

Becoming a Professional Educator: Teachers' Reflective Practices in Shaping Students' Moral Character

Indah Sari*

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara
Email: indah71190211078@uisu.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze teachers' strategies in shaping students' moral character through their roles as role models, mentors, advisors, and inspirers at MTs Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with Aqidah Akhlak teachers and students, as well as field documentation. The findings reveal that the integration of teachers' roles as role models and mentors has a significant impact on students' discipline in vertical worship practices (morality toward Allah SWT) and obedience to authority (morality toward teachers and parents). However, the study also uncovers a disconnection in horizontal behavior, where peer interactions and personal integrity still demonstrate tendencies toward deviant conduct due to external environmental influences and low self-resilience. Data analysis concludes that methods of religious habituation and contextual advice are effective in fostering ritual awareness, yet require further reinforcement in the teacher's role as an inspirer to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation. The implications of this study emphasize the necessity of synergy between teachers' reflective practices and intensive collaboration with parents in order to bridge the gap between formal obedience and authentic character awareness. This research contributes to the development of a morality-based teacher professionalism model within the ecosystem of contemporary Islamic education.

Keywords: *Teacher Professionalism; Character Formation; Reflective Practice*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi guru dalam pembentukan akhlak murid melalui peran sebagai teladan, pembimbing, penasihat, dan inspirator di MTs Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan guru Akidah Akhlak serta siswa, dan dokumentasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi peran guru sebagai teladan dan pembimbing memberikan dampak signifikan terhadap kedisiplinan ibadah vertikal (akhlak kepada Allah SWT) dan kepatuhan terhadap otoritas (akhlak kepada guru dan orang tua). Namun, penelitian ini juga mengungkap adanya diskoneksi pada perilaku horizontal, di mana interaksi antarteman sebaya dan integritas personal masih menunjukkan kecenderungan penyimpangan akibat pengaruh lingkungan eksternal dan rendahnya resiliensi diri. Analisis data menyimpulkan bahwa metode pembiasaan religius dan nasihat kontekstual efektif dalam membangun kesadaran ritual, tetapi membutuhkan penguatan pada aspek peran guru sebagai inspirator untuk memicu motivasi intrinsik siswa. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya sinergi antara praktik reflektif guru dan kolaborasi intensif dengan orang tua guna menutup celah antara ketaatan formal dan

kesadaran karakter yang autentik. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan model profesionalisme guru berbasis moralitas dalam ekosistem pendidikan Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Profesionalisme Guru; Pembentukan Akhlak; Praktik Reflektif*

Introduction

Teacher professionalism within the landscape of contemporary education has undergone a fundamental shift in meaning, where competence is no longer merely understood as mastery of subject matter, instructional strategies, or administrative proficiency. Instead, professionalism is now increasingly defined by teachers' ability to position students as the central subjects of the entire educational process. Professional teachers are required to possess the sensitivity to understand students' needs, characteristics, and psychological dynamics through profound reflective practices. Without such depth of reflection, pedagogical processes risk becoming trapped in mechanical routines that merely pursue formal academic achievement while neglecting the humanistic dimension and the holistic development of students' character and personality (Cramer et al., 2023).

Although formal indicators such as certification and curriculum mastery remain the foundations of competence, overly technical-administrative orientation often reduces the teacher-student relationship to rigid transactional relationships. This approach that overemphasizes technical aspects tends to leave teachers stuck in routines that ignore moral sensitivity and exemplary values. In fact, being a professional teacher actually requires a balance between pedagogical skills with empathy and reflection on the needs of students. This is crucial to ensure that education remains *humanizing education* that goes beyond just knowledge transfer (Mohamad et al., 2022).

The urgency of this study is even more urgent if it is associated with the complexity of student ethical problems in the current school environment. The phenomenon of degradation of respect, increasing bullying behavior, and weakening of social responsibility show that moral formation is still a serious problem that has not been resolved. In this situation of moral crisis, teachers can no longer only function as technical teachers, but must be present as moral inspirers and guides. Given the strategic position of teachers as a model of behavior that tends to be imitated by students, professionalism should not only be measured through academic success, but also by teachers' ability to internalize moral values in daily practice at school (Aldrup et al., 2022).

