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THE ROLE OF AKIDAH AKHLAK TEACHER IN FOSTERING STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AT MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH NEGERI 4 JAMBI CITY

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ABSTRACT

Studi ini menyelidiki peran holistik seorang guru Akidah Akhlak dalam membentuk karakter religius siswa di Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Kota Jambi, mengatasi kesenjangan pedagogis kritis dalam perkembangan moral remaja. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini berfokus pada guru Akidah Akhlak, tiga puluh siswa kelas VIII C, kepala madrasah, dan guru pendidikan agama Islam yang mendampingi sebagai peserta kunci selama periode kerja lapangan selama tiga bulan dari Agustus hingga Oktober 2026. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif terfokus, wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur, dan tinjauan dokumentasi institusional, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana, melibatkan pengurangan data, tampilan data, dan pengambilan kesimpulan, yang divalidasi melalui triangulasi teknik, sumber, dan waktu. Temuan empiris mengungkapkan bahwa guru berfungsi secara dinamis sebagai panutan moral (uswah hasanah), fasilitator pembelajaran spiritual, motivator moral, dan evaluator perilaku. Strategi pembentukan karakter mencakup habituasi agama rutin (ta'wid), pembelajaran aktif berbasis nilai, dan disiplin humanis-reflektif (ta'dhib). Selain itu, faktor pendukung meliputi kepemimpinan institusional yang kuat dan budaya sekolah agama, sedangkan faktor penghambat berasal dari penggunaan gadget digital yang tidak dipantau dan kesenjangan pengawasan domestik. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa konsisten role model pendidik dan habituasi terstruktur berfungsi sebagai praktik pendidikan sentral yang terkait dengan peningkatan disiplin agama siswa yang dapat diamati, menyoroti perlunya kemitraan kolaboratif di rumah dan sekolah.

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Keywords:

Akidah Akhlak Teacher; Religious Character; Madrasah Tsanawiyah; Uswah Hasanah.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the holistic role of an Akidah Akhlak teacher in shaping the religious character of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Jambi City, addressing critical pedagogical gaps in adolescent moral development. Employing a qualitative descriptive case study design, this research focused on the Akidah Akhlak teacher, thirty Grade VIII C students, the madrasah head, and accompanying Islamic religious education teachers as key participants during a three-month fieldwork period from August to October 2026. Data were gathered through focused participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and institutional documentation reviews, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, validated through triangulation of techniques, sources, and time. The empirical findings reveal that the teacher functions dynamically as a moral role model (uswah hasanah), spiritual learning facilitator, moral motivator, and behavior evaluator. Character formation strategies encompass routine religious habituation (ta'wid), value-based active learning, and humanist-reflective discipline (ta'dhib). Furthermore, supporting factors include strong institutional leadership and religious school culture, whereas inhibiting factors stem from unmonitored digital gadget use and domestic supervision gaps. This study concludes that consistent educator role modeling and structured habituation serve as central educational practices associated with improvements in students' observable religious discipline, highlighting the need for collaborative home-school partnerships.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a planned, systematic, and structurally concerted endeavor designed to cultivate an empowering learning environment, enabling students to actively develop their spiritual strength, self-control, intellectual capacities, and practical competencies necessary for societal participation (Rahman, 2022). Within the overarching framework of the national education system, the deliberate cultivation of moral and ethical character occupies a foundational position for achieving social maturity and interpersonal harmony (Khairunisa, 2025). In Indonesia, characterized as a nation possessing the largest Muslim population globally, the ethical and spiritual foundation of Islam serves as the central core of the pedagogical paradigm (Lutfiati, 2024). Madrasahs—functioning as formal secondary educational institutions imbued with distinct Islamic characteristics under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs—bear a profound institutional mandate to produce graduates who not only excel academically but also internalize and manifest moral values (*akhlak karimah*) in their daily lives (Demina et al., 2025). Furthermore, modern educational policy increasingly emphasizes that intellectual brilliance devoid of moral grounding is insufficient to navigate the complexities of contemporary societal challenges, making institutional character development an urgent national priority (Nasution, 2023).

