



## Teacher Exemplary Behavior in Character Learning: A Case Study on the Formation of Longed-for Teachers in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Mehamad Shaleh Gunung<sup>1</sup>, Khozin<sup>2</sup>, Rahmad Hakim<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

\* Corresponding Author: mehamadshalehgunung@gmail.com

### **A ARTICLE INFORMATION**

#### **Article History:**

Received 2026-01-21

Revised 2026-03-21

Accepted 2026-04-22

#### **Keywords:**

Teacher exemplary behavior,  
Character learning,  
Teacher–student relationship,  
Emotional closeness,  
longed-for teacher

#### **DOI:**

10.71280/jotter.v3i3.564

### **A B S T R A K**

This study aims to examine teacher exemplary behavior in character learning and its contribution to the formation of teachers who are longed for by students. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design at MI Muhammadiyah Tahuna. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving teachers and students as the main participants. The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings show that teacher exemplary behavior was reflected in discipline, honesty, responsibility, polite communication, empathy, fairness, emotional control, and consistency between words and actions. These behaviors functioned as moral models that students observed, imitated, and internalized in daily school life. Teacher exemplary behavior also influenced students' motivation and character by encouraging punctuality, confidence, respect, responsibility, and positive classroom participation. In addition, warm communication, active listening, and emotional support strengthened teacher–student relationships and created emotional closeness. This emotional bond contributed to the formation of the longed-for teacher, namely a teacher who is respected, remembered, and missed because their presence provides comfort, guidance, motivation, and moral inspiration. The study concludes that teacher exemplary behavior is a fundamental foundation of character learning and should be strengthened through reflective teaching practices, empathetic communication, and a supportive school culture.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Character education has become one of the central concerns in the development of national education, particularly amid social change, technological advancement, and the increasingly complex moral challenges faced by students (Ruswandi et al., 2023, 2024). Education can no longer be understood merely as a process of transferring academic knowledge; rather, it must also be viewed as a process of shaping attitudes, values, and behaviors that reflect students' holistic personal development. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, character strengthening is emphasized through the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, such as faith and devotion to God Almighty, noble character, independence, mutual cooperation, critical reasoning, creativity, and global diversity (Aziz & Hasanah, 2022; Irawati et al., 2022). Therefore, schools and madrasahs need to develop learning processes that are not only oriented toward cognitive achievement but also toward the formation of students' moral, social, and emotional character (Febriyanti & Andriyani, 2023).

One of the key elements in character education is teacher exemplary behavior. Teachers are figures who have direct influence on students' development because they interact intensively with



students in both classroom learning and daily school life. Teacher exemplary behavior is not only reflected in verbal instruction or moral advice, but also in attitudes, actions, communication styles, discipline, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and consistency between words and actions. In the perspective of character education, teachers are not merely instructors but also social models whose behavior is observed, interpreted, and imitated by students. This is consistent with social learning theory, which states that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling of significant figures in their environment (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Teacher exemplary behavior occupies a strategic position because character values are more easily internalized by students when they witness concrete examples in everyday life. Discipline, for instance, becomes more meaningful when teachers arrive on time and begin learning consistently. Honesty becomes more relevant when teachers demonstrate transparency and fairness in assessment. Empathy becomes easier for students to understand when teachers pay attention to students' emotional conditions and provide support when they face difficulties. Thus, character education cannot rely solely on verbal explanation; it must be embodied through consistent exemplary practices in learning interactions (BABATUNDE et al., 2025; Hidayat, 2025; Qushwa et al., 2025).

However, the practice of character education in schools still faces several challenges. In many learning contexts, character education is often understood as the normative delivery of values rather than as a lived experience demonstrated through teacher-student relationships. Moral values are frequently taught as subject matter, but they are not always internalized within classroom culture and daily teacher behavior. As a result, students may cognitively understand the concepts of right and wrong, but they may not necessarily be able to model and apply these values in real behavior. This condition indicates that character learning requires a more humanistic, relational, and exemplary-based approach (Firdaus, 2020; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023).

In this context, the concept of a “longed-for teacher” emerges. This term refers to a teacher who is not only respected because of authority, but also remembered because of sincerity, care, and the ability to build emotional closeness with students (Mendes-Flohr, 2026). A longed-for teacher is one whose presence creates a sense of safety, comfort, appreciation, and support. Students long for such teachers not merely because of the subject matter they teach, but because of the positive emotional experiences they provide during the learning process (Fox et al., 2021). Warm, open, and trusting teacher-student relationships become an important foundation for creating meaningful learning experiences. Noddings (2013) emphasizes that caring relationships in education are essential to moral formation because students learn values through the experience of being cared for, appreciated, and understood.

