

TEACHER EXEMPLARITY AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS' MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN ISLAMIC DIASPORA EDUCATION

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Abstrak

This study aims to examine the relationship between teacher role modeling and students' moral development strategies at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia, an Islamic diaspora educational institution facing the challenge of character formation within a multicultural environment. The research employed a quantitative correlational design involving all teachers as respondents through a total sampling technique. Data were collected using Likert-scale questionnaires measuring teacher role modeling and students' moral development strategies and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment correlation. The findings reveal that teacher role modeling was rated at a very high level ($M = 4.64$), as were the strategies for students' moral development ($M = 4.74$). The Pearson correlation test yielded a coefficient of $r = 0.834$, indicating a very strong positive relationship between the two variables. These results suggest that the better the teacher's role modeling, the more effective the implementation of students' moral development strategies. The most influential dimensions of role modeling include honesty, discipline, exemplary worship practices, patience, and consistency between words and actions. This study highlights teacher role modeling as a key determinant of successful moral development in the context of Islamic diaspora education. Therefore, strengthening the school's religious culture, promoting habitual worship practices, monitoring student behavior, and fostering sustainable collaboration between schools and parents are essential for consistently instilling moral values in students' daily lives.

Keywords: teacher exemplary behavior, moral development, Islamic education



Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis hubungan antara keteladanan guru dan strategi pembinaan akhlak siswa di SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia, sebuah lembaga pendidikan Islam diaspora yang menghadapi tantangan pembentukan karakter dalam lingkungan multikultural. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional dan melibatkan seluruh guru sebagai responden melalui teknik total sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner skala Likert yang mengukur keteladanan guru dan strategi pembinaan akhlak siswa, kemudian dianalisis dengan statistik deskriptif dan uji korelasi Pearson Product Moment. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keteladanan guru berada pada kategori sangat tinggi ($M = 4,64$), demikian pula strategi pembinaan akhlak siswa ($M = 4,74$). Uji korelasi menghasilkan koefisien sebesar $r = 0,834$, yang menunjukkan hubungan positif sangat kuat antara kedua variabel. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa semakin baik keteladanan guru, semakin efektif strategi pembinaan akhlak yang diterapkan kepada siswa. Aspek keteladanan yang paling berkontribusi meliputi kejujuran, kedisiplinan, keteladanan ibadah, kesabaran, serta konsistensi antara ucapan dan tindakan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keteladanan guru merupakan faktor kunci dalam keberhasilan pembinaan akhlak siswa pada konteks pendidikan Islam diaspora. Oleh karena itu, penguatan budaya religius sekolah, pembiasaan ibadah, pengawasan perilaku, serta kolaborasi berkelanjutan antara sekolah dan orang tua perlu terus dikembangkan guna menanamkan nilai-nilai akhlak secara konsisten dalam kehidupan sehari-hari siswa.

Kata kunci: keteladanan guru, pembinaan akhlak, pendidikan Islam

Introduction

Islamic education has a strategic role in shaping learners' character, moral consciousness, and religious identity. Its task is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge, but also includes the cultivation of akhlaq through the internalization of values in everyday conduct. In this sense, moral education in Islam is closely related to character formation through knowledge, habituation, spiritual awareness, and exemplary practice. Halstead (2004) argues that Islamic education provides a distinctive moral framework grounded in religious values, while Shah (2006) emphasizes that Islamic educational leadership is inseparable from moral responsibility. This perspective is also reinforced by recent Indonesian studies that discuss Qur'anic and Prophetic foundations of moral education, religious moderation, and the relevance of Islamic values for contemporary educational

practice (Darmawan & Nugroho, 2025; Husin et al., 2025; Maulida & Makrufi, 2025; Rifa, 2024).

Teacher exemplarity is therefore a crucial element in Islamic moral education. Teachers are not only transmitters of curriculum content, but also moral agents whose behavior becomes a visible reference for students. Bandura's social cognitive theory explains that students learn many forms of behavior through observation, modelling, and social interaction (Bandura, 2001, 2006). In character education literature, the teacher is often described as a caregiver, model, and mentor whose everyday interactions communicate moral messages to learners (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Lickona, 1997). Sanderse (2013) further emphasizes that role modelling becomes educationally meaningful when students can identify morally significant traits and understand how those traits can be acquired. This argument is supported by Sanger and Osguthorpe (2013), who show that modelling is widely understood as a central means of moral education in teacher preparation.

