

Exemplary Conduct and Innovative Teaching of Moral Education Teachers in Character Development of Students in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The digital era has transformed students' learning patterns and behavior, requiring Akidah Akhlak teachers to strengthen moral development through exemplary conduct and innovative learning practices that correspond with technological development. This study aims to describe the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in developing students' moral character in the digital era, particularly their exemplary role, creativity in developing innovative learning, and its impact on students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo, Jeneponto Regency. This study employed a qualitative approach with phenomenological and pedagogical designs. The data sources consisted of an Akidah Akhlak teacher, the head of the madrasah, eighth and ninth grade homeroom teachers, and eighth and ninth grade students. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings demonstrate that the Akidah Akhlak teacher plays important roles as a role model, innovator, and motivator in students' moral development. Exemplary conduct is demonstrated through honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious practices, and wise use of digital technology in accordance with Islamic values. Learning innovation is implemented through digital learning media and varied methods, including instructional videos, discussions, case studies, presentations, and project-based learning. These roles contribute positively to students' moral development. Although some students are unable to explain the concept of morality theoretically, they demonstrate its application through disciplined, honest, responsible, polite, obedient, and digitally responsible behavior. The study recommends strengthening teacher exemplarity, digital learning innovation, and collaboration among madrasahs, teachers, and parents to sustain students' moral development in the digital environment.

Keywords: Akidah Akhlak Teacher, Moral Development, Teacher Exemplarity, Learning Innovation, Digital Era

Abstrak

Era digital menghadirkan perubahan dalam pola belajar dan perilaku peserta didik sehingga guru Akidah Akhlak dituntut memperkuat pembinaan akhlak melalui keteladanan dan inovasi pembelajaran yang sesuai dengan perkembangan teknologi. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan peranan guru Akidah Akhlak dalam pembinaan akhlak peserta didik pada era digital, bentuk keteladanan guru sebagai teladan, kreativitas guru dalam menciptakan inovasi pembelajaran, serta dampaknya terhadap aspek kognitif, afektif, dan psikomotorik peserta didik di MTs Darul I'tisham Embo Kabupaten Jeneponto. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan

desain fenomenologi dan pedagogis. Sumber data terdiri atas guru Akidah Akhlak, kepala madrasah, wali kelas VIII dan IX, serta peserta didik kelas VIII dan IX. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru Akidah Akhlak berperan sebagai teladan, inovator, dan motivator dalam pembinaan akhlak. Keteladanan diwujudkan melalui kejujuran, kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab, kesopanan, pelaksanaan ibadah, serta penggunaan teknologi secara bijaksana sesuai nilai Islam. Inovasi pembelajaran dilakukan melalui penggunaan media digital dan metode yang variatif, seperti video pembelajaran, diskusi, studi kasus, presentasi, dan pembelajaran berbasis proyek. Peran tersebut berdampak positif terhadap perkembangan akhlak peserta didik. Meskipun sebagian peserta didik belum mampu menjelaskan konsep akhlak secara teoritis, mereka telah menunjukkan penerapannya melalui perilaku disiplin, jujur, bertanggung jawab, sopan, patuh, dan bijak menggunakan teknologi. Penelitian merekomendasikan penguatan keteladanan guru, inovasi pembelajaran digital, serta kolaborasi antara madrasah, guru, dan orang tua.

Kata Kunci: Guru Akidah Akhlak, Pembinaan Akhlak, Keteladanan Guru, Inovasi Pembelajaran, Era Digital

Introduction

Digital transformation has changed the environment for shaping students' character. The educational process, which previously took place primarily through direct interactions within the family, school, and community, now also occurs intensively in the digital space. These changes not only affect the use of technology as a learning medium but also as a source of religious information, communication patterns, identity formation, and the ways in which students acquire and practice moral values. In Islamic education, this condition demands teachers to integrate technology with learning objectives and Islamic values, rather than merely using it as a pedagogical tool ([Mintasih et al., 2024](#)).

The urgency of this issue becomes more apparent because the digital space has ambivalent moral consequences. Digital literacy can strengthen character education if students are able to evaluate information, consider the consequences of actions, maintain integrity, and use technology in accordance with Islamic values. [Yudi & Maryam \(2023\)](#), for example, found a very strong relationship between digital literacy and the effectiveness of Islamic character education among 100 vocational high school students in Bogor, with a correlation coefficient of 0.899 and a determination coefficient of 0.807. In addition, online communication can also facilitate online disinhibition, moral disengagement, and cyberbullying ([Wang et al., 2024](#)). [Burnell et al. \(2023\)](#) through a longitudinal study of 2,104 adolescents even showed a reciprocal relationship between self-control and technology use problems. The findings indicate that moral education in the digital era should not only focus on mastering moral knowledge but also on developing self-regulation skills and the independent application of values.

Digital ethics issues also encompass privacy, misinformation, plagiarism, irresponsible use of artificial intelligence, problematic use of social media, peer pressure, and exposure to risky behaviour. Digital character education requires the integration of information literacy, empathy, social responsibility, academic integrity, critical thinking skills, and self-control ([Memarian & Doleck, 2025](#); [Rau & Premo, 2025](#)). These challenges indicate that moral education can no longer be understood merely as a process of transferring norms in the classroom, but rather as a process of developing moral capacities that students must apply when interacting in both physical and digital spaces.