Within the classical and contemporary philosophy of Islamic education, the formation of students' religious character cannot be reduced to a superficial process of cognitive transfer or the isolated accumulation of theoretical knowledge (Damanik et al., 2025). Instead, true character development necessitates an organic, inseparable integration between core theological beliefs (creed) and observable behavioral manifestations (*akhlak*). Faith functions as the immovable root of a spiritual tree deeply anchored within human conscience, whereas morality represents the branching fruits and foliage visible in daily social interactions among human beings and with the Creator (Masiah & Erdiansyah, 2023). The curriculum subject of Akidah Akhlak is specifically designed to bridge theological convictions with practical moral conduct (Nurdewi, 2022). Within this dynamic instructional space, teachers occupy a central, pivotal position; educators do not merely transmit conceptual material inside a classroom but function as living exemplary figures (*uswah hasanah*) reflecting prophetic ethics across the entire madrasah ecosystem (Nuronia, 2025). The enduring efficacy of religious instruction relies heavily upon the teacher's ability to translate abstract theological doctrines into compelling living models that resonate deeply with adolescent psychology (Faruqi, 2023).

Despite the clear moral mandate embedded within madrasah institutions, empirical realities on the ground indicate that contemporary moral development among adolescents encounters severe structural and psychological obstacles (Faruqi, 2023). The rapid acceleration of global information technology, exposure to unfiltered digital media, and shifting domestic parenting patterns have introduced acute character vulnerabilities among secondary school students (Khairunisa, 2025). Initial preliminary observations conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Jambi City, specifically focusing on Grade VIII C during August 2026, revealed recurrent behavioral phenomena that diverge from ideal religious character standards. A noticeable proportion of students exhibited passive engagement during instructional hours, discourteous manners toward educators, delayed or uncompleted independent

assignments, and persistent reluctance to participate promptly in congregational Zuhr prayers at the madrasah musala (Silvia Pratama, 2023). Furthermore, verbal interactions among peers occasionally featured harsh vocabulary and casual disrespect, indicating that theoretical religious knowledge had failed to transform into deep internal moral awareness and self-discipline. These observable behavioral deviations underscore a troubling disjunction between cognitive religious instruction and actual moral performance among contemporary youth (Khoirunnisa, 2022).

Contemporary Islamic educational literature emphasizes that character education is an enduring, continuous cultivation process synthesizing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 2009). Religious character itself encompasses multiple fundamental dimensions, including the dimensions of theological belief, personal worship, spiritual experience, religious knowledge, and social ethical expression (Irodati, 2022). When adolescent students manifest persistent disciplinary infractions and diminished linguistic politeness, it signifies operational fissures across these critical dimensions (Khoirunnisa, 2022). Consequently, an in-depth, rigorous empirical investigation examining how Akidah Akhlak teachers bridge this moral gap is both highly significant and pedagogically urgent (Izzati, 2023). Addressing these multidimensional moral challenges requires looking beyond superficial disciplinary measures to investigate the deeper relational and pedagogical mechanisms operating within state madrasahs (Demina et al., 2025).

To establish this investigation within a robust academic map, numerous previous empirical inquiries have explored character education within madrasah environments. Rahmawati (2024) investigated the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers at MTsN Al-Wathoniyyah Semarang, concluding that teacher exemplars and religious school culture significantly influence student character, though external social pressures persist. Similarly, Mohammad Sulis (2023) analyzed discipline and manners at MTsN 2 Bondowoso, emphasizing speech etiquette and educator punctuality as primary behavioral models. Furthermore, Siti Sipa Harumsari (2021) mapped teacher functions at MTs Riyadhul Ulum across supervisory, pedagogical, and evaluative dimensions. Although these antecedent studies provide valuable insights, they predominantly examine character sub-components in isolation or restrict their focus to basic administrative habituation routines. Consequently, a comprehensive investigation that holistically evaluates educator roles, strategic instructional methods, and institutional-environmental variables within a state madrasah setting remains necessary (Demina et al., 2025). Furthermore, existing literature frequently overlooks the intricate interaction between formal school habituation and unregulated external digital environments (Khairunisa, 2025).

Addressing these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study comprehensively examines the holistic role of Akidah Akhlak teachers at MTsN 4 Jambi City. Specifically, this research analyzes the operational manifestations of educators acting as role models, learning facilitators, spiritual motivators, and behavioral evaluators. Additionally, it investigates structured pedagogical strategies—including worship habituation, value-oriented active learning, and humanist-reflective discipline—while identifying internal institutional supports and external environmental inhibitors (Arif Muadzin, 2021). Through these research objectives, the study aims to contribute theoretically to Islamic educational science and offer practical guidance for character enhancement initiatives (Nasution, 2023). By shedding light on these intricate pedagogical dynamics, the

research provides actionable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and madrasah administrators striving to elevate the quality of moral instruction (Rahman, 2022).