Previous studies by researchers (Cramer et al., 2023) explained that contemporary teacher professionalism needs to be supported by reflective ability to understand the complexity of education, while (Mohamad et al., 2022) emphasized that reflective practice plays an important role in improving the instructional quality of teachers. (Tobin et al., 2025) also showed that collaborative reflection is able to strengthen

professional learning and the quality of pedagogical interactions. In the context of character formation, (Rahayu et al., 2024) explained that teacher role models are an important factor because students tend to imitate educators' behavior, while (Palunga & Marzuki, 2017) found that teachers play a strategic role in building character through habituation, guidance, and strengthening moral values. In line with that, (Birhan et al., 2021) emphasized that character education requires the consistent involvement of teachers and the school environment. However, these studies still tend to discuss reflective practices and moral formation separately, so this study is here to integrate teachers' reflective practices as a basis for professionalism as well as an instrument for moral formation and moral inspiration of students.

Departing from this frame of mind, this study aims to analyze how reflective practice can construct teachers' professionalism in building students' morals. This research is based on the assumption that reflective teachers will be better able to understand the objective condition of students, position themselves as role models, and create a learning ecosystem that is not only oriented towards intellectual intelligence, but also on moral integrity. The main question to be answered is how to transform into a professional teacher who is able to shape students' morals through strengthening reflective practices in learning. This study is expected to be able to reposition the direction of education to be more responsive to the needs of character development and social concern of future generations.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a *field research* design to explore in depth the role of educators in student-centered learning practices. The location of the research was determined at Madrasah Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Percut Sei Tuan. The primary data in this study is sourced from key informants through *purposive sampling*, including Madrasah Heads, teachers, and students. The data collection technique was carried out through three main instruments, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations are directed to directly observe the teacher's pedagogical behavior in the classroom, while interviews are used to explore the philosophical foundation and subjective experience of teachers in reflecting. Documentation serves as a data amplifier to validate school policies or programs that support moral formation. Data analysis is carried out in a circular and continuous manner following an interactive model that includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation (*data display*), and conclusion drawing or verification. At the reduction stage, the data obtained in the field is sorted and simplified to focus on the theme of the student-centered role of educators. Furthermore, the data is presented narratively to see the pattern of relationships between the research variables. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions that are tested for credibility through

triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the validity of research findings.

Results and Discussion

Teachers as Role Models

The professionalism of teachers in contemporary educational discourse is no longer measured simply through technical pedagogical competence, but through moral integrity as exemplary figures who present real values and norms. This is based on the theory of social learning where students tend to adopt values through the process of imitating behavior rather than just the transmission of verbal knowledge, so that every action, speech, and habit of the teacher becomes a strategic instrument that shapes the moral perspective of students (Maunah, 2016).

The findings of the study show that teachers who consistently practice time discipline, dress neatly, and communicate politely, succeed in creating an authentic impression that encourages students to do the same without the need for formal coercion. Conversely, the failure of teachers to show good morals will create a dichotomy between rhetoric and reality, which ultimately weakens the effectiveness of character education because students are more likely to imitate real behavior than simply accept dry advice from practice. Therefore, the example of teachers is an axiological foundation that determines the success of the transformation of moral values in the educational ecosystem, where reflective practice is mandatory so that teachers continue to evaluate the suitability between personal behavior and the teachings conveyed.

In a more practical perspective, example has a much stronger influence than formal instruction or punishment in shaping the character of students. Teachers understand that the goal of education is not only to make students academically intelligent, but also to form noble morals so that their behavior does not deviate from religious teachings and social norms, which this process must start from internalizing values in the teacher himself (Brownhill et al., 2021).