Research by [Rochim & Khayati \(2023\)](#) explains that PAI teachers perform functions as facilitators, mentors, communicators, role models, evaluators, innovators, and managers of the educational environment. [Sholeh & Abdullah \(2026\)](#) also found that Akidah Akhlak teachers play roles as value educators, moral exemplars, spiritual guides, and social controllers through material reinforcement, religious habituation, personal approaches, and supervision of digital media usage. Thus, the exemplary behaviour of teachers becomes important because students not only need explanations about values but also concrete examples of the application of those values in daily life and the use of technology.

Nevertheless, previous research still shows limitations. Some studies place digitalisation primarily as an issue of teacher technology competence or the effectiveness of learning media, while other studies emphasise exemplary behaviour and habituation as instruments for character formation. [Reksiana et al. \(2024\)](#), for example, found that the digital competence of PAI teachers is still largely at the stage of using simple media, while the ability to independently produce digital teaching materials is relatively limited. [Badrudin et al. \(2021\)](#) also found that online learning management and teacher personality competence significantly influence the strengthening of character education, but their contribution is only 10.5%. These findings indicate a research gap to better understand how teacher exemplarity and learning innovation work together in fostering students' morals in the context of madrasahs.

This research offers novelty by examining character building through the interconnection between the teacher's exemplary behaviour as a role model, digital-based learning innovations, and the actualisation of students' moral values in the context of MTs Darul I'tisham Embo, Jeneponto Regency. This focus allows the research to examine not only how teachers deliver the subject of Akidah Akhlak, but also how teachers become moral figures, develop learning strategies relevant to the digital environment, and help students translate religious values into real behaviour. This perspective aligns with [Lickona's \(1991\)](#) idea that character education encompasses moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, so the success of moral development should be viewed in terms of the interconnection of knowledge, attitudes, and actions.

Based on that, this research aims to analyse the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in the moral development of students in the digital era, particularly through exemplary behaviour, learning innovations, and their impact on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of students at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo, Jeneponto Regency. The research is expected to provide conceptual contributions to the development of Islamic moral education in the digital era, as well as practical contributions to strengthening teachers' competencies in integrating exemplary behaviour, digital pedagogy, and value habituation in students' lives.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological and pedagogical design to deeply understand the experiences, practices, and meanings of the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in the moral development of students in the digital era. This approach was chosen because the research does not aim to statistically test the relationship between variables, but rather to contextually reveal how the exemplary behaviour, creativity in teaching, habituation, and guidance of teachers are manifested in the lives of students. The research was conducted at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo, Jeneponto Regency, with data sources involving the head of the madrasa, Akidah Akhlak teachers, class advisors, as well as eighth

and ninth-grade students who directly experience and observe the moral development process.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to identify the exemplary practices of teachers, the learning process, religious habituation, teacher-student interactions, and student behaviour within the madrasah environment. Interviews are used to obtain in-depth information regarding teachers' experiences, views, and strategies in fostering character. Documentation is used as supporting data to strengthen field findings and provide evidence regarding learning activities and character development.

Data analysis is conducted qualitatively-interactively through three stages, namely data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The validity of the findings is strengthened through triangulation of sources and time, allowing information from various informants and situations to be systematically compared. The procedure allows the research to produce credible interpretations regarding the relationship between the exemplary behaviour and creativity of teachers and the formation of students' morals in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.

Results

The Role of Akidah Akhlak Teachers in the Moral Development of Students in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that Akidah Akhlak teachers play an important role in the moral development of students in the digital era at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo, Jenepono Regency. Moral development is fostered through classroom instruction, habituation, exemplary conduct, advice, guidance, the positive use of digital media, and collaboration with the madrasah and parents. Documentation of religious activities further demonstrates the integration of moral values into both academic and non-academic activities. This pattern indicates that moral development is not treated merely as part of the instructional content but as an educational practice embedded in students' daily lives. The importance of the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers was emphasised by Risnawati, the head of the madrasah:

"Their role is very important, very significant. Why? Because in the madrasah, teachers become parents, substitutes for the students' parents. That is the first point. Second, Akidah Akhlak is not merely a subject in the madrasah. It contains values that must be taught to the students. That is why the Akidah Akhlak teacher here, Mrs Hasniah, in addition to delivering lessons, must also provide moral guidance. That is because, as I said, we are their parents here. Who else will guide them if not us?"

This statement demonstrates that the position of the Akidah Akhlak teacher extends beyond an instructional function. The teacher is regarded as a parental figure who assumes responsibility for internalising moral values in students' lives. This is consistent with Hasniah's statement that "The role of the Akidah Akhlak teacher is to guide, educate, and serve as a role model so that students develop noble character in the digital era." The findings reveal two primary patterns of teacher roles, namely the teacher as a model or role model and the teacher as an innovator. As role models, teachers serve as behavioural references for students within the madrasah environment. Hasniah explained, "As role models, teachers must set an example in the way they speak, demonstrate good attitudes, and engage in good conduct." Risnawati further emphasised:

"Our students, particularly those at MTs level, tend to imitate others. They are still at an age when they tend to imitate and replicate what their teachers do. This is different from students at MA level. MA students are more capable of filtering what they see. If something does not suit them, they will not necessarily follow it. But MTs students tend to think, 'If this is how my teacher behaves, then I should do the same.' Therefore, the role is important. Akidah Akhlak teachers become pioneers, role models, and examples for their students."

