

Implementation of Exemplary Leadership in Character Building of Students at Ra As Syifa, Tarakan City

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of exemplary leadership in developing student character at RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City, and to identify factors that support and hinder its effectiveness. The research used a qualitative approach with a case study method through observation, interviews, and documentation involving the RA principal, teachers, education staff, parents, and students.

The results show that exemplary leadership is implemented through the concrete behavior of the madrasah principal and teachers, reflecting religious values, discipline, responsibility, honesty, social awareness, and polite communication. This exemplary leadership is manifested in the learning process, madrasah culture, daily habits, religious activities, and daily social interactions. The success of its implementation is supported by leadership commitment, a conducive organizational culture, collaboration between the madrasah and families, and the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include the uncontrolled influence of digital media, differences in family parenting styles, limited time for teacher-student interaction, and challenges of the urban social environment. This research confirms that exemplary leadership is an effective strategy in shaping the character of early childhood learners if implemented consistently, collaboratively, and sustainably.

Informasi Artikel

Kata Kunci:

Kepemimpinan Berbasis Keteladanan; Pendidikan Karakter; Anak Usia Dini; Budaya Madrasah; RA Asy-Syifa

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi kepemimpinan berbasis keteladanan dalam pembentukan karakter peserta didik di RA As-Syifa Kota Tarakan, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mendukung dan menghambat efektivitasnya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala RA, guru, tenaga kependidikan, orang tua, dan peserta didik.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan berbasis keteladanan diterapkan melalui perilaku nyata kepala madrasah dan guru yang mencerminkan nilai religius, disiplin, tanggung jawab, kejujuran, kepedulian sosial, dan komunikasi yang santun. Keteladanan tersebut diwujudkan dalam proses pembelajaran, budaya madrasah, pembiasaan harian, kegiatan keagamaan, serta interaksi sosial sehari-hari. Keberhasilan implementasinya didukung oleh komitmen pimpinan, budaya organisasi yang kondusif, kerja sama antara madrasah dan keluarga, serta integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam kurikulum. Sementara itu, faktor penghambat meliputi pengaruh media digital yang kurang terkontrol, perbedaan pola asuh keluarga, keterbatasan waktu interaksi guru dengan peserta didik, dan tantangan lingkungan sosial perkotaan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kepemimpinan berbasis keteladanan merupakan strategi yang efektif dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik usia dini apabila dilaksanakan secara konsisten, kolaboratif, dan berkelanjutan.

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1. Introduction

Character education has become a strategic issue in the development of Indonesian national education in the 21st century. Advances in science, information technology, and rapid social change have had various implications for the lives of students, including those in early childhood education. While these developments provide extensive opportunities for improving the quality of learning, they also present challenges in the form of declining social interactions, increasing individualistic behavior, and weakening the internalization of moral and spiritual values in the younger generation. This situation demonstrates that education is not only required to develop cognitive aspects but also bears the responsibility of shaping students' character holistically and sustainably. Character education is a crucial foundation for building a generation with integrity, responsibility, and a strong moral awareness to face the dynamics of modern life.[1] In the context of early childhood education, character formation plays a fundamental role because early childhood is a golden age that determines an individual's personality development in later life. [2] Various studies have shown that character values are more easily instilled through direct experience, habituation, and role models than through purely instructional approaches. Early childhood tends to learn through imitation of the behavior they observe in their surroundings. Therefore, the presence of role models is a crucial factor in the success of character education. The role of teachers, heads of educational institutions, and parents as role models is a key tool in the internalization of moral, religious, discipline, responsibility, and social values in children.

From an Islamic educational perspective, the concept of role modeling, or *uswah hasanah*, is an educational method with a strong theological foundation. Exemplary behavior is seen as the most effective means of transforming good values because students receive concrete examples that can be observed and imitated in their daily lives. This principle aligns with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which asserts that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling behavior.[3] In the context of Islamic educational institutions, the exemplary behavior of *madrasah* principals and teachers serves not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a leadership instrument capable of building organizational culture, influencing the behavior of school members, and strengthening the implementation of character education comprehensively.

Exemplary-based leadership is a leadership approach that positions leader behavior as the primary source of influence in motivating organizational members. In an educational environment, the principal is not only tasked with carrying out administrative and managerial functions, but also becomes a moral figure who provides a real example for teachers, educational staff, students, and the community.[4] Leadership based on example will create a positive organizational culture, increase the commitment of the school community, and strengthen

the process of character formation of students through a continuous habituation mechanism. Various studies show that the effectiveness of character education is greatly influenced by the consistency of the behavior of leaders and educators in applying the values taught to students.

