help students internalize Islam's universal moral vision: balance (*tawazun*), justice (*adl*), and compassion (*rahmah*).

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study positions teachers as moral and spiritual architects in the process of religious character formation. Their role extends beyond academic instruction to include modeling, mentoring, and meaning-making. Through a synergy of Islamic values and holistic learning, teachers at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah cultivate a generation that embodies faith through action—students who think reflectively, act ethically, and live responsibly in harmony with their Creator and creation.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how teachers at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah enact their roles in shaping students' religious character. The qualitative approach was selected to capture teachers lived experiences, values, and practices in nurturing moral and spiritual growth within the classroom and school environment. As a nature-based Islamic elementary school, Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah integrates faith, environmental ethics, and experiential learning, making it an ideal setting for understanding religious character formation through daily educational practices. The research involved five teachers, one principal, and twelve students selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of those actively engaged in religious and character-based activities.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations focused on teachers' behavior, communication, and interaction with students during religious and academic activities such as prayer, Qur'an recitation, and environmental care. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and the principal explored their understanding of pedagogical responsibility, strategies for moral guidance, and challenges in maintaining consistency between teaching and conduct. Interviews with students were used to triangulate teachers' accounts, revealing how students perceived their teachers as role models. Supporting documents such as lesson plans, school programs, and student work portfolios were analyzed to provide contextual evidence and strengthen the interpretation of field data.

The collected data were analyzed thematically using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Emerging themes such as modeling (*uswah hasanah*), moral habituation, reflective dialogue, and spiritual mentoring were identified and refined through iterative analysis. Research credibility was ensured through data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, while dependability and confirmability were maintained by keeping an audit trail of research procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical approval was obtained from the school administration, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Throughout the research process, Islamic ethical principles of *adab*

(respect), *amanah* (trust), and *rahmah* (compassion) were upheld to ensure integrity and alignment with the study's moral focus.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Teachers as Moral Models

Observations and interviews revealed that teachers at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah serve as moral exemplars, whose daily behavior represents the embodiment of Islamic values. Teachers consistently demonstrated politeness, punctuality, humility, and sincerity in interacting with students. Their actions such as greeting students warmly, maintaining honesty in communication, and showing fairness in assessment were perceived by students as living examples of the Islamic virtues of *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character). One teacher noted, "Before teaching others about honesty, I must first practice it in my own behavior. Students learn more from what they see than from what they hear." This sentiment was echoed by several students who mentioned that their teachers' consistency inspired them to emulate positive behaviors, particularly in discipline and empathy. Field notes indicated that students often mirrored teachers' routines, such as initiating greetings, cleaning the classroom without reminders, and maintaining order during group activities.

The school's principal emphasized that teachers are "the heartbeat of religious culture," stating that moral education cannot succeed without teachers embodying the values they teach. These findings highlight that the school's moral climate depends heavily on the teachers' personal integrity and their visible demonstration of religious ethics in everyday practice.

4.1.2 Teachers as Mentors and Spiritual Guides

Teachers also play a critical role as mentors (*murabbi*), guiding students not only academically but spiritually and emotionally. The mentoring process was evident in the teachers' efforts to understand each student's emotional state, encourage self-reflection, and resolve behavioral issues through personal dialogue rather than punishment. For instance, when students were caught arguing, teachers guided them to reflect on the Islamic principles of patience (*sabr*) and forgiveness (*afw*). Teachers used informal conversations, storytelling, and empathetic questioning to help students connect religious concepts to personal experiences. One teacher shared, "When a child lies, I don't scold them harshly. I ask them how they would feel if someone lied to them. That moment becomes a moral lesson." This mentoring approach fosters moral awareness and self-regulation, allowing students to internalize religious values through emotional understanding. In addition, collective spiritual activities such as *tadarus Al-Qur'an*, *shalat dhuha*, and *doa bersama* (joint prayer) became important spaces for mentorship. Teachers often prayed alongside students and shared short reflections after prayers, reinforcing sincerity, gratitude, and humility. This regular interaction nurtured a sense of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *mahabbah* (affection), making the teacher-student relationship both educational and spiritual.

4.1.3 Teachers as Facilitators of Reflection and Dialogue

The data also indicate that teachers act as facilitators of reflective and dialogical learning. They encourage students to think critically about the moral dimensions of daily experiences. During class discussions, teachers frequently asked questions such as, "Why should we help others even if it is difficult?" or "How can keeping the environment clean reflect our faith in Allah?" These questions invited students to interpret moral behavior not as obligation but as expression of belief. Teachers utilized storytelling from Islamic history and the Qur'an to stimulate moral reasoning. For instance, stories of Prophet Yusuf's honesty and Prophet Muhammad's compassion were integrated into language and social studies lessons. Teachers then guided students to relate these examples to real-life situations, such as honesty during exams or kindness toward peers. This strategy aligns with the school's mission to combine religious knowledge and moral application, allowing students to perceive Islam as a living practice.