The findings also demonstrate concrete forms of such exemplary conduct. Teachers arrive on time, dress neatly, greet students when entering the classroom, and begin and conclude lessons with prayer. They also use polite language, respect students' opinions, and reprimand students appropriately. Students likewise perceived that teachers "give reprimands in a firm manner." These practices demonstrate that exemplary conduct is enacted through everyday behaviour, communication, discipline, religious practice, and the manner in which teachers respond to violations. This finding is reinforced by the view that Akidah Akhlak teachers "must continue to be role models for their students."

The second role concerns the teacher as an innovator. Innovation involves not only the use of digital devices but also teachers' ability to guide students in understanding how technology should be used responsibly. Risnawati explained:

"The use of technology is inevitable. Like two sides of a coin, it has both positive and negative aspects. When we talk about technology, we are not talking only about mobile phones. In the madrasah, as long as we can still control its use, we can manage it, and it can have a very significant impact and provide substantial benefits. This is particularly relevant to digitalisation, because asking students to bring mobile phones does not automatically mean that we are implementing digitalisation. That is not the case."

The use of technology is facilitated through computer laboratories, internet access, LCD projectors, visual materials, and instructional videos. Risnawati stated:

"We take the students to the laboratory. Yesterday, I also told the Year 7 students that the various subject teachers, particularly the Informatics teacher, should frequently use the computer laboratory so that the students become accustomed to digitalisation. Their mindset should not be limited to mobile phones. It is not only about mobile phones. For example, when a teacher uses a particular teaching method, such as an LCD projector, visual materials, or videos, that already constitutes digitalisation. It is not exclusively about mobile phones."

The madrasah also provides LCD projectors and learning equipment, as well as a computer laboratory with internet access, to support digital learning. At the same time, the madrasah restricts the use of handphones as a means of regulating the digital environment. Students stated, "We are prohibited from bringing mobile phones to school." Risnawati emphasised:

"Mobile phones may not be used during lessons, from the beginning to the end of the lesson. If someone brings a mobile phone, inspections are conducted every day. This is one indicator that distinguishes MTs from other levels, particularly MA and SMA. At MTs level, when students are told not to bring mobile phones, they genuinely do not bring them to school."

Thus, moral development in the digital era takes place through a balance between the use of technology for educational purposes and the regulation of its use. Akidah Akhlak teachers play a role in guiding students to use technology positively, understand media

ethics, and remain guided by Islamic values.

The Forms of Akidah Akhlak Teachers' Exemplary Conduct as Role Models in Fostering Students' Morality in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that the exemplary conduct of Akidah Akhlak teachers at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo is manifested through their everyday behaviour, religious practices, supervision, prudent use of technology, and involvement in various character-building activities. Exemplary conduct is not confined to classroom interactions but has also become part of the madrasah culture. This pattern indicates that students' moral development takes place through habituation that is consistently reinforced within the educational environment.

The forms of character development were described by Rosmini, a Year 9 homeroom teacher: "The forms of character development include giving advice, habituating students to worship, providing exemplary conduct, and supervising their daily behaviour." This statement identifies four main forms of character development: advice, habituation, exemplary conduct, and supervision. These four components complement one another. Advice provides students with an understanding of behaviour that conforms to Islamic values, while habituation and exemplary conduct provide direct experience. Supervision then ensures that these values are applied in students' daily lives. Religious habituation is one of the most visible forms of exemplary conduct within the madrasah environment. Risnawati explained:

"For example, routines such as congregational Dhuhr prayer, followed by, what is it called, tadarus or Qur'anic recitation. Then there is also character development conducted by the Guidance and Counselling teachers. So, in addition to Akidah Akhlak, the Guidance and Counselling teachers, student affairs staff, and everyone else certainly work together to foster the students' character."

This finding demonstrates that moral development is implemented collectively. Akidah Akhlak teachers do not work independently but collaborate with Guidance and Counselling teachers, student affairs staff, homeroom teachers, and other elements of the madrasah. A madrasah environment characterised by routine religious activities provides a social context in which students can observe, participate in, and repeatedly practise behaviour reflecting Islamic values.

Teachers' exemplary conduct is also manifested through the moral values they demonstrate. Hasniah stated, "The values of Akidah Akhlak that are exemplified include honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and mutual respect among others." These values do not remain confined to instructional content but are enacted through teachers' behaviour when interacting with students and other members of the madrasah community. Accordingly, teachers serve as *role models* who demonstrate concrete ways of applying Akidah Akhlak values in school life.

In the digital era, teachers' exemplary conduct also encompasses their use of technology. Karmila explained, "Exemplary conduct in digital technology involves using social media wisely and courteously and disseminating useful content." This finding broadens the meaning of exemplary conduct. Teachers are expected not only to demonstrate appropriate behaviour in direct interactions but also to model ethical communication and responsible use of digital media. Hasniah added, "Exemplary conduct in the madrasah involves habituating students to greeting others, smiling, maintaining discipline, and performing acts of worship. The students also respond by following these

good habits.” This response indicates a process of imitation and habituation that develops through direct interaction with teachers.

Teachers’ exemplary conduct is also supported by madrasah policies. Risnawati explained, “The madrasah’s policies supporting students’ character development include, first, the values reflected in the regulations. These regulations establish discipline and govern how our students behave in the classroom and within the madrasah environment. Second, there is religious deepening.” These policies create an environment that supports behavioural consistency. Teachers’ exemplary conduct becomes more effective when the madrasah has rules, habituation programmes, and religious activities that are aligned with the values being taught.

