

Teacher Role Modeling Strengthens Character and Discipline in Islamic Boarding School Students

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Abstract

- Purpose** : This study investigates teacher role modeling as an educational approach for strengthening character and discipline among students in an Islamic boarding school. It addresses the research question of how teacher role modeling is implemented and contributes to addressing students' behavioral and academic problems in Islamic religious education at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo, Indonesia.
- Method** : A qualitative descriptive design was employed involving seven informants, with data collected through observation, open-ended interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.
- Results** : The findings indicate that teacher role modeling functions as a core method in student development, with teachers and boarding-school supervisors serving as role models through direct daily practices and indirect examples drawn from exemplary Islamic figures. The approach addresses discipline-related and academic problems, including delayed prayer, late Qur'anic study, difficulties in memorization, lack of learning focus, and failure to complete assignments. However, more serious violations, such as smoking and bringing mobile phones, require supporting strategies involving advice, institutional procedures, sanctions, and parental involvement.
- Conclusion** : The findings suggest that teacher role modeling should be positioned as the foundation of character and discipline formation, while complementary interventions provide an integrated framework for addressing diverse student problems in Islamic boarding-school education.

Keywords: Teacher Role Modeling; Character Education; Student Discipline; Islamic Education; Islamic Boarding School.

1. Introduction

Character formation and student discipline have become increasingly important concerns in contemporary education because schools are expected not only to develop academic competence but also to cultivate ethical behavior, responsibility, self-control, and social maturity. This concern is particularly significant in Islamic boarding schools, where education extends beyond classroom instruction into students' daily routines, worship, interpersonal relationships, and communal life. In Indonesia, pesantren and Islamic boarding schools provide an environment in which religious learning and character formation are closely interconnected. Recent studies show that character education in Islamic boarding schools is implemented through structured routines, habituation,

discipline, supervision, religious instruction, and other institutional practices. However, institutional rules alone may not be sufficient to shape students' behavior. Because students interact intensively with teachers and supervisors, the behavior demonstrated by educational personnel can become an important source of behavioral learning. In this context, teacher role modeling is particularly relevant because students can observe, interpret, imitate, and gradually internalize the behaviors consistently demonstrated by their educators.

Teacher role modeling refers to the educational process in which teachers demonstrate desirable attitudes, values, and behaviors that students can observe and emulate. In Islamic education, this concept is closely associated with *uswah hasanah*, or exemplary conduct, in which educators become concrete representations of the moral values they teach. Role modeling therefore differs from merely explaining a moral principle. For example, a teacher who teaches students about punctuality but consistently arrives on time, participates in communal prayer, maintains cleanliness, and fulfills professional responsibilities provides a behavioral example through which the abstract value of discipline becomes observable. In the present study, teacher role modeling encompasses both direct examples provided through teachers' and supervisors' everyday conduct and indirect examples introduced through exemplary Islamic figures, particularly Prophet Muhammad and KH. Ahmad Dahlan. The study conducted at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo found that such examples were embedded in Islamic religious and *Kemuhammadiyahan* education and daily boarding-school activities.

Recent scholarship provides substantial evidence that teachers and educational environments play important roles in character development. In one study, Rozikin and Astutik (2021) investigated how character education was implemented in an Islamic boarding school and examined the use of *Syiir Tanpo Waton* as a source of character learning. Using a qualitative approach, the study demonstrated that character education was integrated into the distinctive religious environment of the *pesantren*, reinforcing the position of Islamic boarding schools as important settings for character formation. Similarly, Aini and Fahyuni (2022) examined the role of *madrasah diniyah* teachers in developing students' learning discipline in Islamic boarding schools through a qualitative study involving observation, interviews, and documentation. Their findings emphasized the substantial responsibility of teachers in encouraging students to comply with learning obligations and institutional rules, suggesting that teacher involvement is an essential component of disciplinary development.