In the context of Islamic education, teacher exemplarity resonates with the concept of *uswah hasanah*, namely the presence of exemplary conduct that allows learners to see religious values enacted in concrete behavior. Thus, a teacher's honesty, discipline, patience, worship practices, and consistency between words and actions are not supplementary aspects of teaching; they are part of the moral curriculum experienced by students. Recent Indonesian studies also show the importance of teacher personality, professional competence, religious character development, and teacher efforts in building responsibility, discipline, and moral behavior among students (Apriyadi & Bedi, 2024a, 2024b; Asril & Dafit, 2024; Mufarrohah & Suyadi, 2025; Muhammad et al., 2025; Musfirotun et al., 2025; Sari & Budiyo, 2025).

Strategies for students' moral development require structured and continuous practices. Moral formation cannot rely on verbal instruction alone. It needs habituation, direct advice, behavioral supervision, persuasive communication, and a religious school climate that enables students to practice values repeatedly. Research in Indonesian Islamic education has shown that habituation and teacher modelling are frequently used to internalize *akhlaq* values (Muslimah et al., 2024), that religious

culture supports the strengthening of students' character (Hafiz et al., 2025; Yazid et al., 2025), and that full-day school programs, extracurricular religious activities, internalization strategies, and school leadership can contribute to religious character formation (Isnaini & Istanto, 2025; Nasukah & Fidayanti, 2024; Tamara et al., 2024; Umam et al., 2025; Yanti & Choiri, 2024). Other studies also point to the need for adaptive strategies in addressing students' social behavior, bullying, spiritual development, and digital-era moral challenges (Ardyanti et al., 2025; Fitriyah et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2024, 2025; Januaripin et al., 2025; Purba et al., 2025).

The issue becomes more complex in Islamic diaspora education. Diaspora students often encounter multiple cultural norms, languages, social expectations, and identity negotiations. Research on immigration, acculturation, ethnic identity, and super-diversity shows that migrant communities experience identity formation within complex cultural and social environments (Berry, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001; Vertovec, 2007). In this situation, Islamic educational institutions can function not only as places of learning, but also as spaces for maintaining religious identity, ethical values, and cultural continuity. Studies on Islamic schools in minority and multicultural contexts highlight the importance of school culture, identity formation, and religious educational environments for Muslim students (Merry & Driessen, 2005; Zine, 2006). In the Indonesian overseas education context, studies on Islamic education abroad also show the importance of curriculum development, discipline, and religious values for Indonesian learners outside the country (Indriya et al., 2024; Pangestu & Lisnawati, 2024).

Although previous studies have discussed teacher exemplarity, habituation, religious culture, and moral development in Islamic education, several gaps remain. Most studies are still centered on formal schools or madrasahs in Indonesia, while research on Islamic moral education in diaspora and non-formal settings remains limited. In addition, many previous studies use qualitative descriptive approaches that emphasize strategies, practices, or program descriptions. Fewer studies statistically test the relationship between teacher exemplarity and strategies for students' moral development.

Consequently, there is still a need for empirical evidence that explains how strongly teacher exemplarity is associated with moral development strategies in diaspora-based Islamic education.

The novelty of this study lies in its twofold contribution. First, it examines moral development in the distinctive context of Islamic diaspora education, particularly at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia as a non-formal educational institution for Indonesian children abroad. Second, it offers a quantitative-correlational reading of the relationship between teacher exemplarity and strategies for students' moral development. Based on this background and research gap, this study aims to analyze the relationship between teacher exemplarity and strategies for students' moral development at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia. Specifically, it examines the extent to which teacher exemplarity correlates with the implementation of moral development strategies in the context of Islamic diaspora education.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The design was selected because the main objective of the study was to examine the relationship between two measured variables: teacher exemplarity and strategies for students' moral development. The research was conducted at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia. This location was selected purposively because it represents a non-formal Islamic educational setting serving Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia. The choice of this context is academically important because diaspora-based Islamic education faces distinctive challenges, including multicultural interaction, identity maintenance, and limited access to formal Indonesian schooling structures.