In addition to modelling appropriate behaviour, teachers perform an innovative role in the learning process. Hasniah stated, “Teachers create learning that is creative, engaging, and aligned with technological developments. Learning innovations include the use of discussions, educational videos, interactive quizzes, and project-based learning.” Teachers’ digital competence also supports the implementation of these innovations. Risnawati stated, “The Akidah Akhlak teacher here, Mrs Hasniah, is actually knowledgeable about digital technology. She can use a laptop and various digital devices independently. So, I think this also makes it easier for her to apply these technologies with the students.”

These innovations are directed towards learning that is not merely theoretical. Risnawati explained, “Currently, MTs Darul I’tisham Embo is also implementing a programme that increases practical activities. All teachers are expected to be involved, so students are not given only theory but are also engaged more extensively in practical activities. This is intended to ensure that students develop soft skills that incorporate Akidah Akhlak values.” Hasniah also explained that innovation is implemented through “Digital learning media, including PowerPoint, instructional videos, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp. Second, videos or digital platforms are used to facilitate students’ understanding of the material and increase their learning interest. Third, students’ understanding is ensured through question-and-answer sessions, discussions, assignments, and evaluations.”

Overall, the forms of exemplary conduct demonstrated by Akidah Akhlak teachers encompass behavioural, religious, social, disciplinary, and digital dimensions. Exemplary conduct is reinforced through the habituation of congregational prayer, *tadarus*, greetings, courteous behaviour, discipline, and prudent use of technology. At the same time, learning innovations involving discussions, case studies, presentations, educational videos, and digital media make moral values easier to relate to students’ everyday lives. These findings indicate that teachers’ role modelling operates through consistency among the values they teach, the behaviour they demonstrate, and the madrasah environment that supports their application.

The Impact of Aqidah Akhlaq Teachers’ Exemplary Conduct and Creativity on the Realisation of Moral Values Across the Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Domains of Students in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that the exemplary conduct and creativity of Aqidah Akhlaq teachers have a positive impact on students’ moral development across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. This impact is reflected in changes in students’ behaviour, particularly in terms of discipline, politeness, obedience, responsibility, and more prudent use of digital media. These changes do not occur instantaneously. The

findings show that moral development takes place through habituation, exemplary conduct, motivation, supervision, and the use of learning methods that are relevant to students' lives in the digital era.

In the cognitive domain, the study identified a gap between students' ability to explain moral concepts verbally and their ability to recognise behaviour that corresponds to moral values. When asked about the meaning of morality, NAF responded, "I do not know," while SDS replied, "I forgot." These findings indicate that students' mastery of moral terminology and conceptual definitions remains limited. However, this condition does not necessarily indicate that students lack an understanding of moral values. Risnawati explained:

"Perhaps they cannot express it in words, but they can demonstrate it through their behaviour. It is actually visible. So, we can see it. There are indeed many children who cannot express it verbally, who cannot say that this is called akhlak, but they understand it. They know that, for example, if they say A, that is not allowed. If they say B, that is not allowed. If they behave in a certain way towards their friends, that is prohibited. So, they understand and they know. What I saw yesterday, when I entered the classroom, was clearly evident. They knew and understood. They knew what should and should not be done, especially in matters related to akhlak."

This statement indicates that students' understanding of morality is more evident in their ability to recognise and distinguish between good and bad behaviour than in their ability to define moral concepts academically. Hasniah explained that moral education is taught in Year 7, so "perhaps the students have already forgotten it." Accordingly, the impact of learning in the cognitive domain is more apparent in students' practical understanding of behavioural norms. Students are able to identify actions that are permissible and impermissible in social interactions. In the affective domain, the impact of exemplary conduct is reflected in changes in students' attitudes and responses to the values taught. Hasniah stated:

"When observed after the students have taken Aqidah Akhlaq lessons, there are changes. On average, other schools do not have Aqidah Akhlaq as a subject, particularly ordinary schools. In our school, however, Aqidah Akhlaq is taught as a subject with substantial content and a specific focus on Aqidah Akhlaq."

This statement indicates that Aqidah Akhlaq education occupies a distinctive position within the madrasah environment because moral values receive more focused and sustained instructional attention. Changes in attitudes are also evident in students' own accounts. R, stated, "After learning this, I have become more diligent when teachers ask me to do something, I am always ready when I am called, and I obey my parents at home." This statement demonstrates changes in students' discipline, obedience, and respect towards teachers and parents. Interview findings also indicate that students have begun to understand the importance of honesty, responsibility, politeness, and caution in using social media. They have begun to reduce the use of impolite language, consider information before sharing it, and respect others' opinions in both direct and digital interactions.

In the psychomotor domain, the internalisation of moral values is evident in students' actual behaviour within the madrasah environment and in their daily lives. The implementation of madrasah rules constitutes one of the mechanisms that reinforces behavioural change. Risnawati explained:

“When there is a policy or regulation that is violated, particularly when it concerns akhlak, the sanctions are serious. It is not solely the responsibility of the subject teacher. The homeroom teacher, the head of the madrasah, the deputy head responsible for student affairs, and everyone else work together to foster the students’ akhlak. It is not the case that the Aqidah Akhlaq teacher alone has to take responsibility for everything. No, everyone must work together. If, for example, the students violate certain rules, particularly those related to the development of their akhlak, the matter is referred to the homeroom teacher. After that, the homeroom teacher reports it to me.”