To conceptualize the theoretical interface between educator authority and student moral growth, this study integrates Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which asserts that observational learning and vicarious reinforcement heighten modeling efficacy when students perceive high alignment between normative teacher discourse and daily practice (Sabililhaq et al., 2024). Within state madrasahs, adolescents vigilantly assess educator integrity; consistent non-verbal consistency fosters voluntary behavioral imitation, whereas hypocrisy breeds cynicism (Masiah & Erdiansyah, 2023). Furthermore, acknowledging environmental complexity, this study incorporates Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, recognizing that adolescent development is shaped by interactions across microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems (Khoirunnisa, 2022). By examining how teachers navigate ecological tensions between supportive school climates and unmonitored digital spaces, this research provides vital empirical insights into resilient character formation among contemporary Muslim youth (Khairunisa, 2025).

Moreover, the philosophical framework formulated by Imam Al-Ghazali regarding the purification of the soul (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*) provides profound epistemological depth for understanding how external pedagogical interventions crystallize into internal moral dispositions (Subakri, 2020). Al-Ghazali posits that genuine morality (*khuluq*) is not merely superficial compliance with regulatory directives, but a deeply rooted spiritual state from which ethical actions flow spontaneously without burdensome calculation (Basri, 2023). This internal transformation requires a dual pedagogical methodology comprising continuous behavioral habituation (*riyadah*) and rigorous inner spiritual discipline (*mujahadah*) (Nuronia, 2025). Structured daily madrasah routines, such as morning Quranic recitation and mandatory congregational prayer, function as practical mechanisms of *riyadah* that gradually shape student conscience (Demina et al., 2025). When these institutional practices are reinforced by empathetic teacher mentoring, students are guided toward a higher state of moral maturity where religious observance is driven by intrinsic spiritual devotion rather than external coercion (Irodati, 2022). Thus, synthesizing Bandura's observational learning, Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, and Al-Ghazali's moral epistemology creates a comprehensive analytical lens capable of fully capturing the complex dynamics of character education in modern madrasahs (Faruqi, 2023). Furthermore, investigating how these classical and contemporary paradigms operate synergistically within state madrasah settings addresses a noticeable oversight in existing empirical literature, ensuring that the theoretical contributions of this inquiry remain both conceptually sophisticated and practically applicable to contemporary educational challenges (Nasution, 2023).

In addition to these theoretical paradigms, the methodological framework adopted in this inquiry ensures rigorous empirical scrutiny by pairing focused participatory observations with semi-structured qualitative interviews across multiple institutional strata (Fadila, 2025). Prior academic investigations frequently relied solely on standardized questionnaires or brief administrative evaluations, which often fail to capture the nuanced psychological shifts occurring during adolescent moral development (Rosaliza, 2015). By embedding the researcher directly within the daily

operational rhythms of MTsN 4 Jambi City, this study bridges the divide between abstract normative expectations and messy classroom realities (Adiningrat, 2025). Consequently, the ensuing analysis does not merely catalog pedagogical techniques; rather, it illuminates the intricate interpersonal mechanisms through which teacher authenticity, institutional habituation, and domestic support interact to shape sustainable religious character among secondary school students (Demina et al., 2025). Moreover, exploring the delicate interplay between formal institutional rules and informal student subcultures provides academic clarity regarding how state Islamic schools successfully negotiate contemporary pedagogical demands without compromising spiritual integrity (Khoirunnisa, 2022). Ultimately, the comprehensive scope of this investigation establishes a vital benchmark for future educational studies seeking to evaluate character formation within dynamic, pluralistic Islamic educational environments across the archipelago. By systematically integrating rigorous qualitative methodology with robust classical and modern theoretical frameworks, this inquiry provides profound scholarly value and practical utility for contemporary madrasah advancement (Nasution, 2023).

B. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design utilizing a single-site case study methodology, allowing for an in-depth, comprehensive investigation of natural social interactions, pedagogical phenomena, and character formation processes within the authentic operational setting of the madrasah without experimental manipulation (Adiningrat, 2025). A qualitative case study orientation was deliberately chosen because the primary research objective centers on exploring, documenting, and interpreting the complex holistic role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in shaping students' religious character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Jambi City (Nasution, 2023). This methodological framework empowers researchers to gather rich contextual evidence directly from human participants operating within their natural institutional environment, capturing the subtle moral dimensions, communication patterns, and daily pedagogical interactions transpiring between educators and adolescents. Furthermore, the case study design enables the preservation of holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life organizational events, such as classroom management dynamics, musala worship assemblies, and informal peer interactions, which standard quantitative instruments frequently fail to capture (Yulian, 2018). The philosophical underpinning of this qualitative approach rests on interpretivism, asserting that human actions in educational settings are laden with subjective meanings that must be understood through the participants' eyes while interpreted rigorously by the researcher.