The primary data were obtained from 14 teachers/instructors at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia. Total sampling was applied because the accessible teacher population was relatively limited. The respondents represented several teaching assignments, including early childhood/PAUD, Grades 1-6, combined class teaching, and subject teaching. Data were collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire

consisting of 20 items: 10 items measuring teacher exemplarity and 10 items measuring strategies for students' moral development. Likert-type scales are appropriate for measuring perceptions when the researcher clearly defines the construct, response options, and interpretation procedures (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). The teacher exemplarity variable included indicators of honesty, punctuality, discipline, worship exemplarity, patience, responsibility, polite communication, fairness, and consistency between words and actions. The moral development strategy variable included indicators of worship habituation, direct moral advice, educational reprimand, direct modelling, behavioral supervision, motivation, cultivation of honesty, appreciation, persuasive guidance, and the creation of a religious school environment. Supporting data were also obtained through limited observation of school activities and documentary sources, including school profile information, moral development programs, religious activity records, and relevant institutional documents.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to identify the mean score and category of each variable. Second, instrument consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients showed good internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.823$ for the teacher exemplarity scale, $\alpha = 0.826$ for the moral development strategy scale, and $\alpha = 0.903$ for the combined 20-item scale. These reliability values were retained from the original data analysis and were not modified in this revision. Cronbach's alpha is commonly used to evaluate internal consistency, although it should be interpreted as evidence of scale consistency rather than as proof of validity by itself (Bonett & Wright, 2015; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Third, the Pearson Product Moment correlation test was used to examine the relationship between teacher exemplarity and strategies for students' moral development. The correlation analysis produced $r = .834$ with $p = .0002$, reported as $p < .001$. The interpretation of correlation strength followed general methodological guidance on correlation coefficients, while still considering sample size and research context (Akoglu, 2018; Schober et al., 2018). The interpretation of the findings was supported by Bandura's social

cognitive theory and by the Islamic educational concept of *uswah hasanah*.

Teacher Exemplarity and Students' Moral Development Strategies

The descriptive findings show that the two variables examined in this study were positioned in the very high category. Teacher exemplarity obtained a mean score of 4.64 on a five-point Likert scale, while strategies for students' moral development obtained a mean score of 4.74. The result indicates that the educational environment in this institution is perceived as strongly supported by teachers' moral conduct and by systematic efforts to cultivate students' *akhlaq*. In other words, moral education in this setting is not limited to classroom explanation, but is embedded in daily interaction, worship habituation, correction, advice, supervision, and teacher-student communication.

The very high score for teacher exemplarity suggests that teachers are perceived as credible moral references. In the context of moral education, credibility is essential because students do not merely receive values as verbal messages; they evaluate whether those values are visible in the conduct of the adults who teach them. Teachers who show honesty, responsibility, politeness, fairness, religious commitment, and consistency between speech and action make moral values concrete and observable. This finding is consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which explains that human learning occurs through reciprocal relations among personal factors, behavior, and social environment (Bandura, 2001). In the school setting, teachers are part of the moral environment from which students observe what is acceptable, valuable, and worthy of imitation. It also corresponds to character education literature, which emphasizes that moral learning is shaped by school climate, adult modelling, and the everyday relationships that students experience at school (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Cohen, 2006; Lickona, 1997).

The mean score for students' moral development strategies, which is slightly higher than teacher exemplarity, indicates that teachers perceive the school's moral formation efforts as actively implemented. The strategies include habituation of worship, direct moral advice, modelling, supervision, motivation, appreciation for good behavior, and

personal guidance. Such practices show that moral development is understood as a continuous pedagogical process rather than a single instructional activity. Moral values need to be explained cognitively, experienced affectively, and repeated behaviorally until they become part of students' everyday habits. This view is consistent with research on social and emotional learning, which shows that structured school-based interventions can support students' prosocial behavior and ethical development when implemented consistently (Durlak et al., 2011).