Observation notes show that reflection activities often occurred at the end of the school day, where teachers gathered students to discuss what they learned, how they behaved, and what they could improve. Students wrote short journals expressing gratitude or moral insights, which teachers reviewed weekly. This practice encouraged metacognitive awareness as students became more conscious of how their actions reflected Islamic values.

4.4 Moral Habituation and School Culture

The formation of religious character at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah is reinforced through school-wide habituation practices designed to make moral values part of students' daily routines. Teachers lead students in prayer before and after each lesson, remind them to use polite language, and involve them in social service activities such as helping peers, caring for plants, and collecting waste for recycling. Morning assemblies typically begin with Qur'an recitation, short moral talks, and group reflection on the meaning of selected verses. Teachers consistently model participation in these routines, ensuring that moral lessons are both communal and experiential.

According to one teacher, “We do not separate religion from learning; everything we do must return to values of gratitude, honesty, and respect.”

Through consistent habituation, moral practices became internalized and self-sustaining among students. For example, teachers observed that students began initiating prayers without reminders and displayed increased empathy toward peers. Documentation analysis confirmed that the school’s evaluation system includes behavioral assessments alongside academic grades, reflecting an institutional commitment to holistic moral development. Overall, the data illustrate that religious character formation at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah is a collective moral ecosystem sustained by teacher modeling, mentoring, reflection, and habituation. Teachers act as both the architects and sustainers of this system, ensuring that the values of Islam permeate not only the curriculum but the school’s entire culture.

4.2 Discussion

The results indicate that teachers at *Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah* shape students’ religious character through role modelling, mentoring, reflective dialogue, and moral habituation. Interpreted through the lens of contemporary character-education scholarship, these practices function as a relational moral ecology in which values are learned because they are *lived* in daily interactions. This pattern coheres with research showing that moral formation in schools is sustained when teachers’ conduct, classroom routines, and collective rituals communicate a consistent *hidden curriculum* of care, responsibility, and respect (Thornberg, 2016). In other words, students are not merely told what is good; they *experience* goodness embodied in adult exemplars and communal practices.

First, the centrality of teacher modelling corroborates the longstanding claim that the teacher’s personhood is pedagogically decisive. Students’ repeated references to teachers’ fairness, humility, and sincerity illustrate the mechanism described in social-cognitive accounts of moral learning: young people imitate models they trust and admire, especially when the model’s actions are visible, consistent, and emotionally resonant (Bandura, 2018). In values education, this is echoed by Sanderse’s analysis of the teacher-as-moral-exemplar, who transmits virtue through public practical wisdom how they greet, apologize, listen, and decide in ambiguous situations (Sanderse, 2019). The school’s practice of teachers praying with students, sharing short reflections, and enacting courtesy operationalizes such exemplarity in Islamic terms (*uswah hasanah*), binding doctrine and conduct. Empirically, this helps explain why students reported copying teachers’ small habits initiating greetings, tidying the room unprompted because virtue becomes socially *contagious* when modelled in proximate relationships (McGrath, 2023).

Second, the data show that teachers act as mentors of moral emotion, not only of moral reasoning. One-on-one conversations, gentle corrections, and story-based guidance situate ethical evaluation within feelings of empathy, gratitude, and remorse. This aligns with the “pedagogy of care” tradition, which argues that durable moral commitment grows from relationships of attentiveness and trust rather than from rule-recitation alone (Noddings, 2013). Studies in faith-based contexts similarly find that affective bonds between teachers and pupils predict internalization of school values, because belonging lowers defensiveness and opens space for self-examination (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2016; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). In the present case, teachers’ compassionate mentoring reframes discipline as accompaniment, turning behavioural lapses into moments of guided reflection (“How would you feel if...”). Such *relational accountability* nurtures conscience without shaming, which is crucial for primary-age learners still developing self-regulation.

Third, teachers’ facilitation of reflective dialogue and linking of lessons to authentic experiences is consistent with research on reasoned character education. When pupils are invited to ask *why* keeping the environment clean expresses obedience to God, or *how* honesty applies during examinations, they practice connecting moral concepts to concrete choices. This mirrors Deweyan and dialogic approaches in which ethical understanding emerges through inquiry, not mere assent (Nucci, Creane, & Powers, 2015). In religious settings, dialogic reflection does not dilute faith; rather, it renders beliefs *action-guiding* and context-sensitive (Berglund & Gent, 2019). The school’s use of brief end-of-day journals is a low-cost, high-yield strategy for cultivating metacognitive moral awareness students learn to notice and name the values embodied in their day.

