



Teachers' Role Modeling and Habituation Strategies in Fostering Moral Character of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' efforts to foster students' moral character, focusing on the strategies they employ, the supporting factors, and the challenges encountered in a public elementary school in Indonesia. The study employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis. Primary data were obtained from teachers and students, while secondary data were gathered from the school principal, school documents, and relevant literature. The findings indicate that students demonstrated noticeable improvements in moral behavior, including greater obedience, politeness, respect for teachers, and concern for their peers. Teachers promoted moral character primarily through role modeling, habituation, and continuous guidance. The effectiveness of these strategies was supported by teachers' strong commitment and collaborative relationships within the school community. However, limited parental involvement and inadequate facilities for religious activities remained significant challenges. The study concludes that sustainable moral character development depends not only on teachers' pedagogical efforts but also on active family participation and adequate institutional support. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and the wider community to enhance the effectiveness of character education.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the fundamental aspects of the national education system, which aims to shape students' character so that they possess a personality marked by integrity, good ethics, and grounded in moral values (Akhiyat, 2016; Shalahuddin et al., 2024). Amid rapid advances in science and technology, the challenges of character education are becoming increasingly complex, making the role of teachers crucial in guiding students to uphold the values of goodness (Ivanda & Neni, 2025). Teachers serve not only as conveyors of knowledge but also as moral role models who guide students through their attitudes, behavior, and daily interactions. Education that is carried out consciously, systematically, and

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continuously to shape students' behavior in accordance with the moral values, religious beliefs, and social norms prevailing in society (Suarningsih et al., 2024). As formal educational institutions, schools have a strategic responsibility to foster students' moral values into the curriculum, daily life within the school have a strategic responsibility to foster students' moral values into the curriculum, daily life within the school environment and extracurricular activities (Mualif, 2022).

In the context of elementary education, character education is of the utmost importance because childhood is the most critical phase for character development (Saribun, 2024; Shalahuddin et al., 2024; Soetari, 2017). Instilling moral values from an early age will serve as the foundation for students' future personality development (Muttaqin, 2025; Shalahuddin et al., 2024). However, teachers' efforts to instill good moral values are not easy. It takes patience, consistency, and the right learning strategies for students to internalize moral values in their daily lives. Based on the above definition, education cannot be separated from efforts to nurture students' personalities (Hidayat et al., 2018). Personality development is a mechanism that controls and directs a person's attitudes and behavior. If a person has a strong personality, their attitude is firm; they are not easily influenced by persuasion or external factors, and they take responsibility for their words and actions.

Conversely, if one's character is weak, one is easily influenced and swayed by various external factors and influences (Jannah, 2018). Character development is a central focus in Islam. There are many verses and hadiths that call for doing good and preventing evil; one of them is found in Surah An-Nahl : 90 :

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۚ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

Meaning: *Indeed, Allah commands you to be just and to do good, and to give to your relatives; and Allah forbids you from committing vile deeds, wrongdoing, and hostility. He instructs you so that you may take heed.*

The term *akhlak* is derived from the Arabic word *al-Khuluq*, which refers to the inherent character, moral qualities, and fundamental nature of human beings. Every human being is born with an innate nature bestowed by God (Inaku & Nur Iman, 2020; Mz, 2018). Morality consists of universal norms regarding what is good and evil, right and wrong, and the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice. Character education in Islamic education aims to shape individuals who are faithful, God-fearing, and of noble character in both their personal and social lives. (Febriadi et al., 2025; Marjuni, 2020; Munjiat, 2018)

Morality, or a system of behavior, can be instilled through our relationship with Allah SWT by doing good deeds toward our fellow human beings. The essence of morality based on *tawhid* and *akhlak al-karimah* is doing good deeds wherever one may be. To cultivate good moral character, a series of teachings or educational experiences both formal and informal is required (Parhan et al., 2025; Rifana et al., 2023). This is the responsibility of the education system specifically, teachers as educators to nurture a student's character through elementary school education. (Mildawati & Tangngareng, 2023).