In another study, Hari et al. (2023) investigated the design process of character education for students in Islamic boarding schools in West Sumatra. Their study focused on how character education was conceptualized and organized within the boarding-school environment. The findings highlight the importance of systematic design in translating character values into educational practices, indicating that character development requires more than isolated moral instruction. Likewise, Firmansyah et al. (2023) examined spiritual-based character education at an Islamic boarding school in Southeast Sulawesi. Their findings illustrate how spiritual orientation can become an organizing foundation for character formation, reinforcing the importance of integrating religious values with students' everyday educational experiences. These studies collectively suggest that character education in *pesantren* is most meaningful when values are embedded in the broader educational culture rather than delivered solely as theoretical content.

More specifically, Miftahuddin et al. (2024) investigated the Islamic character education model at Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Boarding School Purwokerto using qualitative observation, interviews, and document analysis. The study found that character formation was integrated into Islamic Religious Education through subjects such as Akhlaq, Aqidah, Fiqh, and Islamic history. In contrast to approaches that primarily emphasize curricular content, the present study draws attention to the behavioral dimension of character education: what teachers and supervisors actually demonstrate in their everyday interactions with students. This distinction is important because character values such as discipline, responsibility, respect, and integrity become more concrete when students encounter them through observable practices.

More recent evidence further supports the importance of teacher modeling. Alwi et al. (2025) examined the influence of teacher role models and self-regulated learning on students' learning manners at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Kabun. Using a quantitative correlational approach with questionnaires, observation, and documentation, the study explicitly connected teacher role modeling with students' learning etiquette. Similarly, research on Islamic Education teachers' strategies for developing students' disciplinary character found that teachers function as educators, motivators, and facilitators while employing strategies grounded in Islamic values. These findings strengthen the argument that teachers are not merely transmitters of curricular knowledge but also behavioral reference points in the formation of student character.

Nevertheless, the existing literature remains fragmented in several respects. Previous studies have examined character education as an institutional program, discipline as a behavioral outcome, teacher strategies as instructional practices, and role modeling as one component of character development. However, relatively limited attention has been given to how teacher role modeling functions as the core method for addressing concrete student problems within an Islamic boarding-school setting, particularly when role modeling is insufficient and must be complemented by other interventions. This distinction is important because students' problems are heterogeneous. The present study found that role modeling was particularly relevant to problems such as delayed prayer, late Qur'anic study, difficulties with memorization, lack of learning focus, and failure to complete assignments, whereas more serious violations such as smoking and bringing mobile phones required additional measures, including advice, standard operating procedures, sanctions, and parental involvement. Thus, understanding role modeling requires examining not only whether it is implemented, but also where it functions as a primary intervention and where supporting strategies become necessary.

This gap provides the rationale for the present study. The research aims to analyze the implementation and role of teacher role modeling in strengthening student character and discipline and in addressing behavioral and academic problems within Islamic Religious Education at Muhammadiyah Boarding School Palopo, Indonesia. The study addresses two central questions: (1) How is teacher role modeling implemented in Islamic Religious Education at Muhammadiyah Boarding School Palopo? and (2) How does teacher role modeling contribute to addressing students' character, disciplinary, and academic problems, and what supporting strategies are required when role modeling alone is insufficient? The study adopts a qualitative descriptive design involving seven informants and uses observation, open-ended interviews, and documentation as data sources. The collected data are analyzed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion

drawing. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand practices, meanings, interactions, and contextual processes rather than statistically estimate causal effects.

The study is expected to demonstrate that teacher role modeling operates not simply as an additional teaching technique but as a core educational mechanism for character and discipline formation, while advice, institutional procedures, sanctions, and parental involvement function as complementary strategies. This expectation is consistent with the study's empirical finding that teachers and supervisors serve as role models through direct daily conduct and indirect representations of exemplary Islamic figures. Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of character education by positioning observable educator behavior at the center of the relationship between Islamic values and students' behavioral development. Practically, it offers Islamic boarding schools a framework for strengthening character education through consistent educator conduct while recognizing the need for differentiated supporting interventions. Its principal novelty therefore lies in conceptualizing teacher role modeling as a core method supported by complementary disciplinary mechanisms, rather than treating exemplary behavior as merely one component of a broader character-education program.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how teacher role modeling was implemented and how it functioned in addressing students' character, disciplinary, and academic problems in Islamic Religious Education at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo, Indonesia. A qualitative design was selected because the research questions concerned educational practices, interactions, meanings, and problem-solving processes occurring within the natural boarding-school environment rather than the statistical measurement of causal relationships. The study was conducted during the 2025/2026 academic year.