This pattern indicates that changes in students’ behaviour are supported by a development and guidance system involving various elements of the madrasah. Each violation is followed up promptly, so that moral development does not stop at a reprimand from the Aqidah Akhlaq teacher. This mechanism creates consistency between teachers’ exemplary conduct, madrasah regulations, supervision, and follow-up actions concerning students’ behaviour.

Teachers’ creativity also strengthens the process of value internalisation. The use of digital learning media, educational videos, case discussions, and daily reflection provides students with opportunities to understand moral values through situations closely related to their lives. During lessons, students appeared more active in discussions, more respectful of their peers’ opinions, and more able to relate the learning material to issues associated with the digital era, such as social media ethics, information dissemination, and civility in digital communication.

Accordingly, the impact of Aqidah Akhlaq teachers’ exemplary conduct and creativity is evident not only in students’ ability to understand moral values but also in their acceptance and application of these values in their behaviour. The cognitive domain is reflected in the ability to distinguish between good and bad behaviour. The affective domain is evident in changes in attitudes and awareness. Meanwhile, the psychomotor domain is reflected in the application of moral values through discipline, obedience, politeness, responsibility, and ethical use of digital technology. These findings indicate that moral development at MTs Darul I’tisham Embo takes place through the interaction of teachers’ exemplary conduct, creative teaching practices, habituation, and the madrasah’s student development system.

Discussion

The Exemplary Behaviour of Teachers as a Mechanism for Moral Development

The research results show that the exemplary behaviour of Akidah Akhlak teachers at MTs Darul I’tisham Embo, Jeneponto Regency, is a mechanism for development that occurs through concrete behaviour, habituation, communication, mentoring, and supervision. Exemplary behaviour is not placed as an additional activity after the delivery of material, but becomes an integral part of the interaction between teachers and students. Observation and interview findings show a relatively consistent pattern, namely that teachers provide examples of good behaviour, the school builds supporting habits, and then students are directed to repeat and apply that behaviour in their daily lives. This pattern shows that moral development at the research site occurs through direct experience, not just through the transfer of knowledge.

These findings can be understood through Thomas Lickona’s character education concept, which serves as the theoretical foundation of the research. Lickona views good

character as a process that includes knowledge of goodness, commitment or intention towards goodness, and actual actions in doing goodness. In the research materials, the concept is formulated through moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action ([Purwati et al., 2024](#)). The exemplary behaviour of teachers in this study primarily serves to bridge the three dimensions. Students not only acquire knowledge about honesty, discipline, responsibility, and politeness, but also see how these values are practiced by the teacher. Thus, teachers provide concrete experiences that allow moral knowledge to translate into attitudes and actions.

This meaning is clearly evident in Hasniah's statement, which indicates that setting an example is understood as consistency between words, attitudes, and actions. Theoretically, that consistency is important because character is not sufficiently built through normative knowledge. Students need a concrete model to understand how a value is applied. This finding is in line with [Damanik & Ningrum \(2025\)](#), who emphasise that Akidah Akhlak teachers not only serve as conveyors of material but also guide the moral and spiritual development of students. The personality of the teacher becomes an important element because learning that only conveys knowledge without providing behavioural examples is difficult to touch on character formation.

The context of the development of MTs-level students further strengthens that function. Risnawati, the head of MTs Darul I'tisham Embo, explained that students at the MTs level still tend to imitate the behaviour they see from their teachers. These findings indicate that exemplary behaviour works through a process of imitation that can then develop into habits. In Lickona's framework, this process shows that character formation does not stop at moral knowing. When students repeatedly observe their teachers' behaviour and then imitate it, moral values begin to move into the realm of moral action.

The form of behaviour exemplified also shows that character building in madrasahs has a concrete scope. Hasniah mentioned honesty, discipline, politeness, responsibility, and the attitude of respecting others as values exemplified by teachers to the students. The IX grade homeroom teacher, Rosmini, explained that the guidance is carried out through advice, habituation of worship, exemplary behaviour, and supervision of daily conduct. Meanwhile, Risnawati showed that the guidance involves congregational Zuhur prayers, recitation of the Quran, and collaboration between the Akidah Akhlak teacher and the guidance and counselling teacher as well as the student affairs department. This finding shows that exemplary behaviour does not work individually. It gains strength when the teacher's behaviour is reinforced by habituation and the culture of the madrasah.

The pattern is consistent with the research by [Suyudi & Wathon \(2020\)](#), which shows that Akidah Akhlak teachers play a role in instilling character in students through direct guidance. [Anggara's \(2022\)](#) research also shows that exemplary behaviour, advice, habituation, as well as reward and punishment can impact the behavioural changes of students. [Mar'atussholehah's \(2026\)](#) research further found that the teaching of Akidah Akhlak is not sufficient to be conducted merely according to schedule and curriculum because some students still exhibit behaviour that does not reflect character values. The research findings at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo reinforce these results, but also show that habituation and exemplary behaviour can serve as mechanisms to connect the values taught with the actual behaviour of the students.

A more distinctive dimension in this research emerges when the exemplary behaviour of teachers is placed in the context of the digital era. The research background shows that some students are starting to make influencers, celebrities, social media stars,

or social media figures their role models instead of their teachers at the madrasah. This issue aligns with the research by [Aulia et al. \(2025\)](#), which found that the use of gadgets for playing games and accessing TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube is accompanied by the emergence of impolite behaviour, low empathy, the use of harsh language, and a decrease in respect for teachers. This means that teachers now not only face the challenge of being role models in the madrasah, but also have to contend with the competition of role models that emerge through the digital space.