Real practices such as teachers who arrive on time and are directly involved in keeping the school environment clean have proven to be a much more effective motivational stimulus for students than just theoretical lectures. In the absence of evidence of real behavior of the figure considered important, moral instruction will only stop as an abstract concept that fails to be internalized into the practical consciousness of the student, so that the professionalism of the teacher cannot be separated from the ability to maintain consistency between words and actions. Thus, the integration between reflective awareness and real action of teachers is an absolute prerequisite in building morality-based professionalism that is able to give birth to a generation with strong character, social responsibility, and authentic moral awareness in daily life (Flores Delgado et al., 2020).

Teacher as a Mentor

The existence of the teacher as a supervisor demands an expansion of the role that is not only limited to classroom instruction, but also to the mastery of a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of individual characteristics of students. Theoretically, the effectiveness of educational guidance depends heavily on the extent to which teachers are able to map the spectrum of students' needs which includes their learning styles, habits, latent potential, and social life backgrounds (Cheung, 2020).

As a reinforcement to this argument, the interview findings emphasized that a teacher must have a deep understanding of the student's profile, because this personal data is the basis of the determinants in determining the techniques and types of guidance interventions that are right on target. A concrete example of this implementation can be seen when a teacher no longer standardizes the approach method, but adjusts the guidance strategy based on the unique talents and sociocultural context of each student, so that the student's self-development process runs more organically and directionally.

Without a deep understanding of these personal aspects, the guidance provided tends to be generic and risks malfunctioning because it does not touch the root of the student's true needs. Thus, mastery of students' backgrounds and potentials is not just an administrative task, but an epistemological foundation for teachers' professionalism in carrying out their functions as transformative supervisors.

This supervisor role strengthens the teacher's position as a facilitator who bridges the gap between academic potential and students' psychosocial independence. Teachers realize that understanding students' learning styles and habits is a crucial diagnostic instrument to ensure that every assistance provided is able to optimize individual talents to the maximum. In practice, teachers who have broad insight into the background of students' lives will be more empathetic and precise in providing direction, so that the guidance not only has an impact on improving academic grades, but also on strengthening character and motivation to learn. This condition is inversely proportional to educational practices that ignore the uniqueness of the individual, in which students often feel alienated and lost their direction due to the teacher's instructions that are irrelevant to the reality of their lives .

This shows that the quality of teacher guidance is directly correlated with the depth of observation data collected regarding student identity. In conclusion, the integration between a holistic understanding of students and the selection of accurate guidance techniques is an absolute prerequisite for the creation of an inclusive educational climate, where each student has the opportunity to grow according to his or her own nature and personal capacity.

Teachers as Advisors

The strategic role of teachers as advisors is a manifestation of moral responsibility to oversee the consistency of students' behavior so that it

remains in harmony with the corridor of religious values and social norms. Theoretically, this advisory function goes beyond just providing examples of behavior (examples), because there is a complexity of student problems that require persuasive and educational verbal interventions. This is based on students' psychological need for direct guidance that is able to touch their affective aspects through intense communication (Thornberg et al., 2020).

As revealed in the interview data, giving advice is not just an incidental activity, but an obligation that must be carried out continuously, both at the beginning, end, and between lesson times. An example of the implementation in the field can be seen in the flexibility of teachers in choosing the right momentum and the use of varied communication techniques, such as inserting educational values through a relaxed and humorous approach so that moral messages are more easily accepted without creating resistance in students. Without a consistent frequency of advice and the right way of delivery, physical example alone will not be strong enough to fortify students' morals from the negative influences of an increasingly complex environment. Therefore, the persistence of teachers in tirelessly advising is a crucial instrument in ensuring that the process of internalizing character continues to run in accordance with the goals of Islamic education.

More deeply, the effectiveness of advice is largely determined by the methodological accuracy and depth of the teacher's empathy for the situation that students are facing. Teachers understand that advice given in a gentle way and tailored to the context of the student's problems or the relevance of the subject matter will have a more significant transformative power than harsh rebukes that are judgmental. This practice shows the integration between social competence and teacher personality, where teachers must be able to read students' inner atmosphere before giving moral direction so that communication is not boring ("The Effects of Two Empathy Strategies in Design Thinking on Pre-Service Teachers' Creativity," 2023).