The empirical fieldwork was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Jambi City, a prominent state Islamic secondary educational institution situated in an urban-suburban transitional landscape characterized by distinct sociocultural dynamics and diverse student backgrounds. Formal institutional authorization and ethical clearance were secured from the madrasah principal prior to data collection, ensuring strict adherence to ethical standards and guaranteeing that research activities did not disrupt scheduled instructional programs (Hasan, 2022). The primary research participants comprised the designated Akidah Akhlak teachers responsible for curriculum delivery in Grade VIII, alongside thirty students from Grade VIII C. Grade

VIII C was purposefully selected following initial preliminary observations that revealed pronounced behavioral variations regarding worship discipline, verbal politeness, and assignment completion, making it an exceptionally informative site for examining character cultivation challenges. To establish comprehensive source triangulation, supplementary key informants were incorporated, including the madrasah headmaster and two accompanying Islamic religious education (PAI) teachers (Fadila Ramadona et al., 2025). Participant selection utilized purposive and saturation sampling techniques, prioritizing individuals possessing direct, deep insight into institutional character cultivation dynamics and instructional implementation (Sa'adi, 2025). Purposive selection ensured that informants possessed rich, first-hand experience regarding classroom moral education, thereby maximizing the depth and informational yield of the qualitative data collected.

Data collection was executed systematically across a dedicated three-month fieldwork period spanning from August to October 2026, ensuring sufficient longitudinal engagement to observe regular operational routines rather than temporary procedural formalities. Primary empirical data were compiled utilizing three core qualitative techniques: focused participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and institutional documentary review (Fadila, 2025). Focused observations were conducted across twenty distinct sessions totaling over forty hours, tracking teacher punctuality, professional modesty, speech etiquette, classroom management, and congregational Zuhr prayer leadership inside the madrasah musala (Pratiwi, 2024). During these observational sessions, the researcher maintained a non-intrusive participant-observer stance, recording detailed field notes concerning environmental arrangements, student engagement levels, and non-verbal teacher-student interactions. Semi-structured interviews were administered to the Akidah Akhlak teacher, thirty student representatives from Grade VIII C, the madrasah head, and PAI instructors, comprising a total of eighteen formal interview sessions lasting between 45 to 60 minutes each. Interview protocols explored pedagogical strategies, institutional obstacles, curriculum integration, and student internal responses. Secondary data encompassed madrasah profiles, curriculum documents, violation logs, daily attendance ledgers, and photographic archives of religious programs, which served as vital verification material to corroborate interview testimonies and observational logs (Hasan, 2022). The combination of these diverse data collection instruments allowed the researcher to cross-examine verbal claims against actual observable behaviors across multiple campus settings.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative data analysis model established by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, encompassing three continuous concurrent stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Nurdewi, 2022). During data reduction, extensive field notes, interview transcripts, and documentary records were systematically filtered, simplified, and categorized into primary thematic codes concerning teacher roles, habituation strategies, and environmental variables (Sofwatillah et al., 2024). Reduced data were subsequently structured into descriptive narrative matrices and thematic charts to establish clear relational patterns between teacher modeling and student behavioral responses. Data trustworthiness and scientific credibility were rigorously enforced through methodological triangulation—cross-verifying interview testimonies against direct observational records and institutional archival documents alongside source triangulation comparing teacher, student, and