In this context, this research finds an expansion of the meaning of role model. The exemplary behaviour of teachers is not only seen in face-to-face interactions but also in how they use technology and social media. Karmila explained that exemplary behaviour in the madrasah is manifested through greetings, smiles, discipline, and worship, which are then followed by the students. This finding expands previous studies because exemplary behaviour is no longer only understood as the conduct of teachers in physical spaces, but also includes moral consistency in digital spaces.

This expansion is relevant to [Khoiriyah's \(2024\)](#) study, which shows that PAI teachers in the digital era need to provide exemplary behaviour in digital conduct, build critical digital literacy, instill Islamic values, and direct technology towards social and good purposes. However, Khoiriyah's research uses the Systematic Literature Review method, whereas this study demonstrates the form of exemplary behaviour through empirical data in madrasahs. Here lies the novelty of the research findings: the concept of digital exemplarity does not stop as a normative demand, but is seen in the practices of teachers who connect offline and online behaviours as a unified moral education.

These findings also need to be read critically. The exemplary behaviour of teachers does not automatically result in moral change just because they set an example. Its effectiveness depends on the continuity of habituation, supervision, educational interaction, and institutional support. This is evident from the involvement of the head of the madrasa, class teachers, guidance counsellors, student affairs, and parents in the mentoring process. Therefore, the teacher as a role model is better understood as the center of a coaching ecosystem, not the sole factor in character formation. This finding also reinforces [Sunardi's \(2024\)](#) view that character formation requires a good understanding of religion, engaging and interactive learning strategies, and parental involvement.

Therefore, this research shows that the exemplary behaviour of teachers works through three interconnected stages: values are introduced through learning, values are demonstrated through the teacher's behaviour, and then values are reinforced through habituation and supervision. The pattern aligns with Lickona's framework as it connects moral knowing with moral feeling and moral action. The novelty of the research lies in the finding that the process now takes place in two intertwined environments, namely the madrasah and the digital space. Therefore, Akidah Akhlak teachers must not only serve as role models in conventional behaviour but also as models of digital ethics. Practically, madrasahs need to strengthen the consistency of teachers' behaviour, religious habituation, mentoring, supervision, and integrated digital literacy. Further research can delve into how students compare the exemplary behaviour of teachers with digital figures they follow, so that the position of teachers as a moral reference can be more sharply understood amidst the changing patterns of student identity formation.

Innovation in Akidah Akhlak Learning in the Digital Environment

The research results show that the innovation in Akidah Akhlak learning at MTs

Darul I'tisham Embo, Jenepono Regency, emerged as a response to changes in the learning environment of students in the digital era. The innovation is not only marked by the use of technological devices but, more importantly, by the teachers' efforts to combine digital media with teaching methods that enable students to more actively understand and apply moral values. Interview, observation, and documentation data reveal three main patterns: diversification of learning media, variation in pedagogical strategies, and guidance on the use of technology to remain within the framework of Islamic values. These findings indicate that the digitalisation of learning in madrasahs is beginning to shift from mere device usage to the development of learning experiences that are more relevant to students' lives.

Hasniah, as a teacher of Akidah Akhlak, explained teacher's creativity is not only related to the use of technology but also to the ability to combine various methods to create more participatory learning. In practice, teachers use PowerPoint, educational videos, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp to support the delivery of material. The media are then supplemented with questions and answers, discussions, assignments, and evaluations to ensure that students understand the material being studied. This pattern shows that technology functions as a supporter of the pedagogical process, while the interaction between teachers and students remains an important part of learning.

Field findings also indicate a shift from predominantly lecture-based learning to more varied learning approaches. The teacher combines lectures with group discussions, case studies, presentations, educational videos, and screenings of exemplary stories of the prophets and Islamic figures. These variations make the students more active and help them connect the material of Akidah Akhlak with the realities of everyday life. Pedagogically, this pattern is important because moral education cannot be adequately understood through definitions or memorisation. Students need situations that allow them to interpret values, consider behavioural choices, express opinions, and connect the material with their social experiences.

The teacher's ability to operate technology becomes a key supporting factor. The head of the madrasah considers that a teacher's personal ability to use digital tools facilitates their application in instruction. The findings indicate that teachers' digital competence plays an instrumental role in creating space for innovation. However, the research data also shows that technical skills are not the only determining factor. The ability to choose media, methods, and activities that align with the goals of moral education actually becomes the determining factor in the pedagogical meaning of technology. That orientation is reinforced by the madrasah's policy that encourages an increase in practical activities. Learning innovation does not stand alone as the individual creativity of the teacher, but rather receives support from the institutional orientation of the madrasah. Learning is directed to connect knowledge with practice so that the values of Akidah Akhlak can be present in the skills and behaviour of students.

The findings are relevant to the discussion on the digitalisation of learning experiences in research literature. [Susanti et al. \(2024\)](#) show that digital media and social media can become more relevant mediums for PAI learning in line with technological developments. [Nasaruddin et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasise that the digitalisation of learning at the secondary school level is not sufficient by merely replacing conventional media with digital devices, but it needs to encompass objectives, teaching materials, media, methods, and evaluation. Compared to field findings, practices at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo have shown this direction through a combination of digital media, discussions, case studies, assignments, presentations, and evaluations.