As an illustration, when teachers give advice while joking but still full of meaning, students tend to feel more valued and open to listening, so that the values conveyed are not seen as a threat but as a need for self-improvement. On the other hand, rigid and non-contextual approaches to advising often distance students from the teacher figure and trigger deviant behavior. This condition emphasizes that the quality of the relationship between teachers and students is a key variable that determines the success of value transformation. Thus, the role of the teacher as an advisor is not only about transferring moral instruction, but about building a heart-to-heart dialogue that aims purely for the good of the future of students so that they remain firm in religious teachings and avoid moral decadence.

Teachers as Inspirations

The role of the teacher as an inspirer is the culmination of the integration of the role of example, guidance, and advisor, which aims to ensure that each educational message does not just stop as a voice heard, but permeates deeply into the student's conscience. Theoretically, inspiration is an internal driving force that is born when a student is no longer just obedient because of instructions, but is moved because of the emotional and spiritual resonance of the teacher's figure. This is based on the principle that true character transformation only occurs when the values conveyed by the teacher are able to penetrate the space of consciousness and settle into the student's identity (Sawyer et al., 2020).

When a teacher who is known for discipline (example), understands learning difficulties (supervisor), and always gives direction with affection (advisor) speaks in front of the class, every word he says has the weight of authority that is able to trigger a paradigm shift in students. On the other hand, without inspiration, the role of the teacher as an advisor and mentor will only become a superficial mechanical routine, where moral messages only "stop" in the ear without ever touching the depths of the heart, which often results in changes in student behavior that are only temporary or pseudo-temporary. Therefore, the position of the teacher as an inspirer is the key determinant that ensures that all the educational energy provided is able to crystallize into an intrinsic motivation for students to continue to grow towards moral glory.

The inspiration of a teacher lies in his ability to unite scientific authority with sincerity of devotion, thus creating a strong inner attachment with the students. Inspirational teachers are aware that every advice and guidance must have a "spirit" in order to be able to move the will of students to improve themselves independently without having to be constantly supervised. In this context, the role of exemplification and mentorship that has been done before acts as a platform of trust; When the students have put their full trust, then every instruction of the teacher will penetrate into the soul and become a moral compass in their daily lives.

A student who feels inspired by his teacher will make that figure an ideal standard in action, so that even in difficult situations, students will reflect on the values that the teacher has taught as a basis for decision-making. Without this element of inspiration, the interaction between teacher and student would only be trapped within the limits of arid academic formalities, where the transfer of values loses its magical power to change lives. Thus, the role of the inspirer is the final estuary that binds the entire dimension of teacher professionalism, which ultimately gives birth to a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has a depth of sense and character that is authentically internalized.

Impact on Students' Morals

The formation of morals is a fundamental orientation in Islamic education that positions teachers as the main catalyst in building spiritual awareness and discipline in student worship. Theoretically, the success of

internalizing divine values cannot be achieved only through cognitive transfer of religious knowledge, but must be through a process of *habituation* and reflective mentoring that is carried out consciously and sustainably so that these values crystallize into character (Khadavi, 2023).

It is based on the principle that authentic religious consciousness is born from an environment that integrates formal instruction with consistent daily practice. The significant impact of teachers on students' spiritual behavior, where most students independently carry out *zuhur* and *ashar* prayers in congregation, as well as fill the waiting time by praying or reading the Qur'an without the need for repressive instructions.

In contrast to the educational approach that simply pursues ritual formalities, this pattern of coaching suggests that teachers are successfully transforming obligations into spiritual needs, although supervision is still required for a small percentage of students to maintain the consistency of their behavior. Therefore, the professionalism of teachers in this realm is an axiological foundation that ensures that every activity in the school, from joint prayer to the reading of the Qur'an before and after study, becomes an effective instrument in bringing students closer to Allah SWT.