This descriptive pattern is important when read through the concept of *uswah hasanah* in Islamic education. Islamic moral education emphasizes the unity between knowledge and action; the teacher is expected not only to explain *akhlaq* but also to embody it. Halstead (2007) argues that Islamic moral education is directed toward inner change through the internalization of values, not merely the transmission of religious information. The present finding supports that view because the moral development strategies at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia appear to operate through the combination of instruction, habituation, and teacher exemplarity. The school's moral culture becomes meaningful because students encounter values in the visible behavior of their teachers.

Compared with previous studies, these findings confirm the central role of teachers' personal qualities in character formation. Musfirotnun et al. (2025) reported that teacher personality competence is related to students' responsibility, while Mufarrohah and Suyadi (2025) found that teacher exemplarity functions as a living example in shaping children's politeness and moral behavior. The present study strengthens those findings by showing that the relationship is also observable in a diaspora-based non-formal Islamic education context. Internationally, the result corresponds with Sanderse (2013), who argues that role modelling is a key mechanism in moral and character education, and with Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who emphasize the importance of teacher social and emotional competence for classroom outcomes. However, this study adds a contextual contribution by showing that teacher exemplarity has special importance in an Indonesian Islamic educational institution abroad, where teachers are also expected to help preserve religious and cultural identity.

Dominant Moral Practices and Areas for Pedagogical Strengthening

The indicator analysis shows that teacher exemplarity was most visible in polite communication when correcting students, honesty, fairness, worship exemplarity, and consistency between words and actions. These dominant indicators reveal that teachers at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia are perceived not only as transmitters of knowledge, but also as moral figures whose interpersonal conduct influences the students' moral atmosphere. The prominence of polite correction is especially significant. Moral education does not occur only when teachers deliver religious lessons; it also takes place when teachers respond to mistakes, correct misconduct, give advice, and manage conflict. A teacher who corrects students politely teaches more than discipline; the teacher also models respect, emotional control, and ethical communication.

Honesty, fairness, and consistency between words and actions are central to the credibility of moral instruction. If students perceive that teachers are honest and fair, they are more likely to accept advice, correction, and guidance as morally legitimate. Conversely, if teachers teach values without embodying them, the educational message may lose persuasive power. This finding is closely related to Sanger and Osguthorpe's (2013) argument that modelling is widely perceived as a major means through which moral education occurs. It is also supported by Osguthorpe (2008), who argues that teachers' dispositions and moral character matter because they influence the ethical meaning of teaching. At SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia, the dominant indicators suggest that teachers' moral authority is constructed through both religious practice and interpersonal consistency.

At the same time, the findings indicate several areas that still require strengthening, particularly punctuality and patience in dealing with students. These aspects should not be interpreted as major weaknesses, because the overall score of teacher exemplarity remains very high. Rather, they show specific dimensions that can be improved to make teacher exemplarity more complete and consistent. Punctuality teaches discipline through practice. A teacher who arrives on time, begins activities as scheduled, and respects institutional routines communicates that discipline is not only demanded from students but also practiced by educators. Patience, meanwhile, reflects emotional maturity, empathy, and wisdom in guiding learners with

different personalities and behavioral challenges.

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, punctuality and patience are not merely professional traits; they are observable behaviors that may shape students' own self-regulation. Bandura (2001, 2006) emphasizes that people learn from the social environment through observational and self-regulatory processes. When students repeatedly observe teachers who are punctual and patient, they encounter concrete models of disciplined and emotionally controlled behavior. In Islamic moral education, these qualities are also part of *akhlaq* because they reflect *amanah*, *sabr*, and responsibility. Thus, improving punctuality and patience is not only a matter of professional performance, but also a way of strengthening the moral consistency of the teacher as *uswah*.

For the second variable, the dominant moral development strategies were the cultivation of honesty, worship habituation, direct moral advice, educational correction, and appreciation for good behavior. These practices show that moral formation in the school is implemented through multiple pathways. Honesty is cultivated as a foundational moral value; worship habituation trains students in discipline and spiritual awareness; direct advice clarifies moral expectations; correction guides students when they make mistakes; and appreciation reinforces positive behavior. This combination reflects a comprehensive approach to moral development because it involves knowledge, feeling, action, and social reinforcement.