administrator accounts across varying operational moments. Furthermore, member checking and audit trail verification were implemented to eliminate researcher bias, wherein preliminary interview summaries and thematic interpretations were returned to informants to verify conceptual accuracy (M. Husnullai et al., 2024). Ethical safeguards strictly guaranteed institutional confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent, securing formal guardian authorization and student assent prior to conducting interviews with minor participants. Furthermore, researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the fieldwork by keeping detailed reflective journals and conducting debriefing sessions with academic peers, ensuring that subjective interpretations did not unduly influence empirical data collection or thematic coding procedures (Sulung, 2024). The careful combination of these rigorous qualitative validation techniques guarantees that the findings presented in this study possess high scientific credibility and dependability. Ultimately, the methodological rigor applied in this investigation establishes a dependable empirical foundation for exploring complex educational phenomena within similar Islamic institutional settings (Sutriyanti, 2024). Additionally, the researcher adhered to strict epistemological standards by ensuring that all field interpretations remained grounded in the lived experiences of the participants, thereby mitigating researcher bias and enhancing the transferability of the findings to broader educational contexts (Yulian, 2018). The integration of multiple data streams—ranging from real-time classroom observations to historical archival records—ensured a robust, multifaceted understanding of how religious character is negotiated daily within madrasah environments. Through these comprehensive methodological safeguards, the research successfully captured the intricate dynamics of Islamic moral pedagogy. Moreover, the triangulation protocols implemented throughout the data collection and analysis phases served as a vital bulwark against subjective distortion, allowing the investigators to reconcile discrepancies between teacher self-reports and actual student behavioral enactments in informal campus settings. Such methodological thoroughness is indispensable when examining complex psychosocial constructs such as religious character and moral internalization among adolescents navigating contemporary digital and cultural transitions (Nasution, 2023).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Empirical qualitative research conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Jambi City revealed that the formation of students' religious character is an integrative and sustainable pedagogical effort, rather than an isolated transfer of memorization materials. In order to capture a comprehensive picture of the process of forming religious character, field data was collected through diligent observation of participation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and tracing of institutional documents. The main participants involved in this learning ecosystem include madrasah leaders, field teachers, PAI group guidance teachers, and representatives of grade VIII C students who are the empirical focus of the research. The contextual profile and contribution of each informant are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Research Informant Profiles at MTsN 4 Jambi City

No.	The Role of the Informant	Code	Contribution of Focus in Research
1	Head of Madrasah	INF-HM	Institutional policies, character curriculum direction, supervise support, and provision of worship facilities.
2	The Main Teacher of Moral Faith	INF-T1	Direct example of instilling value in the classroom, daily worship guidance, and personal behavior coaching
3	Associate Teacher of the Faculty of Medicine	INF-T2	Strengthening cross-subject scores, joint supervision during congregational worship, and discipline monitoring.
4	Student Representatives of Class VIII C	INF-S1 to S5	Acceptance of the teacher's example, harina's behavioral compliance, learning activeness, and the challenges suggested by students.

Source: Qualitative Research Field Data MTsN 4 Jambi City

The results of class observations and in-depth interviews show that the Akidah Akhlak teacher holds a central function in reviving the moral awareness of students. The concrete actions presented by teachers include four dimensions of educational roles that complement each other, namely moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*), spiritual and learning facilitators, motivators who drive awareness, and evaluators of behavior development. As a moral example, teachers display Islamic moral values through real daily actions. Teachers are always present at the madrasah before the bell rings, dress neatly and close the awrah according to Islamic manners, and welcome students at the gate with smiles and warm greetings. When teaching, the speech used is always polite, calm, and free from rough intonation, demonstrating patience when dealing with students who experience learning difficulties or behavioral challenges. The main Akidah Akhlak teacher emphasized this during an interview session: "Teaching Akidah Akhlak cannot be done only by lectures or memorizing textbook contents. Teenage students always observe how we walk, reprimand them, speak, and treat our fellow colleagues. If the teacher tells them to be honest and disciplined but arrives late or acts rudely, the learning process collapses instantly. The personal example of the teacher constitutes the living core of the character curriculum itself."

As a spiritual and learning facilitator, teachers design an environment that supports students' religious involvement. Teachers actively coordinate the implementation of congregational Zuhr prayers in the madrasah musala, ensuring the order of ablution facilities, neatness of prayer rows (*shaf*), and proper worship procedures. In the classroom, instructional sessions consistently begin with Quranic *tadarus* and joint prayers, where theological concepts such as the pillars of faith are explicitly connected to the formation of real social behavior. As a motivator, teachers recognize that student obedience triggered exclusively by fear of physical punishment produces mere superficial compliance. Therefore, teachers frequently share exemplary narratives of the Prophet and his companions to awaken a genuine desire for noble character from within the students. Sincere verbal praise and positive appreciation are

consistently provided to students who demonstrate initiative in completing assignments on time or assisting classmates. As an evaluator of behavior development, teachers monitor changes in student attitudes continuously. Evaluation extends beyond cognitive examination papers through daily attitude observation logs recording the development of students' manners, honesty, discipline, and worship obedience. When students are observed skipping congregational prayers or neglecting assignment submissions, teachers employ a personal approach and empathetic counseling in a private setting rather than public reprimands. The details of these educator roles are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Manifestation of the Role of Moral Faith Teachers in Shaping Religious Character