As an early childhood Islamic educational institution (RA As-Syifa) in Tarakan City, RA As-Syifa is committed to developing character education through an integrated exemplary approach across all educational activities. This effort is realized through the systematic instilling of religious values, discipline, responsibility, honesty, independence, and social awareness by the principal and teachers. However, the implementation of character education in the digital age faces various complex challenges, such as the influence of social media, changing family interaction patterns, the heterogeneity of student backgrounds, and the social dynamics of urban communities. These challenges often create a gap between the ideal concept of character education formulated in education policy and the reality of its implementation on the ground.

Several previous studies have discussed character education in early childhood education institutions, the role of role models in developing children's character, and Islamic educational leadership.[5] However, research specifically examining the implementation of exemplary leadership in shaping student character at RA institutions and analyzing the supporting and inhibiting factors within the social context of Tarakan City remains relatively limited. This research gap is crucial to examine given the social, cultural, and religious characteristics of the Tarakan community, which have their own unique dynamics in the early childhood education process.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the implementation of role-modeling-based leadership in developing student character at RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City, and to identify factors that support and hinder the effectiveness of role models in bridging the gap between character education theory and practice. The research findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic educational leadership studies and early childhood character education, as well as provide practical recommendations for educational institution managers in developing leadership models oriented toward sustainable student character development.

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative research method with a case study approach. This approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of exemplary leadership in character formation for students at RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City, North Kalimantan.

Location and Time

This research was conducted at RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City, North Kalimantan, Indonesia, from February to April 2026.

Research Subjects: Head of RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City, Teachers, Education Personnel, Parents of RA Syifa, Tarakan City

Data Collection Techniques

- Observation
 - In-depth interviews
 - Documentation
- Data Analysis Techniques**
- Data reduction
 - Data display
 - Conclusion drawing and data verification
- Data Validity**
- Source triangulation
 - Technique triangulation
 - Time triangulation

3. Result and Discussion

Result

1. Implementation of Exemplary Leadership at RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City in Shaping Student Character.

The research findings indicate that the implementation of exemplary leadership at RA As-Syifa in Tarakan City serves as a primary foundation for developing student character. This leadership approach focuses not only on the administrative and managerial functions of the institution but also positions the RA principal as a role model who consistently demonstrates behavior consistent with the values he intends to instill in students. Observations revealed that the RA principal actively participates in various daily activities at the madrasah, from welcoming students in the morning, through group worship, learning activities, and social activities involving the entire school community. This presence conveys a symbolic message that character education is not merely a normative concept taught through learning materials but must be embodied in concrete behavior that can be observed and imitated by students.

The research findings indicate that the RA principal's exemplary behavior is demonstrated through discipline in carrying out duties, punctuality, polite communication, responsibility for work, and commitment to religious values. These attitudes then become a culture that is transmitted to teachers and other educational staff, fostering a shared vision for educating students. On various occasions, the RA principal not only instructed teachers on the importance of character education but also demonstrated directly how these values were put into practice in daily life. This demonstrates that exemplary leadership serves as an instrument for transforming organizational culture, capable of influencing the behavior of all members of the madrasa community.

Based on interviews with teachers, it was found that the RA principal consistently exemplifies religious behavior by encouraging the practice of reciting prayers before beginning activities, maintaining good manners in interactions, performing congregational prayers, and demonstrating humility toward the entire school community. Teachers acknowledged that the RA principal's consistent behavior provides moral motivation to implement the same values in the learning process. This phenomenon demonstrates that leadership effectiveness is determined not only by

organizational management skills but also by the leader's ability to model credible behavior for members.[6]

The implementation of exemplary leadership at RA As-Syifa is also evident in the learning process carried out by teachers. Teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as role models who demonstrate behavior consistent with the character values being taught. During learning activities, teachers practice using polite language, demonstrate patience when dealing with students, respect differences in abilities, and model discipline and responsibility. Through this process, students gain concrete learning experiences, making it easier to internalize character values than through lectures or purely verbal instructions.

These findings align with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which explains that individuals learn behavior through observing models perceived as credible and socially close. In the context of early childhood education, imitation plays a very dominant role because children do not yet have the strong abstraction skills to understand moral concepts theoretically. Therefore, the presence of role models is a crucial factor in the success of character education. The results of this study corroborate the findings of various studies that state that the exemplary behavior of teachers and educational leaders has a significant influence on students' character development.

In addition to the individual behavior of leaders and teachers, the implementation of exemplary leadership at RA As-Syifa is realized through the establishment of a madrasah culture that supports character development. This culture is reflected in various habit-building programs, such as greetings, smiling, and greetings, reciting prayers before and after activities, maintaining a clean environment, sharing with friends, queuing orderly, and respecting teachers and parents. These programs are implemented routinely, forming behavioral patterns that are internalized in students' lives. The ongoing practice of habituation demonstrates that character education is not an incidental activity, but rather a systematic process that requires consistency and the involvement of all components of the educational institution.