The effectiveness of teachers in shaping religious culture is reflected in the atmosphere of solemnity and order that is built in every worship activity in the school environment (Hudri & Umam, 2022). Teachers not only act as teachers of Moral Faith subjects, but also as architects of a spiritual environment that is able to instill gratitude and dependence on the Creator through small practices that mean a lot. Good practice is seen in the performance of short Qur'anic *tadarus* and joint prayers performed solemnly by the disciples, showing that spiritual values have been internalized into their daily practical consciousness.

Without disciplined habituation and a real example of the teacher, religious material will only stop as an abstract concept that fails to affect the real behavior of students outside the classroom. This condition reinforces the argument that the teacher's impact on students' morals is most evident in the transition from external obedience to independent internal awareness. In conclusion, the role of teachers as a central figure in moral development is an absolute prerequisite for producing a generation that is not only intellectually superior, but also has spiritual depth and moral responsibility rooted in the values of monotheism.

The moral manifestation of students in the social realm shows a varied gradation between respect for authority figures and interaction with peers. The obedience of students to parents and teachers is a reflection of the internalization of the values of respect (*ta'zim*) that are still maintained in the culture of Islamic education, where adult figures are seen as holders of moral authority. At MTs Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah shows that most students have the awareness to maintain their words and deeds in front of their parents to avoid hurtful conflicts, as well as show polite communication ethics such as greeting, greeting, and obeying the teacher's instructions without significant resistance.

The students' parents' confessions confirm that despite small dynamics such as debates, their children's behavior remains within the limits of reasonableness that do not exceed the norms of politeness. However, this condition is inversely proportional when looking at the realm of peer interaction and behavior towards oneself, where verbal bullying practices, abusive actions, and deviant behaviors such as smoking and dishonesty are still found. Therefore, there is a behavioral dichotomy that shows that obedience to authority is not necessarily directly proportional to the maturity of students' personal and social character in daily life.

The phenomenon of moral degradation towards friends and self at school is influenced by the complexity of internal and external factors that weaken students' self-defense. Teachers of Akidah Akhlak identified that low parental supervision, a less harmonious family background (*broken home*), and economic pressure are determinant variables that trigger students to seek attention through negative ways at school.

The practice of behavior such as skipping school, being lazy to study, and taking away the rights of others is an excess of the fragile foundation of personality in the face of the current of association and destructive development of the times. From a pedagogical perspective, this inequality proves that moral development should not only stop at formal-ritualistic aspects, but must touch the psychosocial roots of students in order to build strong character resilience. Without synchronization between parental attention, teacher examples, and a healthy social environment, the process of moral formation will continue to face obstacles in realizing a whole person. Thus, strengthening the role of teachers as companions and inspirers is an absolute prerequisite for bridging the gap between theoretically learned moral values and real practices in students' social interactions (Wanders et al., 2020).

Integrative Strategy for Internalizing Moral Values: Synergy of the Role of Teachers and School Culture

The strategy of internalizing moral values in schools must be formulated through an integrative and multidimensional approach to bridge the gap between formal obedience and character awareness. An effective method of implementation in this context is the integration of the role of teachers as role models, guides, advisors, and inspirers into a coherent educational ecosystem. Theoretically, the success of this method depends on the consistency between the values taught and the behavioral reality displayed by the teacher in front of the students in every daily interaction.

This is based on the principle that moral transformation will not be achieved only through oral instruction, but requires structured habituation supported by a religious and inclusive school environment. For example, the effectiveness of congregational prayers and the well-run *tadarus* of the Qur'an show that habituation is the most powerful method in building spiritual awareness. Therefore, the synchronization between the hidden *curriculum* and the figurative role model of teachers is the main

foundation that determines the success of the formation of student morals holistically (Muzakkir et al., 2024).