The areas that need further improvement are behavioral supervision and persuasive guidance. Supervision is necessary because moral development requires continuity between values taught in the classroom and behavior displayed in daily life. However, supervision should not be understood merely as control or surveillance. In moral education, supervision becomes more effective when it is combined with dialogue, personal attention, and reflective guidance. Thornberg (2008) warns that values education can become weak when teachers lack professional knowledge about how moral values should be translated into pedagogical practice. Therefore, persuasive guidance is important because it helps students understand why a value matters, rather than only encouraging obedience to rules.

The findings also support studies on habituation and religious school culture. Muslimah et al. (2024) emphasize that the internalization of *akhlaq karimah* requires exemplary methods and habituation, while Hafiz et al. (2025) and Yazid et

al. (2025) show that a religious atmosphere can strengthen students' character. The present study agrees with these studies but gives an additional explanation: religious culture and moral habituation become more educationally persuasive when teachers themselves embody the values promoted by the program. This is also consistent with Indonesian studies on religious activities, leadership, full-day school, and internalization strategies in strengthening moral and religious character (Hafsoh, 2025; Isnaini & Istanto, 2025; Tamara et al., 2024; Umam et al., 2025; Yanti & Choiri, 2024). Programs provide structure, but teachers provide credibility.

Correlational Evidence between Teacher Exemplarity and Moral Development Strategies

The Pearson Product Moment correlation test produced a coefficient of $r = 0.834$ with $p < .001$. This result indicates a very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between teacher exemplarity and strategies for students' moral development. In practical terms, higher teacher exemplarity is associated with stronger implementation of moral development strategies. The positive direction of the relationship means that when teachers are perceived as more consistent in displaying moral, religious, responsible, and communicative behavior, moral development strategies are also perceived as more active and effective. The significance value confirms that this relationship is not incidental within the dataset, even though the study involved a limited number of respondents.

Scientifically, this result shows that teacher exemplarity is not a peripheral element in moral education. It is a central pedagogical condition that supports the effectiveness of moral development strategies. Advice, worship habituation, supervision, appreciation, and correction are more likely to be accepted when they come from teachers who embody the values being taught. If a teacher asks students to be honest but does not demonstrate honesty, moral instruction becomes weak and contradictory. If a teacher encourages discipline but does not show punctuality, discipline may appear as a demand imposed on students rather than a shared moral practice. Conversely, when teachers' speech and conduct are aligned, moral guidance becomes more persuasive and meaningful.

This result is strongly relevant to Bandura's social cognitive theory. Students learn not only through direct teaching but also through observing significant models in their social

environment. Teachers are significant models because they possess institutional, moral, and religious authority. Through repeated observation, students learn how teachers speak, keep promises, correct mistakes, maintain worship, manage time, and treat others fairly. The strong correlation found in this study can therefore be interpreted as empirical support for the idea that moral modelling and moral strategy are mutually reinforcing. Teacher exemplarity gives moral strategies their credibility, while moral strategies provide structured opportunities for exemplarity to be observed, repeated, and internalized.

The result also strengthens the concept of *uswah hasanah* in Islamic education. In this tradition, the teacher's example is not separate from the method of moral instruction; it is part of the method itself. A teacher who becomes a living example of honesty, discipline, patience, politeness, and worship communicates *akhlaq* through action. The strong correlation between the two variables suggests that moral development at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia operates through this integration. The teacher does not merely teach moral rules, but becomes part of the moral environment that gives those rules meaning. This interpretation is consistent with Halstead's (2007) emphasis that Islamic moral education aims at inner transformation through value internalization.

The finding is also consistent with international research on teacher modelling. Sanderse (2013) explains that role modelling in moral and character education should not be understood as simple imitation. Effective modelling requires admirable traits, student recognition of those traits, and pedagogical explanation that helps students understand why the traits matter. Sanger and Osguthorpe (2013) also found that preservice teachers commonly regard modelling as a primary means of moral education. The present study extends this discussion by providing a statistical relationship between teacher exemplarity and moral development strategies in an Islamic diaspora setting. In other words, the study does not merely claim conceptually that teachers matter; it shows empirically that teacher exemplarity is strongly associated with the implementation of moral development strategies.