Several previous studies have shown that teacher exemplary behavior contributes to students' character formation. Assyifa et al. (2023) emphasized that exemplary behavior in moral and faith-based learning serves as an important foundation for shaping students' character in the twenty-first century. Deni et al. (2022) found that positive habituation consistently practiced by teachers, such as prayer routines, queueing culture, and literacy activities, can gradually strengthen students' character. Meanwhile, Astuti et al. (2023) showed that emotional closeness between teachers and students affects students' motivation, discipline, and enthusiasm for learning. Other research also indicates that polite, empathetic, and responsive teacher communication can create a comfortable learning atmosphere and encourage student participation in learning (Sugianto, 2024).

Although many studies have discussed teacher exemplary behavior and character education, studies that specifically connect teacher exemplary behavior with the formation of a “longed-for teacher” remain limited. Most previous studies have focused on the role of teachers as moral role models, character habituation strategies, or teacher-student relationships in general. Few studies have explored in depth how exemplary teacher behavior in character learning builds emotional closeness,

increases learning motivation, shapes students' responses, and ultimately makes teachers figures who are missed and remembered by students. This issue is important because the concept of a longed-for teacher involves a psychopedagogical dimension of education, namely the relationship between exemplary behavior, emotional bonding, learning motivation, and the internalization of character values.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to strengthen character education through teacher exemplary behavior that is concrete, consistent, and humanistic. Amid educational practices that often emphasize academic targets, teacher exemplary behavior needs to be repositioned as the core of character learning. Teachers who demonstrate discipline, honesty, empathy, polite communication, and responsibility not only shape students' positive behavior but also create memorable learning experiences. Such experiences can build strong emotional bonds between teachers and students, making teachers not only instructors but also moral and psychological figures whose presence is longed for.

The research gap lies in the limited number of studies that examine teacher exemplary behavior multidimensionally: as a moral practice, a character-learning strategy, a social model, and a foundation for emotional relationships between teachers and students. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on linking teacher exemplary behavior in character learning with the formation of the longed-for teacher. Thus, this study does not only discuss how teachers become role models, but also how students respond to such exemplary behavior, how emotional closeness is formed, how learning motivation is strengthened, and how meaningful learning experiences are created.

Based on the above background, this study aims to examine in depth teacher exemplary behavior in character learning and its contribution to the formation of teachers who are longed for by students. Specifically, this study seeks to describe the forms of teacher exemplary behavior in character learning, analyze how teacher exemplary behavior builds emotional closeness with students, and explain how such behavior contributes to the formation of teachers who are respected, remembered, and longed for by students.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Approach and Design**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore in depth how teacher exemplary behavior is practiced in character learning and how it contributes to the formation of a teacher figure who is longed for by students. This approach allows the researcher to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, interactions, and meanings within a natural educational setting (Adrias & Ruswandi, 2025; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2023; Yin, 2017).

A case study design was used because this research focused on a specific case, namely teacher exemplary behavior in character learning at MI Muhammadiyah Tahuna. The case study design enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon comprehensively by considering classroom interactions, teacher-student relationships, school culture, and students' emotional responses toward teachers. In this context, the phenomenon of the "longed-for teacher" was not treated as an abstract concept, but as a lived experience emerging from daily interactions between teachers and students.

### **Research Site and Participants**

The research was conducted at MI Muhammadiyah Tahuna. This site was selected because the madrasah provides a relevant context for observing character learning practices and teacher exemplary behavior in daily school activities. The school environment allows intensive interaction

between teachers and students, making it possible to examine how exemplary behavior is demonstrated, received, and internalized by students.