Education, in general, is a process for developing all aspects of the human personality, including knowledge, moral values, attitudes, and skills (Nasihudin & Hariyadin, 2021). In addition, education is also a manifestation of and an integral part of human needs that are essential to life itself; thus, it can be said that education is fundamentally aimed at shaping and to develop students' personalities so that they improve in every aspect (Wulandari & Fauzi, 2021). Teaching is a task that carries a heavy responsibility, because the success or failure of the education and teaching process lies in the hands of the teacher (Sholehah, 2025). Teaching is not merely the process of conveying knowledge to students; it is far more complex than that.

The evolution of perspectives on learning and Teaching has undergone changes in line with advances in science and technology, all of which present challenges for

teachers to continually improve their competencies (Yani, 2021). Teachers are expected to serve as role models in fostering students' moral character. Moral character development cannot be achieved solely through good attitudes and behavior (Jannah, 2019). Modeling good moral character is the most effective way for teachers to foster moral character (Ramadhani & Sari, 2022). Character education should begin as early as possible, especially at the elementary school level. Elementary school teachers should introduce students to good character through a variety of teaching methods, both theoretical and practical. In other words, modeling good character is one of the most effective methods for character development.

The purpose of moral education is to help children reach the highest stage of moral development (moral perfection). The aspects required in moral education are the principles of internalization and awareness, the principle of conditioning, and the principle of imitation, which lead to modeling (Akbar et al., 2025; Fadlullah, 2017). Teachers are members of the educational staff who play a key role in determining the success of educational goals, as they interact directly with students to provide guidance that will produce the desired graduates. Teachers are human resources who serve as planners, implementers, and key contributors to the achievement of organizational goals. Teachers are the backbone of educational activities, particularly those related to the teaching and learning process (Tegar, 2023).

Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, making their competence and performance essential to achieving educational goals and responding to the growing demand for high-quality human resources in an increasingly competitive global environment (Engkizar, Jaafar, Hamzah, Syafril, Oktavia, et al., 2026; Mustafa et al., 2026; Rusdi et al., 2026). Against this background, this study examines teachers' efforts to foster students' moral character in elementary school, with particular attention to the strategies employed, the supporting factors that facilitate their implementation, and the challenges encountered throughout the process. By providing an in-depth understanding of moral character development practices at the elementary education level, the study is expected to contribute to the advancement of character education theory and practice, particularly in strengthening school-based approaches to students' moral development.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with case study approach (Engkizar et al., 2025; Phelan & Phelan, 2015; Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023; Volmar & Eisenhardt, 2020). This design was selected because it provides an in-depth understanding of teachers' efforts to foster students' moral character through direct interaction within the school environment. The study was conducted in elementary school. The participants consisted of teachers and students, while the principal and other individuals involved in character education served as additional informants. Primary data were obtained through observations and in-depth interviews with teachers and students, whereas secondary data were collected from the principal, school documents, books, and relevant literature on character education (Engkizar et al., 2026; M et al., 2026; Masani & Fabanjo, 2026).

Data collection involved classroom and school observations to examine students' daily behavior, particularly their interactions with teachers and peers, as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and the principal to explore character-building strategies and implementation practices. Documentation, including school records, activity photographs, and other relevant documents, was used to complement the findings (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Engkizar, Jaafar, Hamzah, et al., 2023; Hendawi et al., 2024). The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by observation protocols, interview guides, and

documentation checklists. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data credibility was established through source and method triangulation, while data were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Akbar, 2024; Rijali, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers promote character development by integrating moral values into classroom instruction, fostering religious commitment through worship practices, and demonstrating exemplary behavior as role models. Character formation is further reinforced through habituation, encouraging students to behave appropriately, communicate politely, and show mutual respect (Mustofa & Ali Firman, 2021). In addition, teachers provide continuous guidance and advice to strengthen students' internalization of moral values. The findings indicate that these efforts are implemented through several key strategies, as described below.