However, the use of video, PowerPoint, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp does not by itself indicate that the learning has become fully innovative. The literature emphasises that technology does not automatically increase student engagement. The pedagogical value of technology depends on the extent to which the media provides opportunities for learners to think, ask questions, discuss, make decisions, collaborate, create works, and reflect. The research findings become more meaningful precisely because teachers do not stop at the use of media, but combine it with discussions, case studies, assignments, and project-based learning. Thus, the innovation found is more accurately understood as the integration of media and learning activities rather than merely the digitisation of learning tools.

Another important finding is the ethical orientation of technology use. The role of teachers as innovators in this research is not only manifested through the development of media and digital methods but also through their ability to guide students to have digital literacy and use technology in accordance with Islamic moral values. This finding expands the understanding of innovation in Akidah Akhlak learning. Technology is not just a tool to make learning more engaging, but rather an environment that can be used to train moral behaviour. The literature in the research materials emphasises that technology can become an environment for moral practice if learners learn to apply Islamic values when using technology, rather than merely learning about values through technology (Juhaidi et al., 2023).

Fajri et al. (2022) show that digital citizenship education needs to build students' abilities to participate responsibly in the digital environment, while Prasetyo et al. (2021) identify digital readiness, digital citizenship competence, and educational policies as important elements in its development. If contextualised in the learning of Akidah Akhlak, these principles can be translated into practices of tabayyun, guarding the tongue, honesty, responsibility, respect for others, and caution in spreading information. Thus, the learning of Akidah Akhlak can address issues that students truly face in the digital space.

At this point, the novelty of this research becomes apparent. Sunardi's (2024) previous research has shown the importance of engaging and interactive Akidah Akhlak learning strategies in character formation for students. However, the previous research focused on eleventh-grade students at MAS Al-Mahdi Serang Banten, while this study examines eighth and ninth-grade students at MTs Darul I'tisham Embo in the context of the digital era. The novelty of this research does not solely lie in the use of digital media, but in the finding that the innovation of Akidah Akhlak learning can serve as a bridge between religious material, active learning experiences, and the formation of behaviours relevant to students' digital lives. This finding theoretically reinforces the idea that the success of learning innovation is determined by the quality of integration between technology, methods, materials, and the goals of moral education. Practically, teachers need to continuously develop their digital skills as well as pedagogical creativity so that technology does not stop being just a presentation tool. Madrasahs also need to maintain institutional support through the provision of facilities, strengthening practical activities, and collaboration among teachers. Further research can delve deeper into the effectiveness of digital case-based learning and authentic projects in shaping digital ethics, particularly through activities such as information verification, educational content production, behaviour reflection, and moral decision-making. This direction will expand the findings of this research from media innovation to innovation in the learning experience of Akidah Akhlak in the digital space.

Transformation of Students' Morals in Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Aspects

The research results show that the exemplary behaviour and creativity of Akidah Akhlak teachers have a positive impact on the moral development of students in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The impact does not appear instantly, but is formed through habituation, exemplary behaviour, motivation, guidance, and the use of creative teaching methods. This finding is important because the formation of character cannot be understood merely through the ability of students to memorise or explain concepts, but must be seen from the ability to understand values, accept and internalise them, and then manifest them in daily behaviour. The teaching of Akidah Akhlak itself is emphasised not to focus solely on knowledge, but also on attitudes and behaviours that can be observed through observation, practical tasks, journals, and portfolios (Damanik & Ningrum, 2025).

In the cognitive aspect, the research found an interesting condition. Some students are not yet able to explain the concept of morality theoretically. NAF, when asked about the definition of akhlak, answered, "I don't know," while SDS answered, "I forgot." At first glance, the findings can be understood as a limitation in cognitive understanding. However, field data shows that the inability to explain definitions does not necessarily indicate a lack of understanding of values. Risnawati explained, "maybe it can't be conveyed through words, but it can be through actions." "It is actually visible." She's continued that students might not be able to verbally express that an action is called morality, but they know which actions are permissible and which are not to be done to others. These findings reveal a gap between declarative knowledge and practical understanding.

This condition can be interpreted through Lickona's character education theory, which places moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action as the three main components of character formation (Purwati et al., 2024). In the context of this research, students are not yet fully proficient in the verbal-conceptual ability to explain morals, but some values are present in their ability to recognise right and wrong actions. Therefore, the research findings indicate that the development of these three domains does not always occur simultaneously. Conceptual knowledge can lag behind experience and behavioural habits. This also indicates that the evaluation of Akidah Akhlak learning, which only uses the ability to answer definitions, has the potential to overlook the moral development that has been observed in the students' behaviour.

In the affective aspect, transformation is seen through more concrete changes in attitude. The Akidah Akhlak teacher stated that after receiving training, the students showed changes such as "being more disciplined, polite, and wise in using digital media." The values that developed were not limited to the relationship between students and teachers, but also included honesty, responsibility, discipline, courtesy, obedience to parents, and respect for others. Interview results show that students are increasingly understanding the importance of honesty, responsibility, discipline, and etiquette in using social media. They are also starting to reduce impolite language, being more cautious before sharing information, and valuing others' opinions more in both direct and digital discussions. The findings indicate that moral education has shifted from normative understanding to the internalisation of values in social interactions.