Role Categories	A Teacher's Actions	Empirical Evidence and Observed Behavior Indicators
Moral Example (Uswah Hasanah)	Displaying the moral integrity of Islam through punctuality, politeness, and modesty of appearance.	Be present on time at the madrasah, dress neatly and shar'I, get used to greetings and smiles, speak polite words, and patiently control emotions.
Worship & Learning Facilitator	Arrange a conducive learning environment and direct regular worship procedures.	Guiding the zuhur prayer in congregation, disciplining ablution and shaf salat, leading daily tadarus, and relating the material of faith with daily manners.
Motivator Penggerak	Fostering religious awareness from within students without using repressive physical coercion.	Tell the example of the Prophet and his companions, give appreciative praise, and foster students' confidence and social concern.
Attitude & Behavior Evaluator	Monitor the development of daily manners and provide personal and supportive coaching guidance	Make daily behavior logs, persuasively call out problematic students, trace the root of the problem, and give direction for improvement.

Source: Synthesis of Observational and Interview Data

The formation of students' religious character requires the implementation of a structured pedagogical strategy. Findings in the field show that Akidah Akhlak teachers apply three main strategies, namely habitual worship, active value-oriented learning, and the enforcement of humanist-reflective discipline. The first strategy, regular worship habituation, is grounded in the principle that physical actions performed repeatedly crystallize into inner dispositions. Daily, Grade VIII C students participate in structured religious activities, including collective juz Amma recitation before lessons, pre-study prayer recitations, and mandatory participation in congregational Zuhr prayers. Teachers do not issue commands from afar; rather, they actively participate in

ablution, occupy prayer rows, and perform dhikr alongside students in the madrasah musala.

The second strategy involves active value-based learning inside the classroom, transforming monotonous instructional atmospheres into interactive experiences. Lessons frequently incorporate interactive quizzes, brief educational ice-breaking games, and simple case study discussions addressing social etiquette and digital media ethics. By examining everyday challenges, teachers train students' critical reasoning to connect theological beliefs with practical behavior. A Grade VIII C student informant noted during interviews: "Learning Akidah Akhlak is enjoyable because we are not just told to copy notes or memorize definitions. The teacher invites us to discuss daily problems, conducts quizzes, and listens to our perspectives without immediately scolding us."

The third strategy centers on the enforcement of humanist-reflective discipline. When students violate institutional regulations—such as arriving late to prayer or neglecting homework—teachers strictly avoid physical punishment. Instead, teachers invite students into empathetic private dialogues, encouraging self-reflection so they recognize their mistakes while receiving constructive educational consequences such as memorizing short Quranic surahs, performing voluntary sunnah prayers, or completing remedial assignments under direct supervision. This strategy matrix is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Strategies for Religious Character Formation by Moral Faith Teachers

Strategy Dimension	Field Operational Activities	Target Student Character Dimension
Habit of worship (*Ta'wid*)	Zuhur prayer in regular congregation, tadarus juz Amma, joint prayer, and the habit of shaking hands (*salim*).	Piety, obedience to worship, discipline of time, and consistent spiritual awareness.
Value-Based Active Learning	Discussion of today's social ethics, Islamic educational games, interactive quiz interludes, and wisdom reflection.	Critical moral thinking, a deep understanding of faith, enthusiasm for learning, and togetherness in the classroom.
Humanist-Reflective Discipline (*Tadhib*)	Empathetic personal consultation, self-reflection dialogue, follow-up task guidance, and religious educational sanctions.	Personal responsibility, honesty, sincere remorse, self-control, and deep respect for teachers.

Source: Field Observation Analysis at MTsN 4 Jambi City

Character education within the madrasah ecosystem continuously interacts with broader social environments. The success of Akidah Akhlak teacher development is heavily influenced by internal supporting factors and external inhibiting challenges. Primary supporting factors stem from the strong commitment of the madrasah principal, who prioritizes character education and allocates adequate infrastructure including clean prayer rooms, sufficient ablution stations, and Quranic resources. Collaborative reinforcement among the entire teacher council further solidifies a unified religious climate across the institution. Conversely, primary inhibiting factors originate from external environments.