Leading by Example

Children aged 7–12 tend to imitate the behavior of those around them. Students will imitate and follow the example set by their teachers. Therefore, leading by example in education is an effective method for preparing and shaping children morally, spiritually, and socially. Given that educators are the most influential figures in children's eyes whose behavior and manners will always be ingrained in the children's personalities theoretically, serving as a role model is the most important aspect of a teacher's role; thus, becoming a teacher means accepting the responsibility to be a role model. The interview results show that teachers serve as role models in fostering their students' moral character. The results of the interview with Informant 1, a teacher, indicate that:

...Teachers always set a good example for children by speaking politely in front of students and behaving appropriately. This way, students can model their behavior after ours; character education in school is carried out through the examples and role models set by teachers. Teachers' behavior and manners in their interactions with students, the way they treat their students, and the way they treat their fellow teachers within the school environment and the community will serve as role models.

The interview results show that teachers serve as role models in fostering their students' moral character. The author then interviewed Informant 2 about how to foster good character in students:

...If I want to teach my child to always be disciplined, then I should lead by example by being disciplined myself first. That way, my students can follow my example. My efforts to foster good character in my students involve setting a good example for instance, always speaking kindly, greeting one another, offering advice, and respecting others.

Furthermore, the author conducted interviews with students who said that:

...Teachers have always shown me how to behave as a good student, how to sit properly, and how to speak politely. A child's words and manner of speaking even the way they respond to their friends or others are influenced by their surroundings, including their teachers. Expressions of emotions such as anger, joy, and sadness, as well as moral character and good manners, are considered good in a student if their teacher also treats them well.

Role modeling in education is the most effective method for preparing and shaping students morally and socially. Teachers are the best role models in the eyes of students, who will emulate their behavior and manners. Whether they realize it or not, the image of an educator whether through words or actions, material or spiritual is imprinted on students' minds and hearts. The moral values instilled by teachers will have a lasting impact on students, as students at this age are naturally inclined to imitate others. This role model should always be upheld so that it can be most effective; therefore, the entire school community should provide support and set a good example through their actions.

Habit Formation

Teachers' efforts to foster students' moral character involve consistently teaching students to respect their teachers and instilling in them the habits of discipline, good manners, and social responsibility. Examples of discipline include arriving on time and following school rules (Salamah et al., 2026; Sriwahyuni et al., 2025). An example of good manners is when teachers consistently encourage their students to greet the class upon entering the room. Praying before and after studying, teaching students to speak politely to their peers, respecting teachers, and honoring parents. Examples of social responsibility include striving to do good deeds for friends, checking on sick friends, helping friends in need, and giving alms and charity in the way of Allah SWT (Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizaret al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2020).

Islam strongly encourages educating children and nurturing their moral character through exercises and habits appropriate to their psychological development even if these may seem forced because this serves to keep children from straying. These habits and exercises will shape certain attitudes in the child; gradually, these attitudes will become clearer and stronger, and eventually they will become unshakable because they have become part of the child's personality. In an interview with Informant 1, he stated that :

...When students arrive at school, I make it a habit to ensure they always arrive on time and are never late. If any student is late or fails to arrive on time (lacks discipline), we will issue a warning so they do not repeat the behavior.

Habituation is an action that, when performed frequently, becomes a habit; if that habit is repeated continuously, it eventually becomes part of a person's character; and once that character has become a defining trait of a person, they have developed a specific personality. Whether a person's personality is good or bad depends on the habits they have formed since childhood. Therefore, these habits and exercises will shape certain attitudes in students; over time, these attitudes will become clearer and stronger, and eventually they will become unshakable because they have become part of their personality.

Advice

Advice plays a significant role in opening students' eyes to the true nature of things, guiding them toward noble character and dignity, instilling in them noble moral values, and equipping them with Islamic principles. Based on the results of an interview with one of the teachers, it can be explained as follows:

...Teachers always instill discipline in their students as part of character development; they always advise students to show respect toward their teachers, to always respect those who are older or younger than them, and also always advise students that they should be very careful in all their social interactions, because when interacting with friends, one should always behave well and never look down on others, Therefore, we must be very disciplined in instilling good character in students.