The principal construct examined was teacher role modeling, operationally understood as the observable exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers and boarding-school supervisors that could be observed and emulated by students. The study examined two forms of role modeling: direct role modeling, demonstrated through educators' everyday conduct, and indirect role modeling, conveyed through the presentation of exemplary Islamic figures. The study also examined the distinction between a core method, referring to role modeling as the primary approach to addressing student problems, and supporting methods, referring to advice, institutional standard operating procedures (SOPs), sanctions, and parental involvement used when role modeling alone was insufficient.

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo, a Muhammadiyah-affiliated Islamic boarding school located in Palopo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The institution provides integrated religious and formal education and serves students at the junior and senior secondary levels. The documented school profile reported a total of 221 students at the junior and senior secondary levels.

The study involved seven informants selected from stakeholders and students at MBS Palopo. The source manuscript identifies the informants as representing relevant participants in the

implementation of role modeling and student development. The sampling approach was purposive in orientation, namely selecting participants who possessed direct knowledge or experience concerning teacher role modeling, student discipline, and the implementation of Islamic Religious Education within the boarding-school environment.

The inclusion criterion was direct involvement in, or substantial knowledge of, the educational and disciplinary processes examined in the study. Participants without relevant experience or information concerning teacher role modeling and student problem-solving were not included. Because the source manuscript does not provide a complete demographic table specifying each informant's age, gender, position, or length of service, these characteristics are not reported here to avoid introducing unsupported information.

Instruments and Materials

Three principal data-collection instruments were used: observation, open-ended interviews, and documentation. These instruments were selected because they enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon from complementary sources and to capture both observable practices and participants' accounts of those practices. The research manuscript explicitly identifies observation, interviews, and documentation as the data-collection techniques.

Observation was used to document naturally occurring examples of teacher and supervisor role modeling and student responses within the boarding-school environment. Particular attention was given to educators' everyday conduct, including punctuality, participation in religious activities, cleanliness, communication, teaching practices, interpersonal conduct, and other behaviors relevant to character and discipline. The documented practices included teachers or supervisors waking students early, arriving at the mosque on time, maintaining teaching discipline, maintaining cleanliness, communicating in Arabic, and demonstrating polite interaction.

Open-ended interviews were used to obtain participants' explanations of the implementation, purpose, perceived function, and limitations of teacher role modeling. The open format allowed participants to describe concrete student problems and the strategies used to address them without restricting their responses to predetermined alternatives.

Documentation was used to collect relevant institutional and educational records and supporting materials concerning the boarding school, its educational activities, and the implementation of role modeling. The three instruments were used complementarily to strengthen the description of the phenomenon through multiple sources.

The source manuscript does not report the use of standardized questionnaires, psychometric scales, experimental materials, or statistical scoring procedures. Consequently, no instrument validity or reliability coefficients are reported. The qualitative instruments were instead used to generate descriptive evidence through observation, interviews, and documentation.

Procedure and Data Collection

Data collection followed a chronological process consisting of preparation, field observation, interviewing, documentation, and organization of the collected evidence.

First, the researcher identified the research setting and relevant participants. MBS Palopo was selected because the institution explicitly integrates Islamic education, character formation, and boarding-school routines, making it appropriate for examining teacher role modeling in a natural educational context.

Second, the researcher conducted field observations. Observations focused on the everyday interactions of teachers, supervisors, and students. The researcher documented observable forms of direct role modeling, including educators' punctuality, religious practices, teaching behavior, cleanliness, language use, and interpersonal conduct. Indirect role modeling was also examined through the use of exemplary figures, particularly Prophet Muhammad and KH. Ahmad Dahlan.

Third, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews with the seven informants. Interviews explored how role modeling was understood and implemented, which student problems were addressed through role modeling, how students responded to exemplary behavior, and what additional strategies were employed when role modeling did not adequately address particular problems.