Unmonitored smartphone and gadget usage distracts students with online games and social media trends that disregard modest ethics. Furthermore, inconsistent domestic parenting and minimal parental worship supervision at home create behavioral dualism, where students behave orderly inside the madrasah but exhibit negligence in domestic settings. Classroom fatigue resulting from late-night screen time and occasional student reluctance toward congregational prayers represent ongoing practical obstacles. The population factor matrix and character building inhibitors are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. Population Factor Matrix and Character Building Inhibitors

Category Factors	Identified Field Conditions	The Existence of Phenomena and Teacher Solutive Actions
Supporting Factors (Madrasah Internal Ecosystem)	1. Full commitment from the head of the Madrasah. 2. Exemplary synergy from the entire teacher council. 3. The availability of clean prayer room facilities and ablution facilities. 4. The formation of a culture of greetings, smiles, and prayers together.	Teachers take advantage of institutional support to enforce daily worship routines, use prayer room facilities optimally, and cooperate with fellow teachers in supervising students.
Inhibiting Factors (External & Personal Challenges of Students)	1. The use of smart gadgets and social media without control. 2. Lack of attention and habituation of worship in the family environment. 3. The influence of poor peer association. 4. Feeling lazy and lowering the focus of students learning in class.	Teachers compensate for student boredom through quizzes and educational games in the classroom, strengthen regular communication with parents, and provide personalized counseling guidance to students with problems.

Source: Empirical Data Matrix MTsN 4 Jambi City

Analysis/Discussion

The empirical findings established at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 4 Jambi City demonstrate conclusively that the formation of student religious character is a complex, dynamic, and non-linear developmental process relying fundamentally on personal integrity, teaching presence, and relational authenticity. Traditional assumptions asserting that religious education succeeds exclusively through dogmatic memorization and textual transmission of theological formulas are thoroughly challenged by the field realities observed at MTsN 4 Jambi City. On the contrary, religious character is

cultivated effectively when abstract theoretical principles are translated into observable, living behavioral patterns that adolescent students can admire, emulate, and internalize within their daily social routines.

The central function of the Akidah Akhlak teacher as a role model (*uswah hasanah*) finds profound theoretical grounding in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, specifically through observational learning and vicarious reinforcement mechanisms. According to this psychological paradigm, human behavior is largely acquired through modeling; by observing symbolic models within their immediate environment, individuals encode behavioral sequences, store cognitive representations, and subsequently enact corresponding behaviors. Grade VIII C students occupy a critical transitional phase characterized by identity exploration, emotional volatility, and heightened sensitivity to adult inconsistencies. When educators instruct students to practice punctuality, perform prayers with solemnity, and speak politely, yet display tardiness, emotional instability, or indifference, students experience acute cognitive dissonance. This dissonance frequently breeds moral cynicism and superficial compliance. Conversely, when Akidah Akhlak teachers consistently display emotional composure, worship discipline, modest attire, and sincere hospitality, they operate as highly credible symbolic models. Students voluntarily internalize these values because the observed models possess institutional legitimacy, positive reputation, and genuine moral authenticity. The physical presence and active participation of teachers in the front rows of the musala transform congregational worship from an administrative requirement into an inspiring shared spiritual norm.

Furthermore, the pedagogical architecture implemented at MTsN 4 Jambi City reflects the classical philosophy of Islamic education, specifically the moral epistemology formulated by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. Al-Ghazali defines morality (*khuluq*) as a deeply entrenched state of the soul from which ethical actions emerge spontaneously without complex calculation. To elevate moral action from external obligation to spontaneous inner disposition (*malakah*), Al-Ghazali established a dual methodology comprising continuous behavioral habituation (*riyadah*) and inner spiritual discipline (*mujahadah*). Structured daily madrasah routines—such as mandatory congregational Zuhr prayer, morning Quranic tadarus, and meditative traditions—serve as practical mechanisms of *riyadah*. By repeatedly engaging students in acts of worship within a supportive school ecosystem, physical worship practices become habitual. Over time, supported by teacher motivational reflections during instruction, this external obedience penetrates the inner consciousness, fostering *mujahadah* where students choose spiritual devotion driven by intrinsic conviction rather than fear of external sanctions.

The instructional effectiveness demonstrated by Akidah Akhlak teachers is further amplified by the dynamic integration of value-clarification learning inside the classroom. Utilizing Islamic educational quizzes, ice-breaking games, and discussions centered on contemporary moral case studies directly addresses mental fatigue and boredom among students. In secondary religious education, a recurring obstacle is student perception that religious doctrine represents rigid historical dogma disconnected from modern adolescent culture. By facilitating active discussions regarding digital ethics, cyberbullying, examination honesty, and filial respect, teachers bridge sacred texts with contemporary social realities. Students do not merely receive moral commands passively; they process how divine accountability applies to their

immediate social world, fostering critical moral reasoning and cognitive understanding that clarifies why ethical behavior is spiritually vital and socially beneficial.