Based on the interviews conducted, the teachers' efforts in fostering the moral character of students at elementary school can be summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Construction of the character of students of elementary school

Strategy	Teacher Implementation	Impact on Students
Exemplary Behavior	Teachers set an example in their speech, behavior, and religious practice	Students model positive and polite behavior
Habituation	Encouraging students to behave well, be disciplined, and act responsibly	Sustainable moral habits are formed
Advice	Providing guidance and reinforcing moral values	Students understand and apply moral values in their daily lives

The results of observations and interviews indicate that teachers at elementary

school have consistently implemented character education. Students have begun to show changes in behavior, such as being more obedient and polite, as well as showing respect for teachers and caring for their classmates. Teachers use role modeling, habit formation, and guidance as their primary strategies.

Supporting Factors in Fostering Students' Moral Character at Elementary School

The main supporting factors are the teachers' commitment to fostering students' moral character, the close, family-like relationship between teachers and the principal, and a conducive school environment. These factors contribute to the success of moral character development. Based on the interviews and observations conducted, the supporting factors in fostering students' moral character at elementary school can be summarized in the table below:

Table 2. Supporting Factors at elementary school

Supporting factors	Description
Teachers' Commitment	Consistency in fostering students' moral character
Family Relationships	Synergy between teachers and the principal
School Atmosphere	An environment that fosters character development

The success of character education at elementary school is closely linked to a number of supporting factors that play a crucial role in creating an educational environment grounded in moral values. Teacher commitment is a key element driving the continuity of the character education process, as teachers demonstrate a high level of dedication to instilling moral values through leading by example and fostering positive habits. In addition, a harmonious, family-like relationship between teachers and the principal fosters a collaborative and supportive work environment, allowing the character-building process to proceed effectively. A conducive school environment also contributes to the success of character education by providing students with opportunities to interact positively, develop empathy, and cultivate a sense of social responsibility.

Challenges Faced in Fostering Students' Moral Character at Elementary School

Teachers face several challenges in character education. Based on the interviews and observations conducted, the challenges faced by teachers in fostering the character of students at elementary school are as follows:

Table 3. Challenges at elementary school

Challenges	Description
Parental Support	Not being sufficiently involved in fostering children's moral character
Places of Worship	Worship facilities at schools are still limited
Student Motivation	Moral awareness remains low among some students

Teachers face challenges such as a lack of motivation and support from parents, as well as limited facilities and infrastructure for religious activities at school. These obstacles reduce the effectiveness of character education, particularly in helping students develop the habit of consistently practicing religious values. In the process of character education at elementary school, teachers face a number of challenges that affect the effectiveness of the character education program. The main obstacle is a lack of motivation and support from parents, so that the moral values instilled at school are not always carried over into the family environment. In addition, limited facilities and infrastructure for religious worship at school reduce students' opportunities to develop the habit of consistently practicing their religion. This situation results in a low level of internalization of moral values in students' daily lives.

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that fostering students' moral character may require a combination of strategies involving role modeling, habit formation, and guidance, as well as support from families and school facilities. These findings are relevant to the global character education agenda, which emphasizes collaboration among schools, families, and the community in shaping a generation of character.

CONCLUSION

This study found that teachers' efforts to foster students' moral character were supported by three main strategies: role modeling, habituation, and continuous guidance. These strategies contributed to positive changes in students' behavior, reflected in greater obedience, politeness, respect for teachers, and care for their peers. Their implementation was strengthened by teachers' commitment and a collaborative school climate supported by school leadership. Nevertheless, limited parental involvement and inadequate facilities supporting religious activities remained important challenges to sustaining character development. The findings suggest that effective moral character education requires coordinated support from teachers, schools, families, and the wider community. They also contribute to the broader discourse on character education by highlighting the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach in promoting students' moral development within elementary education.

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