Fourth, documentary evidence was collected and examined. Documentation was used to complement observations and interview accounts and to provide contextual information about the institution, its educational programs, and its approach to student development.

Fifth, the researcher organized the evidence obtained from the three sources. Information concerning teacher role modeling, student problems, values exemplified by educators, and supporting interventions was grouped according to its relevance to the research questions. The study consequently distinguished between direct and indirect role modeling and between the core and supporting approaches to addressing student problems.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using three sequential stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This analytical procedure is explicitly reported in the research manuscript.

During data reduction, the researcher selected, organized, and condensed information relevant to the research questions. Observational records, interview accounts, and documentary evidence were examined to identify information concerning teacher role modeling, student problems, exemplary values, and supporting interventions.

During data presentation, the reduced data were organized descriptively to facilitate comparison across sources and to establish relationships among the identified themes. The presentation focused on the implementation of role modeling, student problems addressed through the approach, exemplary values demonstrated by educators, and the relationship between the core and supporting methods.

During conclusion drawing, patterns identified across the evidence were synthesized to answer the research questions. Particular attention was given to whether role modeling functioned as the primary approach and under what circumstances supporting strategies were required. No inferential statistical tests, statistical significance thresholds, or quantitative software were used because the study employed a qualitative descriptive design.

Ethical Considerations

The study involved human participants in an educational setting and therefore required attention to confidentiality, voluntary participation, and responsible use of participant information. Participants were approached as sources of information concerning educational practices and student development, and the research process was conducted within the institutional setting of MBS Palopo.

Participant identities should be protected in reporting the findings, particularly because the study concerns student behavior and disciplinary problems. Information that could directly identify individual students or disclose sensitive personal circumstances should therefore be anonymized in the research report. The available manuscript does not specify the name or reference number of a formal institutional ethics approval, nor does it provide detailed procedures for written informed consent. Accordingly, these details should not be retrospectively added to the Methods unless they were actually obtained during the original study. If formal ethical approval and written consent were secured, the article should report the approving institution, approval number/date, and consent procedure in the final manuscript.

Overall, this methodological design enabled the study to examine teacher role modeling in its natural educational context and to trace how educators' observable conduct, Islamic exemplary figures, and complementary disciplinary mechanisms were incorporated into the process of addressing student problems.

3. Results

The findings are presented according to the two research questions: (1) how teacher role modeling was implemented in Islamic Religious Education at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo, and (2) how role modeling was used to address students' character, disciplinary, and academic problems, including the supporting strategies used when role modeling was insufficient. The study involved seven informants and identified findings from observations, open-ended interviews, and documentation.

Implementation of Teacher Role Modeling in Islamic Religious Education

The findings showed that teacher role modeling was positioned as a central practice in the educational and residential life of MBS Palopo. Teachers and boarding-school supervisors served as role models within the ISMUBA educational program, comprising Al-Islam, Kemuhammadiyah, and Arabic. Role modeling was implemented in two forms: direct role modeling and indirect role modeling.

Direct role modeling was demonstrated through the everyday conduct of teachers and supervisors. The observed practices included waking earlier to wake students for morning prayer, arriving at the mosque on time, maintaining punctuality in teaching, maintaining cleanliness, using Arabic in communication, and demonstrating polite interpersonal behavior. These practices occurred within the routine interactions between educators and students.

The direct role-modeling arrangement was also reflected in the boarding-school supervision system. Each dormitory was supervised by an ustadz responsible for approximately 15 students. The school did not assign primary dormitory supervision to senior students; instead, each room was placed under the responsibility of an ustadz as the principal supervisor.

The findings further documented that role modeling began with routine activities. For example, supervisors woke up and prepared themselves before waking students for congregational Fajr prayer. Supervisors also attended congregational prayer at the mosque on time.

Indirect role modeling was implemented through the introduction of exemplary Islamic figures. Prophet Muhammad was presented as an exemplary figure for Muslims generally, while KH. Ahmad Dahlan was presented as an exemplary figure associated with Muhammadiyah. Their

values and life examples were introduced through educational programs and Kemuhammadiyah activities.