When juxtaposed with previous empirical studies in Islamic character education, the findings of this study confirm and expand existing academic literature. Consistent with prior research by Rahmawati regarding teacher roles in madrasah environments, this study emphasizes that educator modeling and religious school culture serve as primary catalysts for student moral transformation. However, whereas earlier studies focus predominantly on administrative routines and general material delivery, this present investigation reveals that teachers' capacity to construct relational trust and provide empathetic personal counseling guidance (*ta'dhib*) represents the decisive key to maintaining sustainable character development during personal moral crises. Similarly, aligning with Mohammad Sulis regarding discipline and manners and Siti Sipa Harumsari regarding linguistic and sartorial politeness, empirical evidence from MTsN 4 Jambi City proves that behavioral indicators such as time punctuality, sharia-compliant modesty, and refined speech are not isolated habits, but external manifestations rooted in firm theological foundations.

Analyzing these findings through Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory reveals significant structural insights regarding the external boundaries testing madrasah character cultivation. Bronfenbrenner posits that adolescent development is shaped by mutual interactions across layered environmental systems, particularly microsystems (direct settings like schools, homes, and peer groups) and mesosystems (interconnections between major environments). At MTsN 4 Jambi City, madrasah microsystems function as structured, value-rich environments where Islamic norms are systematically modeled and reinforced. However, external microsystems—specifically unmonitored home environments and borderless digital spaces—frequently operate under opposing, hedonistic values. When students return home and encounter domestic environments lacking prayer habits or spend hours immersed in unmonitored online gaming and social media characterized by abusive language, acute mesosystemic friction occurs. This ecological dissonance explains why certain students display exemplary manners inside the madrasah yet neglect prayers or exhibit indifference outside school boundaries.

The strategic interventions deployed by Akidah Akhlak teachers to address ecological dissonance affirm a crucial paradigm shift from repressive law enforcement toward restorative humanist discipline. In traditional educational models, student disobedience in religious duties is frequently met with public reprimands or physical punishments. Among adolescents, such punitive measures typically generate resentment, covert rejection, and internal resistance. Conversely, teachers at MTsN 4 Jambi City apply a personal dialogue approach (*ta'dhib*), inviting struggling students into empathetic, non-judgmental counseling sessions. Within Islamic educational philosophy, *ta'dhib* embodies the holistic cultivation of adab—encompassing spiritual order, self-esteem, and moral responsibility. By helping students diagnose root causes of disobedience originating from domestic friction, peer pressure, or digital fatigue, educators preserve student dignity while guiding them toward self-improvement. This empathetic approach fosters an internal locus of control, ensuring that students' religious character evolves into an independent disposition resilient against negative external influences.

In synthesizing these comprehensive insights, the empirical evidence confirms that cultivating student religious character through *uswah hasanah* is a multidimensional, collaborative endeavor. Exemplary teacher conduct serves as the vital spiritual core, but its transformative potential is fully realized only when supported by dedicated institutional leadership, cohesive teacher councils, restorative sanction frameworks, and active parental engagement. When these diverse elements operate in harmonious alignment, discipline ceases to be a tiresome administrative burden and transforms into an organic process of self-realization and moral nobility within the madrasah community.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Akidah Akhlak teacher plays a central, multi-dimensional role at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Jambi City, functioning dynamically as an exemplary moral role model (*uswah hasanah*), spiritual learning facilitator, moral motivator, and behavior evaluator. The systematic cultivation of students' religious character is effectively actualized through structured pedagogical strategies encompassing routine worship habituation (*ta'wid*), value-oriented active learning, and humanist-reflective discipline (*ta'dhib*). Furthermore, empirical observations underscore that these core educational practices are substantially supported by strong administrative leadership and a cohesive religious school culture, although their overall efficacy is frequently challenged by external obstacles such as unmonitored digital gadget consumption, peer distractions, and domestic supervisory gaps.

While the findings indicate a positive association between consistent educator role modeling and noticeable improvements in students' observable religious discipline, the single-site qualitative case study design and absence of systematic longitudinal tracking present inherent limitations that preclude definitive claims of long-term causal transformation. Consequently, future investigations should employ mixed methods or longitudinal frameworks across diverse regional madrasahs to evaluate the sustained moral impact of educator exemplars. Practically, madrasah administrators are strongly encouraged to strengthen collaborative partnerships with parents and school committees, ensuring that institutional habituation inside the classroom is reinforced consistently within the home environment to foster enduring spiritual and ethical maturity among adolescent students.

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