The participants in this study consisted of teachers and students who were directly involved in character learning. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Teachers were selected based on their involvement in character learning and their role as figures considered exemplary by the school and students. Students were selected because they experienced direct interaction with teachers and were able to provide information about how teacher exemplary behavior influenced their attitudes, motivation, and emotional closeness (Shenton, 2004; Tisdell et al., 2025)

### **Research Focus**

The focus of this study was teacher exemplary behavior in character learning and its contribution to the formation of a teacher who is longed for by students. The research focused on three main aspects. First, the forms of teacher exemplary behavior in character learning, including discipline, honesty, responsibility, empathy, polite communication, fairness, and consistency between words and actions. Second, the implementation of character learning that builds emotional closeness between teachers and students. Third, the contribution of teacher exemplary behavior to the formation of a teacher figure who is respected, remembered, and longed for by students.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine teacher behavior and teacher-student interactions during learning activities and daily school routines. Through observation, the researcher identified forms of exemplary behavior such as punctuality, classroom discipline, polite communication, emotional support, empathy, and fairness in treating students.

In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and students. Interviews with teachers aimed to explore their understanding of exemplary behavior, their strategies in character learning, and their efforts to build positive relationships with students. Interviews with students aimed to understand how they perceived teacher behavior, how they responded to teacher exemplary practices, and how such behavior influenced their motivation, comfort, and emotional attachment to teachers.

Documentation was used to support and verify the data obtained from observation and interviews. The documents analyzed included school activity records, character education programs, learning documentation, classroom activity notes, photographs of learning activities, and other documents related to character learning practices at MI Muhammadiyah Tahuna. The original draft also indicates that observation, interviews, and documentation were used as the main data collection techniques in examining teacher exemplary behavior and students' responses (Nowell et al., 2017; Patton, 2014).

### **Research Instruments**

The main instrument in this qualitative case study was the researcher. The researcher played a central role in determining the research focus, collecting data, analyzing findings, and interpreting the meaning of the data. To support the data collection process, the researcher used observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation checklists.

The observation guideline was used to record teacher exemplary behavior and student responses during classroom and school activities. The interview guideline was used to explore teachers' and students' perceptions related to exemplary behavior, character learning, emotional closeness, and the figure of the longed-for teacher. The documentation checklist was used to identify supporting documents related to character learning activities and school programs.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data

condensation was carried out by selecting, simplifying, and organizing data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. The data were categorized based on the main themes of the study, such as teacher discipline, moral exemplary behavior, communication style, empathy, emotional support, teacher-student relationships, and students' responses.

Data display was conducted by presenting the findings in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic categories, and tables. This process helped the researcher identify patterns and relationships between teacher exemplary behavior and students' character formation. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting recurring patterns in the data and verifying them through comparison among observation results, interview data, and documentation (Miles et al., 2014).

#### **Data Validity**

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and school documents. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observation, interviews, and documentation. This process was used to ensure that the findings were consistent, credible, and reflected the actual conditions in the field.

In addition, the researcher conducted repeated reading and interpretation of the data to ensure that the conclusions were grounded in the evidence collected. By using triangulation, the study sought to produce a comprehensive understanding of teacher exemplary behavior in character learning and its contribution to shaping teachers who are longed for by students (Alexander, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Forms of Teacher Exemplary Behavior in Character Learning**

The first finding shows that teacher exemplary behavior in character learning was reflected through concrete and observable actions in daily classroom interactions. The forms of exemplary behavior most frequently identified were discipline, honesty, responsibility, polite communication, empathy, fairness, emotional control, and consistency between words and actions. These forms of exemplary behavior became important because students did not only receive moral values through verbal explanation, but also observed how those values were practised directly by their teachers.

Based on classroom observation, teacher discipline was one of the most visible forms of exemplary behavior. Teachers arrived on time, started learning according to the schedule, prepared learning activities, and maintained classroom order consistently. This behavior provided students with a direct example of how discipline should be practised in daily school life. Students responded positively by becoming more aware of time, more orderly in joining classroom activities, and more respectful of classroom rules. The initial draft also shows that teacher discipline was identified as an important observed aspect, with students following the teacher's pattern of punctuality and showing greater appreciation for time.

Another form of exemplary behavior was polite and respectful communication. Teachers used courteous language, gave clear instructions, listened to students' responses, and provided feedback without humiliating them. This form of communication created a more comfortable classroom atmosphere and encouraged students to ask questions or express opinions. The observation data in the draft indicate that positive teacher communication made students more courageous in asking questions and more active in giving opinions.

Empathy and emotional support were also central forms of teacher exemplary behavior. Teachers paid attention to students' conditions, motivated students who experienced learning

difficulties, and responded to students’ problems with patience. This behavior showed that character learning was not only about teaching rules, but also about building emotional security in the classroom. Students who felt supported tended to feel more appreciated, accepted, and confident. The data in the draft also emphasize that empathy and emotional support made teachers function as supportive figures for students’ emotional development.