Student Problems Identified in the Boarding-School Setting

The findings identified student problems across disciplinary, academic, personal-management, and everyday residential domains. The problems reported in the data included:

Table 1. The Problems Reported Data

Category	Student problems identified
Religious discipline	Delayed attendance at prayer and Qur'anic study
Academic	Difficulty memorizing, lack of learning focus, failure to complete assignments
Self-management	Difficulty managing time
Residential behavior	Room cleanliness problems
Rule violations	Bringing mobile phones and smoking

Delayed participation in congregational prayer was identified as one of the disciplinary problems. The reported causes included staying up late, difficulty waking up, and inadequate management of sleeping and resting time.

The data also identified academic problems, particularly difficulties with memorization, reduced concentration during learning, and failure to complete assignments. Other problems concerned delayed participation in Qur'anic study and difficulties in managing daily activities.

Two more serious rule violations were specifically identified: smoking and bringing mobile phones. These problems were treated differently from routine disciplinary and academic difficulties in the subsequent problem-solving process.

Values Demonstrated Through Teacher Role Modeling

Six principal values were identified in the implementation of role modeling at MBS Palopo: discipline, worship, politeness, knowledge, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values. The values were demonstrated through teachers' and supervisors' conduct and through the educational culture of the institution.

Table 2. The Values Were Demonstrated

Value	Form identified in the findings
Discipline	Punctuality and adherence to daily routines
Worship	Religious practices and habituation of worship
Politeness	Appropriate manners in interactions
Knowledge	Academic competence, scholarly development, and Arabic use
Trustworthiness	Educators' responsibility in carrying out educational duties
Muhammadiyah values	The values and struggle associated with KH. Ahmad Dahlan and Muhammadiyah

The findings further categorized these values into three dimensions of personality development. Discipline was categorized within the physical dimension, knowledge within the

intellectual dimension, and worship, politeness, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values within the spiritual dimension.

The data also showed that the four forms of exemplary education identified in the theoretical framework – exemplary conduct in worship, simplicity, humility, and morality – were represented in the practices observed at MBS Palopo. Worship was reflected in religious and Muhammadiyah practices, trustworthiness in educators' responsibility, politeness in humility, and morality across discipline, trustworthiness, politeness, and knowledge-related behaviors.

Role Modeling as the Core Method for Addressing Student Problems

The findings identified teacher role modeling as the core method used in addressing student problems. It was applied first through educators' observable behavior and was used particularly in relation to routine disciplinary and academic problems. The problems associated with this approach included delayed prayer, delayed Qur'anic study, difficulty memorizing, insufficient learning focus, and failure to complete assignments.

The findings showed that the core method was not limited to classroom instruction. It operated through teachers' and supervisors' daily interactions with students, where exemplary behavior was continuously visible. The role-modeling practices encompassed discipline, worship, politeness, knowledge, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values.

Supporting Methods for More Serious or Repeated Problems

An additional finding was that role modeling was not used as the sole strategy for every student problem. For more serious violations, particularly smoking and bringing mobile phones, MBS Palopo combined role modeling with several supporting methods. These consisted of advice, institutional SOPs, sanctions, and parental involvement.

The resulting pattern identified in the data can be summarized as follows:

Table 3. The Resulting Pattern Identified In The Data

Intervention	Function reported in the findings
Teacher role modeling	Providing observable examples of appropriate behavior
Advice	Providing explanation and direction
SOPs	Establishing institutional behavioral procedures
Sanctions	Reinforcing discipline in cases of violations
Parental involvement	Supporting the resolution of serious problems through school-family coordination

The findings also documented parental involvement in resolving serious student problems. Communication between the boarding school and parents was used when problems required additional coordination, and information concerning students' problems could also be communicated between parents and boarding-school supervisors.

Conditions Limiting the Consistency of Role Modeling

An unexpected finding concerned the conditions affecting students' reception of teacher role modeling and educators' ability to maintain exemplary behavior. The data indicated differences according to students' maturity. Junior secondary students were described as more likely to imitate

teachers and supervisors, whereas older students tended to be more selective in accepting examples and could display greater personal resistance.