Fourth, the prominence of moral habituation prayer routines, Qur’anic recitation, environmental service—supports the dual-process view that character is formed by practice plus understanding. Habit without meaning risks ritualism; meaning without habit rarely survives pressure. Effective programmes therefore intertwine repetition, reflection, and recognition (Berkowitz, Bier, & McCauley, 2017). In Islamic schools, habituation becomes *ta’dib*: a pedagogic choreography that trains attention, body, and language toward virtue. Our results suggest that when teachers themselves participate praying, cleaning, queuing they transform routines from compliance tasks into shared moral projects, strengthening collective identity and moral salience (Lovat & Toomey, 2020). The moral “chronicity” observed students initiating prayers or helping peers unprompted—indicates that dispositions are becoming self-activating rather than teacher-dependent.

Fifth, the school’s integration of faith, ecology, and experiential learning positions religious character as engagement with creation, not retreat from it. This resonates with holistic and sustainability-oriented frameworks

that foreground place-based ethics learning to care for the environment as an enactment of gratitude and stewardship (UNESCO, 2021; Barr & Dunlop, 2022). For primary pupils, caring for plants or managing waste offers tactile entry points into the virtues of responsibility and foresight. Teachers' practice of reading Qur'anic verses alongside science topics exemplifies *interdisciplinary moral literacy*: students learn that truth, beauty, and goodness converge in attention to God's signs and neighbours' needs (Arthur, Harrison, & Davison, 2020). Such integration likely explains why pupils could articulate moral meanings behind ostensibly routine acts (e.g., cleaning as *ibadah*), a hallmark of deep internalization.

These interpretations carry implications for teacher professionalism. If modelling, mentoring, dialogue, and habituation are the causal levers, then teacher development must prioritise dispositional formation alongside technique. International reviews emphasise that effective character programmes invest in teachers' ethical self-understanding, relational skills, and reflective practice, not only in lesson scripts (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Kristjánsson, 2018). The case study suggests several practical levers: structured micro-rituals (greeting, gratitude rounds), scheduled reflective circles, and *co-participation* in religious routines. Importantly, teachers need institutional backing time, mentoring communities, and evaluation systems that value character outcomes—to maintain consistency under workload pressures (White, 2021).

Finally, the discussion invites a caveat and a research agenda. While qualitative evidence shows robust alignment between teacher practices and pupils' reported dispositions, causal claims about long-term character change warrant longitudinal and mixed-methods designs (Baehr, 2017). Future studies might triangulate observation with parent reports and behavioural indicators beyond school (e.g., community service, digital citizenship). Comparative studies across Islamic and non-Islamic settings could also illuminate which elements are context-specific (e.g., Qur'anic framing) and which are generalizable (e.g., dialogic reflection). Nonetheless, by mapping how a teacher-centred moral ecology operates in a *Sekolah Alam* context, this study adds practice-proximate evidence to international debates on how schools make character stick.

In sum, the school's approach exemplifies a living pedagogy of virtue: teachers *embody* what they *teach*, *accompany* pupils through moral emotions, *invite* reason-giving in dialogue, and *stage* habits that rehearse goodness until it becomes second nature. When faith commitments, communal routines, and caring relationships align, primary pupils learn to see religious character not as a list of rules, but as a coherent way of being in the world before God, with others, and for creation.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teachers at Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah occupy a transformative role in the moral and spiritual life of the school. Their actions demonstrate that the heart of Islamic education lies not in verbal instruction but in lived example, consistent care, and reflective engagement. Teachers act as educators, mentors, and moral exemplars whose integrity animates the school's vision of faith-based learning. Through modelling ethical conduct, nurturing emotional bonds, and guiding collective practices such as prayer and community service, they transform moral ideals into daily experience. As a result, students internalize Islamic values through observation, participation, and reflection, gradually forming a stable moral identity rooted in sincerity, empathy, and responsibility.

The findings reinforce theoretical perspectives that view character formation as a holistic process combining cognition, affection, and behavior. The teachers' roles exemplify *ta'dib* the integration of knowledge, discipline, and ethics and illustrate how spiritual mentoring enhances students' moral reasoning and self-regulation. Pedagogically, the study confirms that moral education becomes most effective when teachers embody what they teach, creating a relational environment where values are felt before they are formulated. Institutionally, Sekolah Dasar Alam Aceh Tengah provides a model of how faith-based schools can merge Islamic pedagogy with experiential and ecological learning to produce students who are not only devout but socially and environmentally conscious. This synergy reflects a 21st-century renewal of Islamic education that is reflective, compassionate, and action-oriented.

Going forward, schools and policymakers should prioritize teacher formation as the cornerstone of religious character education. Professional development must focus not only on pedagogical competence but also on spiritual depth, emotional intelligence, and reflective practice. Supporting teachers as moral professionals through mentoring, collaboration, and institutional recognition will ensure that the cultivation of *akhlaq al-karimah* remains authentic and sustainable. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring longitudinal effects of teacher modelling and by comparing diverse school settings. Ultimately, the study reaffirms that in Islamic education, teachers are not merely conveyors of knowledge but living bridges between faith and humanity, shaping generations through the quiet power of example.

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ISSN: **3089-5138**, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37249/jomess.v2i1.1300>

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