Teacher firmness was another form of exemplary behavior found in character learning. Teachers enforced classroom rules fairly without excessive anger or verbal violence. This firmness helped students understand behavioral boundaries and the importance of responsibility. The teacher’s firmness was not perceived as authoritarian when it was accompanied by fairness, clear reasons, and respectful communication. In this way, students learned that rules were not meant to punish, but to create a safe and orderly learning environment.

Moral exemplary behavior was also shown through honesty, politeness, and responsibility. Teachers demonstrated these values in daily actions, such as being transparent in giving assessments, keeping promises, using polite language, and showing responsibility in guiding students. These actions became a model that students could observe and imitate. In character learning, such consistency is crucial because students are sensitive to the gap between what teachers say and what teachers do. When teachers show consistency between moral instruction and personal conduct, students are more likely to trust and imitate them. The forms of teacher exemplary behavior found in this study can be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Forms of Teacher Exemplary Behavior in Character Learning

Aspect Observed	Field Finding	Pattern Identified	Student Response
Teacher discipline	Teachers arrived on time and consistently started learning according to the schedule.	Discipline became the most visible model for students.	Students became more punctual and more respectful of time.
Teacher communication	Teachers used polite language, gave clear instructions, and responded to students respectfully.	Positive communication created a comfortable classroom climate.	Students were more willing to ask questions and express opinions.
Empathy and emotional support	Teachers paid attention to students’ conditions and motivated students who faced difficulties.	Teachers became supportive figures for students’ emotional development.	Students felt appreciated, accepted, and more confident.
Teacher firmness	Teachers enforced rules fairly and without excessive anger.	Consistent firmness strengthened classroom structure and behavioral boundaries.	Students became more obedient and understood acceptable behavior.
Moral exemplary behavior	Teachers showed honesty, politeness, and responsibility in daily interactions.	Moral values were demonstrated through concrete actions.	Students imitated teachers’ moral behavior in social interaction.
Teacher-student interaction	Teachers built warm and respectful relationships with students.	Positive relationships strengthened emotional closeness.	Students felt comfortable and valued the teacher’s presence.

Based on Table 1, teacher exemplary behavior was not limited to moral instruction, but was embodied in concrete daily practices. The teacher’s punctuality, respectful communication, emotional support, fairness, and moral consistency became direct learning resources for students. These findings indicate that character learning becomes more effective when teachers demonstrate the values they expect students to internalize.

The forms of exemplary behavior also functioned as moral modeling. Students learned character values through observation, imitation, and habituation. For example, when teachers consistently used polite language, students learned how to communicate respectfully. When teachers enforced rules fairly, students learned the meaning of justice and responsibility. When teachers showed empathy, students learned how to care for others. Thus, teacher exemplary behavior served as a bridge between moral values taught in learning and moral values practised in everyday school life.

Overall, the first finding confirms that teacher exemplary behavior is a fundamental element in character learning. The teacher's actions, communication, and emotional responses became visible models that shaped students' understanding of discipline, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and respect. This finding becomes the basis for understanding the next finding, namely how teacher exemplary behavior influences students' motivation and character development.

### **The Influence of Teacher Exemplary Behavior on Students' Motivation and Character**

The second finding shows that teacher exemplary behavior had a significant influence on students' motivation and character development. Students responded positively to teachers who demonstrated discipline, care, responsibility, emotional stability, and consistency in daily interactions. In the context of character learning, students did not only interpret teacher behavior as classroom management, but also as a concrete example of how moral values should be practised. As a result, teacher exemplary behavior encouraged students to become more motivated, disciplined, confident, and willing to participate in classroom activities.

Teacher discipline became one of the main factors influencing students' motivation and behavior. When teachers arrived on time, began lessons according to schedule, and consistently maintained classroom order, students gradually followed the same pattern of discipline. The field data in the draft show that students became more respectful of time and more aware of classroom rules after observing teacher discipline. This indicates that discipline was not merely taught through instruction, but internalized through repeated observation of teacher behavior.

Teacher communication also influenced students' motivation to participate in learning. Teachers who used polite language, gave clear directions, and responded to students respectfully created a comfortable classroom atmosphere. In such an atmosphere, students became more willing to ask questions, express opinions, and participate in discussions. This shows that positive communication can reduce students' fear of making mistakes and increase their confidence in the learning process. The draft also indicates that polite and responsive teacher communication made students more courageous in asking questions and more active in giving opinions.