The findings also showed that some students did not necessarily recognize teachers' disciplined behavior as role modeling because they regarded such behavior as part of teachers' normal professional obligations. Consequently, the same behavior could be observed by students without necessarily being consciously identified as an exemplary act.

A further constraint concerned educators themselves. The data identified emotional management as an internal challenge for boarding-school supervisors. Continuous responsibility for supervising students for extended periods could produce physical and psychological fatigue, and reduced emotional control could affect the consistency of exemplary behavior displayed to students.

Summary of the Main Findings

Overall, the results identified a two-level pattern of student problem management at MBS Palopo. Teacher role modeling constituted the primary approach and was implemented through direct everyday behavior and indirect presentation of exemplary Islamic figures. The approach encompassed six principal values discipline, worship, politeness, knowledge, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values. For routine disciplinary and academic problems, role modeling was the principal approach identified in the data. For more serious violations, particularly smoking and mobile-phone possession, role modeling was combined with advice, SOPs, sanctions, and parental involvement.

4. Discussion

This study found that teacher role modeling occupied a central position in character and discipline formation at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo. The practice operated through two complementary forms: direct modeling, in which teachers and boarding-school supervisors demonstrated desirable behavior in everyday activities, and indirect modeling, in which students were introduced to exemplary Islamic figures such as Prophet Muhammad and KH. Ahmad Dahlan. The findings also showed that role modeling was most directly associated with routine disciplinary and academic problems, whereas more serious violations required additional measures, including advice, institutional procedures, sanctions, and parental involvement. Six principal values were embedded in the modeling process: discipline, worship, politeness, knowledge, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values.

The first research question how teacher role modeling is implemented in Islamic Religious Education at MBS Palopo was supported by the findings. Role modeling was not confined to explicit moral instruction in the classroom but was embedded in teachers' and supervisors' daily conduct. Direct modeling included punctuality, participation in congregational prayer, cleanliness, appropriate communication, and responsible performance of educational duties. Each dormitory was supervised by an ustadz, with approximately 15 students under each supervisor, allowing students to encounter educators as observable behavioral references throughout their daily routines.

The second research question how role modeling contributes to addressing student problems and when supporting strategies are required was also supported. Role modeling was identified as

the core method for problems such as delayed prayer, delayed Qur'anic study, memorization difficulties, lack of learning focus, and failure to complete assignments. However, the findings did not support the assumption that role modeling alone is sufficient for every behavioral problem. Smoking and bringing mobile phones were addressed through a combination of role modeling and supporting interventions, including advice, standard operating procedures, sanctions, and parental involvement.

This distinction is important because it reframes role modeling from a universal disciplinary solution into a foundational educational mechanism within a broader problem-solving system. The evidence therefore supports the conceptual distinction between core method and supporting methods proposed in this study. The core method establishes the behavioral norm, while supporting methods are activated according to the seriousness and persistence of the problem.

The findings can be explained through the principle that character is more readily internalized when moral values are encountered through consistent observable behavior rather than verbal instruction alone. The theoretical framework of Abdullah Nashih Ulwan is particularly relevant because it places exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) among the important methods of Islamic education. In the MBS context, this principle became visible when teachers demonstrated the behaviors that students were expected to practice. The supervisor who wakes before students, prepares for prayer, and arrives at the mosque on time provides a concrete behavioral representation of discipline rather than merely defining discipline verbally.

This mechanism also helps explain why role modeling extended beyond classroom learning. Boarding-school education creates continuous interaction between educators and students. Consequently, teachers' behavior becomes part of the students' learning environment throughout the day. The approximately 15-to-one supervisory arrangement identified in the study facilitates repeated observation and interaction, making role modeling a recurring rather than isolated experience.

The findings are also consistent with the three-dimensional conception of character education derived from Ulwan in the manuscript. Discipline was associated with physical development, knowledge with intellectual development, and worship, politeness, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values with spiritual development. Thus, role modeling at MBS Palopo operates across behavioral, intellectual, and spiritual domains rather than treating discipline as merely compliance with institutional rules.