Observations also show that the RA principal actively oversees the implementation of the madrasah culture and provides appreciation to teachers and students who demonstrate positive behavior. This appreciation serves not only as a form of recognition but also as a character-building strategy that encourages students to repeat good behavior. From an educational psychology perspective, positive reinforcement is a crucial factor in habit and character formation because it can increase students' intrinsic motivation.

The most prominent character traits formed through the implementation of exemplary leadership at RA As-Syifa include religiousness, discipline, responsibility, independence, social awareness, and honesty. Religious character is reflected in students' habits of daily prayer, memorizing short surahs (chapters), and demonstrating behavior in accordance with Islamic teachings. Discipline is evident in students' ability to follow school rules, arrive on time, and complete assigned tasks. Meanwhile, social awareness develops through sharing,

helping friends, and demonstrating empathy for the surrounding environment. These results demonstrate that exemplary leadership has a significant contribution to creating an educational environment that supports holistic character development.[7]

Overall, the implementation of exemplary leadership at RA As-Syifa in Tarakan City demonstrates that the success of character education is greatly influenced by the consistent behavior of leaders and teachers in serving as role models for students. When the values taught align with the behavior demonstrated by educators, the process of character internalization is more effective and sustainable.

2. Factors that Inhibit and Support the Effectiveness of Role Modeling at RA As-Syifa, Tarakan City in Bridging the Theory-Practice Gap of Character Education Amidst the Social Challenges of Tarakan City.

The research results show that the effectiveness of role-modeling leadership in shaping student character is influenced by various interacting supporting and inhibiting factors. The primary supporting factor stems from the commitment of the RA principal and all teachers to making role modeling a primary strategy for character education. This commitment is reflected in consistent behavior, a shared educational vision, and the willingness of all educators to serve as role models for students in all educational activities.

Another supporting factor is the creation of a conducive organizational culture. A religious, harmonious, and character-building madrasah environment provides ample space for students to observe and emulate positive behavior. A strong organizational culture also minimizes contradictions between the values taught and the behaviors displayed by the school community. From an educational management perspective, alignment between the institution's vision, organizational culture, and leadership practices is a key prerequisite for successful character education.[8]

Family support is also a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of role modeling. Interviews indicate that students who receive character strengthening at home tend to demonstrate better character development than those who do not receive adequate parental guidance. The synergy between family and madrasah allows for consistency of values so that students gain uniform moral experiences both in the school environment and at home.[9]

However, this study also identified various inhibiting factors that impact the effectiveness of role models. One major factor is the increasingly difficult-to-control influence of digital media. Exposure to social media content, digital videos, and various information inconsistent with character education values often presents alternative behavioral models that conflict with the values taught in schools. This situation causes students to receive diverse moral messages, making the process of character internalization more complex.

Furthermore, heterogeneity in family backgrounds also presents a challenge. Not all parents share the same understanding of the importance of character education. Some families still emphasize academic achievement

over character development, resulting in a disconnect between character education programs at school and parenting practices at home. These differences in parenting styles have the potential to create a gap between the values taught by teachers and the experiences students gain within the family environment.

Another inhibiting factor relates to the increasingly complex social dynamics of urban communities. High parental work mobility, reduced family interaction time, increased use of children's devices, and the influence of diverse social environments pose challenges to the sustainability of character education. In such situations, schools often must assume a greater role in character education than before.

The findings of this study indicate that the success of exemplary leadership is not solely determined by the quality of the leader but is also influenced by support from the broader social system. Therefore, efforts to bridge the gap between character education theory and practice require strong collaboration between madrasahs, families, communities, and the government. The exemplary behavior demonstrated by madrasah principals and teachers will be more effective if reinforced by the students' social environment. Thus, character education can develop as a collective movement involving all educational stakeholders and not be solely the responsibility of schools.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of exemplary leadership at RA As-Syifa in Tarakan City occurs through three mutually reinforcing dimensions: verbal exemplary behavior, behavioral exemplary behavior, and exemplary worship. These three dimensions are operationalized through structured programs involving the entire institutional ecosystem, ranging from daily habituation systems and character appreciation programs to moral mentoring for educators.

The effectiveness of implementation is supported by internal factors (leadership commitment, organizational culture, integrative curriculum) and external factors (parental support, Islamic environment). Meanwhile, major challenges stem from inconsistent family environments, the influence of digital media, Tarakan City's socio-cultural heterogeneity, and teacher competency gaps in consistently implementing exemplary behavior.

This study recommends three things: (1) strengthening practical and sustainable school-family partnership programs; (2) developing a teacher supervision system that focuses on the character dimension; and (3) formulating exemplary behavior guidelines that are contextualized to the socio-cultural characteristics of Tarakan City as a multicultural border city.

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