That affective change cannot be separated from the exemplary behaviour of the teachers and the madrasah environment. Guidance is carried out through congregational prayers, recitation of the Quran, advice, supervision, and habituation to Islamic behaviour. The head of the madrasah also explained that the guidance is not solely the responsibility

of the Aqidah Akhlak teacher, but involves the class guardian, the head of the madrasah, and the student affairs department. When students face problems, the madrasah responds collectively. Thus, affective transformation occurs within an educational ecosystem that provides consistent reinforcement. This is in line with [Mar'atussholehah \(2026\)](#), who places habituation, exemplary behaviour, and moral guidance as central parts of the role of Akidah Akhlak teachers in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of students.

Aspek psikomotorik menunjukkan hasil yang lebih mudah diamati karena nilai-nilai moral telah terwujud dalam tindakan nyata. R, seorang siswa kelas sembilan, menyatakan, "Setelah mempelajari hal ini, saya menjadi lebih tekun saat diminta melakukan sesuatu oleh guru, selalu siap sedia ketika dipanggil, serta patuh kepada orang tua di rumah." Pernyataan tersebut memberikan gambaran konkret mengenai perubahan perilaku, termasuk peningkatan kepatuhan, kesiapan mengikuti instruksi, dan sikap hormat terhadap orang tua. Di lingkungan madrasah, perubahan ini juga tercermin dalam sikap disiplin, kesantunan, tanggung jawab, kepatuhan kepada guru, serta penerapan kebiasaan-kebiasaan religius. Di ruang digital, para siswa mulai menunjukkan sikap hati-hati dalam berbagi informasi dan mengurangi penggunaan bahasa yang kurang santun. Dengan demikian, moralitas tidak hanya tampak dalam interaksi tatap muka, tetapi juga mulai diterapkan dalam perilaku di dunia digital.

The psychomotor aspect shows results that are easier to observe because moral values have been manifested in actions. The statement R a ninth-grade student provides a concrete illustration of behavioural changes, including increased obedience, readiness to follow instructions, and respect for parents. In the madrasah environment, these changes are also reflected in discipline, politeness, responsibility, obedience to teachers, and the practice of religious habits. In the digital space, students are beginning to show caution in sharing information and reducing the use of impolite language. Thus, morals are not only evident in face-to-face interactions but are also beginning to be applied in digital behaviour.

The relationship between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects shows that the exemplary behaviour and creativity of teachers work complementarily. Exemplary behaviour provides concrete examples that can be observed by students, while creative learning offers experiences that help them connect values with real-life issues. Research results show that the use of digital media, educational videos, case discussions, and reflections helps students understand the application of moral values in real life. During the learning process, students appeared more active in discussions, appreciated their peers' opinions, and were able to relate the material to issues of social media ethics, information dissemination, and digital communication etiquette. The pattern shows that moral transformation occurs when learning provides space to understand, experience, and practice values.

This finding also shows a novelty compared to previous research. [Mar'atussholehah \(2026\)](#) found that the teaching of Akidah Akhlak can face issues such as the lack of enthusiasm among students and the failure to instill character values in daily behaviour. This study found a more complex condition: although some students were not yet able to define ethics theoretically, they had already demonstrated behavioural indicators that aligned with ethical values. This difference shows that the success of character development cannot be accurately assessed solely based on cognitive abilities. This research offers the perspective that moral transformation can begin with practice and habituation, then develop towards a more mature conceptual understanding.

In the context of the digital era, these findings have theoretical and practical

implications. Theoretically, the research findings reinforce Lickona's framework that character encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and actions, but at the same time, they show that these three elements can develop at different levels (Purwati et al., 2024). Practically, teachers need to use assessments that combine understanding of the material, attitudes, and actual behaviour. The teaching of Akidah Akhlak also needs to maintain exemplary behaviour, habituation, discussion, reflection, and the practice of using technology in accordance with Islamic values. Thus, the success of moral education is more accurately seen in the consistency of students in applying values, whether in madrasah, family, or digital spaces.

Further research can deepen the dynamics of these changes through longitudinal observation to determine whether the good behaviour that has been formed through habituation can develop into a more conscious and consistent moral understanding. Further studies also need to compare the experiences of students in the madrasah, family, and social media environments because these three contexts have different influences on character formation. The direction of this research is important to test the sustainability of the transformation from moral action to a stronger internalisation of values, while also clarifying the position of Akidah Akhlak teachers in facing competition from sources of exemplary behaviour in the digital environment.

Conclusion

Research results show that teachers play an important role as role models, innovators, and motivators through honest, disciplined, responsible, polite behaviour, the practice of worship, and the wise use of technology in accordance with Islamic values. Learning innovations are realised through the use of PowerPoint, educational videos, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, discussions, Q&A sessions, case studies, presentations, and project-based learning. The exemplary behaviour and creativity positively contribute to the formation of students' morals. Although some students are not yet able to explain the concept of morals theoretically, they have demonstrated its application through discipline, honesty, responsibility, politeness, obedience to teachers and parents, and wisdom in using digital technology. The limitations of the research lie in the case focus, which only covers one madrasah, the data sources limited to teachers, the head of the madrasah, class advisors, and students in grades VIII and IX, as well as the use of a qualitative approach that produces contextual understanding without quantitative measurement of behavioural changes. Subsequent research is recommended to expand the context of the madrasah, use a longitudinal approach or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, and to examine more deeply the sustainability of character formation among students in a digital environment.

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