Compared with Indonesian studies, the result supports the findings of Musfirotnun et al. (2025), Mufarrohah and Suyadi (2025), and Muslimah et al. (2024), but it also fills a specific gap. Earlier studies tend to focus on formal schools, madrasahs, or early childhood education in Indonesia, often using

qualitative or descriptive approaches. This study contributes a quantitative correlation analysis in a non-formal Indonesian Islamic education institution in Malaysia. The diaspora context makes the finding more distinctive because teachers are not only responsible for classroom instruction; they also function as guardians of religious identity, moral culture, and Indonesian-Islamic values in a multicultural environment.

Integrated Discussion: Social Learning, Islamic Diaspora Context, Implications, and Future Directions

Taken together, the descriptive and correlational findings indicate that moral education at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia is built upon the close relationship between teacher exemplarity and moral development strategies. Teacher exemplarity provides the moral credibility of education, while moral development strategies provide structured practices through which values are cultivated. The very high descriptive scores and the very strong correlation show that these two elements operate together rather than separately. This integrated finding is the central contribution of the study: in Islamic diaspora education, moral formation depends not only on curriculum, programs, or religious activities, but also on the moral presence of teachers who serve as visible models for students.

Theoretically, the findings can be interpreted through the convergence of social cognitive theory, role-modelling theory, and Islamic moral education. Social cognitive theory explains how students learn by observing meaningful figures in their environment. Role-modelling theory clarifies that teachers' traits become educational when students recognize them as worthy of imitation and when teachers connect those traits with moral explanation. Islamic moral education adds a spiritual and normative dimension by emphasizing the unity of knowledge, action, and akhlaq. In this study, these three perspectives meet in the figure of the teacher as a moral model, a religious guide, and a pedagogical actor. Teacher exemplarity becomes the point where theory, practice, and religious values intersect.

The diaspora context gives this finding additional significance. SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia serves Indonesian children in a multicultural environment. In such a context, moral development is not only about shaping individual behavior; it is also about preserving religious, cultural, and national identity. Students may interact with different languages,

social expectations, and cultural practices outside the school environment. Research on acculturation, ethnic identity, and super-diversity explains why diaspora students require educational spaces that help them negotiate identity while maintaining meaningful cultural and religious continuity (Berry, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001; Vertovec, 2007). Teacher exemplarity helps them see that Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, patience, respect, responsibility, and worship can remain relevant in plural social life.

This interpretation is supported by research on Islamic schools and Muslim minority education. Merry and Driessen (2005) show that Islamic schools in Western countries are shaped by policy, identity, and community expectations, while Zine (2006) demonstrates how Muslim girls' experiences in Islamic schools involve both identity negotiation and responses to wider social pressures. Although the present study was conducted in Malaysia rather than in a Western minority context, the findings are relevant because SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia also functions as an educational space where religious and cultural identity are maintained. The present study adds quantitative evidence from the Malaysian context and shows that teacher exemplarity is strongly related to moral development strategies in such settings.

The findings also extend research on religious school culture and character education. Hafiz et al. (2025), Yazid et al. (2025), and Tamara et al. (2024) show that religious programs, extracurricular activities, and school culture contribute to character formation. The present study agrees with these conclusions but emphasizes that programs require teacher credibility. A school may design worship habituation, moral supervision, or character-building activities, but these programs will be more convincing when students observe that teachers practice the same values. This is why the relationship between exemplarity and strategy is crucial. Moral programs without teacher exemplarity risk becoming formal routines, while teacher exemplarity without structured strategies may remain personal virtue without systematic educational impact.

The practical implication is that teacher development should include moral and relational dimensions, not only pedagogical technique. Teachers need to strengthen consistency between speech and action, punctuality, patience, persuasive communication, and reflective moral guidance. The areas for improvement found in this study provide a useful agenda for

institutional development. Punctuality can be strengthened through professional discipline and school routines; patience can be developed through reflective practice and training in student guidance; persuasive communication can be improved through mentoring and teacher collaboration. These improvements are important because the teacher's everyday conduct becomes part of the moral curriculum experienced by students.