The distinction between direct and indirect modeling provides an additional mechanism. Direct modeling makes values visible through educators' behavior, whereas indirect modeling expands the pool of behavioral references by connecting students with exemplary Islamic figures. The two forms were implemented together at MBS Palopo. This combination allows students to encounter values both through immediate interpersonal experience and through narratives of exemplary figures.

The findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that character development in Islamic boarding schools depends on systematic integration of values into students' everyday educational experiences. Miftahuddin et al. (2024), for example, found that Islamic character education at an Indonesian boarding school was integrated into Islamic Religious Education through subjects such as Akhlaq, Aqidah, Fiqh, and Islamic history. The present study extends this

finding by showing that curricular integration is complemented by the behavioral enactment of values by teachers and supervisors. In other words, the present evidence shifts attention from what character education contains to how educators embody the values being taught.

The findings also agree with Anirah et al. (2024), who used a qualitative design involving interviews, observation, and documentation to investigate disciplinary character education in an Islamic boarding school. Their study found that systematic discipline development contributed to students' participation in religious activities and everyday behavior. The similarity is particularly evident in the present study's finding that discipline is cultivated through repeated routines. However, the MBS Palopo study adds a different emphasis by identifying teacher role modeling as the core method, rather than focusing primarily on institutional discipline development.

Similarly, recent research on responsibility formation at an Indonesian Islamic boarding school found that role models, habituation, and close monitoring contributed to students' responsibility and discipline. This supports the present finding that role modeling works most effectively within an environment of continuous supervision. The difference is that the present study explicitly differentiates role modeling from other interventions and identifies a hierarchy between the core and supporting methods.

The findings are also compatible with research showing that teachers' exemplary behavior influences students' moral development. Anissa et al. (2023), using a qualitative descriptive design, found that teachers strengthened students' morality through everyday practices such as greeting, speaking politely, and engaging in routine Qur'anic activities. The MBS Palopo findings similarly identify politeness, worship, and discipline as values embodied by educators. The convergence across contexts suggests that role modeling operates through repeated behavioral exposure rather than through isolated instructional events.

At the same time, the present study introduces an important qualification to the role-modeling literature. The evidence shows that not all student problems respond equally to exemplary behavior. Serious violations such as smoking and unauthorized possession of mobile phones required advice, SOPs, sanctions, and parental involvement. This finding aligns with recent work demonstrating that reward-and-punishment systems can form part of disciplinary and religious character development in Islamic boarding schools. Thus, the present study does not position role modeling and disciplinary mechanisms as competing approaches; instead, it indicates that they can operate sequentially or complementarily.

An additional finding concerns age and students' receptiveness to modeling. The manuscript reports that younger students tended to imitate teachers more readily, while older students were more selective in accepting teachers as behavioral models. It also identifies educator fatigue and emotional regulation as potential constraints on consistent modeling. This may explain why findings from studies conducted with younger students or highly structured environments cannot be directly generalized to older boarding-school students.

Theoretically, this study contributes by conceptualizing teacher role modeling as more than a supporting component of character education. The findings position it as a core pedagogical mechanism through which Islamic values are translated into observable behavior. The core/supporting distinction provides a useful conceptual refinement: educators first establish

behavioral norms through exemplary conduct, while more directive mechanisms are added when students demonstrate persistent or serious violations.

The findings also extend the application of Ulwan's theory by demonstrating how direct and indirect forms of exemplary education can coexist within a contemporary Islamic boarding-school environment. The direct behavior of teachers and supervisors provides immediate models, while Islamic historical figures provide broader moral reference points.

Practically, Islamic boarding schools should therefore treat teacher and supervisor conduct as part of the curriculum of character education. Professional development should not focus exclusively on instructional competence but should also strengthen punctuality, emotional regulation, interpersonal ethics, religious practice, responsibility, and consistency between teachers' words and actions. Boarding-school management should also maintain manageable supervisory arrangements because close educator-student interaction creates more opportunities for behavioral modeling. Finally, schools should establish clear procedures for determining when role modeling should be supplemented by counseling, parental communication, institutional SOPs, or sanctions.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the qualitative descriptive design provides contextual depth but does not permit causal claims about whether role modeling directly produces changes in student discipline or character. The article should therefore use terms such as contributes to, supports, and functions as, rather than causes or produces an effect.