The application of the first method focuses on strengthening exemplary practices that are precise and consistent in the school environment. Teachers must position themselves as standards of behavior through tangible actions, such as time discipline, neatness of dress, and politeness in language, which indirectly become a stimulus for students to do positive social imitations.

This argument is reinforced by the finding that students are more easily moved when they see teachers directly involved in social activities, such as maintaining cleanliness or performing worship on time, rather than simply listening to moral lectures in class. Without authenticity in teacher behavior, any coaching method will lose its influence because it is considered mere rhetoric by the students. Thus, the professionalism of teachers based on moral integrity is an absolute prerequisite that must be met before carrying out other educational functions.

The second method involves optimizing the role of the teacher as a supervisor that is personalized and based on accurate student profile data. As mentioned in the interview findings, a deep understanding of students' family backgrounds, potentials, and learning styles is key to determining the right guidance techniques. In practice, teachers should not use a flat-hitting approach, but should intervene tailored to individual needs, especially for students who come from a less harmonious family background (*broken home*) or those who have self-defense problems. A concrete example of this application is the provision of special guidance or psychological assistance for students who often commit disciplinary violations so that they feel personally cared for. If this method of guidance is ignored, then the potential for behavioral deviations will be difficult to mitigate because the root of the problem is never touched by school policy.

The method of giving advice should be done with a humanistic and contextual approach through warm two-way communication. Teachers need to leverage strategic momentum, both inside and outside the classroom, to insert educational values in a variety of ways, such as through casual conversations, meaningful jokes, or heart-to-heart discussions. This is based on the reality that MTs students who are in the adolescent phase tend to be resistant to harsh reprimands, but are very responsive to advice given with gentleness and empathy. As an illustration, teachers can relate the subject matter to the social phenomena that students are experiencing so that the advice feels relevant and not patronizing. Without flexibility in the way of communicating, the teacher's advice will only be considered a passing wind that has no power to change deviant behavior.

The fourth method is the development of school religious culture that supports the formation of independent spiritual awareness in students. This practice is implemented through a daily routine that is systematically designed, starting from joint prayer, short *tadarus*, to the implementation

of congregational worship that is carried out without coercion. Theoretically, an environment full of religious symbols and activities will create positive social pressures that encourage students to adapt their behavior to the values standards that prevail in the environment. Findings regarding student independence in carrying out worship prove that a strong school culture is able to reduce students' dependence on external teacher supervision. Therefore, strengthening the Islamic school climate must continue to be maintained as an educational instrument that works subliminally in the psyche of students.

As the estuary of all these methods, teachers must play the role of inspirers who are able to unite all elements of education into a driving force for students' inner changes. Inspirational teachers are able to awaken students' intrinsic motivation so that they have their own desire to improve themselves, respect others, and maintain their integrity even without direct supervision. In contrast to conventional approaches that are often stuck on the aspects of sanctions and rewards, the inspirational method emphasizes more on the development of a vision of the future and the glory of students' character. As concluded from the field data, the existence of students who still commit moral violations shows that the role of this inspirer is very crucial to bridge the gap between knowledge and action. Thus, the integration of example, guidance, advice, and a religious environment will create a solid foundation for the birth of a generation with noble character to Allah SWT, fellow humans, and himself.

Conclusions

This study emphasizes that the transformation of students' character at MTs Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah does not occur linearly through cognitive instruction but must be built through multidimensional synergy between the figurative role models of teachers, the depth of personal guidance, and the strengthening of consistent religious culture. The findings show significant success in the realms of transcendental relationships and vertical authority, but still leave challenges in the dimensions of horizontal interaction between friends and personal integrity that are vulnerable to external influences. Implicitly, the professionalism of teachers must be redefined not only as material teachers, but as moral architects capable of integrating empathic and inspirational approaches to close the gap between formal obedience and authentic character awareness. Therefore, the sustainability of moral development requires a closer synchronization between the reflective supervision of teachers in schools and the strengthening of parental control functions in order to create a more resilient self-defense of students against moral decadence in the contemporary era.

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