Institutionally, SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia can use these findings to strengthen its moral development model. The school should continue worship habituation, direct advice, appreciation for good behavior, and cultivation of honesty, while also improving behavioral supervision and persuasive guidance. Collaboration with parents is also important because students' moral development does not occur only in school. Family, peer relations, digital media, and the wider multicultural environment also shape moral behavior. Therefore, school-parent cooperation can help maintain continuity between values taught at school and practices at home. In diaspora education, this cooperation is especially important because families and schools share the task of preserving religious and cultural identity.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study was conducted in one institution with 14 teacher/instructor respondents, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian schools abroad or all Islamic diaspora educational institutions. Second, the data were collected through perception-based questionnaires, which may contain respondent subjectivity. Third, the study focused on the relationship between teacher exemplarity and moral development strategies, while other factors such as family environment, peer interaction, social media exposure, and broader multicultural influences were not examined in depth. These limitations do not weaken the significance of the findings, but they indicate the need for broader and deeper follow-up studies.

Future research should involve more institutions and larger samples from different SB Muhammadiyah centers or other Indonesian Islamic diaspora schools in Malaysia and beyond. A mixed-methods design is also recommended so that quantitative correlation can be complemented by interviews, observation, and analysis of students' lived experiences. Such studies would help explain how students actually perceive teacher exemplarity, how moral values are negotiated in multicultural settings, and how school-based strategies interact

with family and community influences. By expanding the research design, future studies can develop a more comprehensive model of Islamic moral education in diaspora contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that teacher exemplarity has a very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with strategies for students' moral development at SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia. The findings show that teacher exemplarity was positioned in the very high category with a mean score of 4.64, while strategies for students' moral development were also in the very high category with a mean score of 4.74. The Pearson Product Moment correlation test produced a coefficient of $r = .834$ with $p < .001$, indicating that stronger teacher exemplarity is closely associated with stronger implementation of moral development strategies. This result confirms that moral development in Islamic diaspora education cannot be separated from the moral quality, consistency, and pedagogical presence of teachers.

The discussion and analysis demonstrate that teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge, but also as moral models whose conduct shapes the credibility of moral education. In the context of SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia, teacher exemplarity is reflected through honesty, fairness, polite communication, worship practices, responsibility, and consistency between words and actions. These qualities make moral values visible and understandable for students. Strategies such as worship habituation, direct advice, educational correction, appreciation, supervision, and persuasive guidance become more effective when they are supported by teachers who embody the same values in their daily conduct. Therefore, teacher exemplarity should be understood as a core pedagogical condition in students' moral development, not merely as an additional personal quality.

Theoretically, the findings strengthen Bandura's social cognitive theory, especially the idea that students learn through observation, modelling, and interaction with significant figures in their environment. The study also supports the Islamic educational concept of *uswah hasanah*, which emphasizes that

moral education becomes meaningful when teachers provide living examples of akhlaq. In this sense, teacher exemplarity becomes a bridge between moral instruction and moral internalization. The study contributes to the literature by showing that this relationship is not only relevant in formal Islamic schools or madrasahs, but also in non-formal Islamic diaspora education, where schools play an important role in preserving students' religious, moral, and cultural identity within a multicultural environment.

Practically, this study recommends that SB Muhammadiyah Kepong Malaysia continue strengthening its moral development programs through worship habituation, religious school culture, direct moral guidance, behavioral supervision, and collaboration with parents. Teachers should also continue improving punctuality, patience, persuasive communication, and consistency between speech and action. These aspects are important because students' moral learning is shaped not only by what teachers teach, but also by how teachers act, communicate, correct mistakes, and respond to daily challenges. Institutionally, teacher development programs should include moral, spiritual, and relational dimensions, so that teachers are prepared not only as instructors but also as moral educators.

For future research, this study recommends broader investigations involving more respondents and several Islamic diaspora educational institutions in Malaysia or other countries. Since this study used a correlational quantitative design and involved 14 teacher/instructor respondents from one institution, future studies may apply mixed-methods approaches by combining questionnaires, interviews, classroom observation, and student perspectives. Such research would provide deeper insight into how students experience teacher exemplarity, how moral values are internalized in diaspora contexts, and how family, peer interaction, digital media, and multicultural environments influence students' moral development.

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