Second, the study involved only seven informants from one boarding school. Although this enabled detailed examination of the MBS Palopo context, the findings cannot automatically be generalized to other Islamic boarding schools with different organizational cultures, student populations, or religious orientations.

Third, the study relied principally on observation, interviews, and documentation. Student character and discipline were not measured using standardized behavioral scales or longitudinal indicators. Consequently, the study captures reported and observed practices rather than quantitatively demonstrating changes in students' behavior over time.

Fourth, the findings may be affected by researcher and participant bias. Teachers and institutional personnel may present the boarding school's practices favorably, particularly when discussing disciplinary systems and educational effectiveness. Observation may also influence participants' behavior.

Fifth, the study was conducted within a specific Muhammadiyah educational environment. The prominent role of KH. Ahmad Dahlan and Muhammadiyah values means that some findings may reflect institutional characteristics that differ from those of non-Muhammadiyah pesantren.

Future studies should address these limitations through multi-site and comparative research involving Muhammadiyah, traditional pesantren, and other Islamic boarding-school models. A useful research question would be: How does the core role of teacher modeling differ across Islamic boarding-school organizational cultures?

Longitudinal research could also examine whether repeated exposure to teacher role modeling produces sustained changes in students' discipline, worship practices, responsibility, and academic behavior. Quantitative or mixed-method studies could operationalize role-modeling consistency and student discipline using validated instruments and examine relationships between them while controlling for student age and prior behavior.

Future research should also investigate the role of teacher emotional regulation and workload, given the present finding that fatigue can affect the consistency of exemplary conduct. Another important question is: How does teacher emotional regulation influence students' perception and acceptance of teachers as role models? Finally, intervention studies could compare role-modeling-centered approaches with approaches combining role modeling, habituation, counseling, parental involvement, and sanctions to determine which combinations are most appropriate for different categories of student problems.

The central contribution of this study is the demonstration that teacher role modeling can function as the core mechanism of character and discipline formation in an Islamic boarding-school context, but it should not be understood as a stand-alone solution to every student problem. Its strength lies in transforming abstract Islamic and institutional values into visible, repeated, and socially situated behavior. At MBS Palopo, direct modeling by teachers and supervisors and indirect modeling through exemplary Islamic figures operate alongside supporting mechanisms when problems become more serious. This finding advances the discussion of Islamic character education by connecting *uswah hasanah* with a differentiated problem-solving framework: model the desired behavior first, then apply proportionate supporting interventions when necessary. Such a framework offers both theoretical value for understanding character formation and practical value for Islamic boarding schools seeking to develop disciplined, responsible, and morally grounded students.

5. Conclusion

This study examined teacher role modeling as a core approach to strengthening character and discipline among students at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Palopo, Indonesia. It aimed to explain how role modeling is implemented in Islamic Religious Education and how it contributes to addressing students' disciplinary, academic, and behavioral problems.

The findings lead to four main conclusions. First, teacher role modeling is implemented through direct and indirect forms: teachers and boarding-school supervisors demonstrate exemplary conduct in daily activities, while exemplary Islamic figures such as Prophet Muhammad and KH. Ahmad Dahlan provide indirect models. Second, role modeling encompasses six principal values discipline, worship, politeness, knowledge, trustworthiness, and Muhammadiyah values which are embedded in students' educational and residential experiences. Third, role modeling functions as the core method for addressing routine problems, including delayed prayer and Qur'anic study, memorization difficulties, lack of learning focus, and failure to complete assignments. Fourth, more serious problems, particularly smoking and bringing mobile phones, require supporting methods, including advice, institutional SOPs, sanctions, and parental involvement.

Theoretically, the study contributes to Islamic character-education scholarship by positioning teacher role modeling as a foundational mechanism through which values are translated into observable behavior. Practically, educators and boarding-school managers should strengthen teachers' consistency as role models while developing complementary disciplinary and family-engagement mechanisms for more complex student problems.

Future research should examine these relationships across multiple Islamic boarding schools and use longitudinal or mixed-method designs to investigate how sustained teacher role modeling influences student character and discipline over time.

6. References

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