Empathy and emotional support from teachers also contributed to students' confidence and learning motivation. Teachers who paid attention to students' conditions, provided encouragement when students experienced difficulties, and gave appreciation for students' efforts helped create a sense of being valued. This emotional support strengthened students' self-confidence and encouraged them to engage more actively in learning. Students who felt accepted and supported were more likely to show positive attitudes, obey classroom rules, and develop responsibility in completing learning tasks.

Teacher firmness also had an influence on students' character. The teacher's ability to enforce rules fairly without excessive anger helped students understand the importance of boundaries and responsibility. Students became more obedient not because they were afraid, but because they understood that classroom rules were applied consistently and fairly. This kind of firmness supported the development of self-control, discipline, and respect for shared agreements.

The influence of teacher exemplary behavior on students' motivation and character can be summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Influence of Teacher Exemplary Behavior on Students’ Motivation and Character

Teacher Behavior	Exemplary	Influence on Students	Character Developed	Value
Discipline		Students became more punctual and more respectful of classroom routines.	Discipline	and responsibility
Polite communication		Students became more confident in asking questions and expressing opinions.	Confidence and respect	
Empathy and emotional support		Students felt appreciated, accepted, and motivated to learn.	Self-confidence and social awareness	
Fair firmness		Students obeyed rules and understood behavioral boundaries.	Responsibility and self-control	
Honesty and consistency		Students trusted teachers and imitated moral behavior.	Honesty and integrity	
Warm interaction		Students became more active, comfortable, and emotionally engaged.	Cooperation and positive attitude	

Based on Table 2, teacher exemplary behavior influenced students in both motivational and character dimensions. On the motivational side, students became more active, confident, and willing to participate in learning. On the character side, students showed better discipline, responsibility, respect, self-control, and honesty. This finding indicates that teacher behavior can function as a living curriculum in character education, because students learn not only from what teachers explain, but also from what teachers consistently demonstrate.

The finding also suggests that students’ motivation was closely related to the emotional quality of teacher-student interaction. When teachers showed care, appreciation, and respectful communication, students felt safer and more valued in the classroom. This emotional safety encouraged them to participate more actively and to develop positive learning habits. Conversely, if teachers only emphasized rules without empathy, students might obey formally but fail to internalize character values meaningfully.

Overall, the second finding confirms that teacher exemplary behavior contributes directly to students’ motivation and character formation. Discipline, polite communication, empathy, fair firmness, honesty, and consistency became important factors that shaped students’ learning attitudes and moral behavior. This finding provides a basis for understanding the next aspect, namely how teacher exemplary behavior builds teacher-student relationships and emotional closeness in character learning.

### Teacher–Student Relationship and Emotional Closeness

The third finding shows that teacher exemplary behavior contributed to the formation of positive teacher–student relationships and emotional closeness in character learning. The relationship between teachers and students was not built only through formal instructional interaction, but also through daily communication, empathy, attention, and emotional support. In this study, students responded positively to teachers who treated them respectfully, listened to their difficulties, and created a classroom atmosphere that made them feel safe and valued.

Observation data showed that teachers built emotional closeness through warm communication and active listening. Teachers did not only give instructions, but also responded to students’ questions, listened to their opinions, and provided encouragement when students faced difficulties. This kind of interaction helped students feel more comfortable in the classroom. The draft also indicates that warm teacher–student interaction strengthened emotional closeness and made students feel comfortable with the teacher’s presence.

Empathy was another important factor in building emotional closeness. Teachers showed concern for students’ conditions, motivated students who lacked confidence, and provided support when students experienced learning or personal difficulties. This behavior made students feel accepted and appreciated as individuals. In character learning, such emotional support is important

because students are more likely to internalize values when they feel emotionally connected to the teacher who teaches those values.

The teacher’s polite and respectful communication also strengthened the quality of teacher–student relationships. Students became more willing to ask questions and express opinions because they felt that their voices were heard. This finding shows that emotional closeness was not formed instantly, but developed through repeated positive interactions. When teachers consistently communicated with kindness, patience, and respect, students developed trust in the teacher.

The findings on teacher–student relationship and emotional closeness can be summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Teacher–Student Relationship and Emotional Closeness

Aspect	Field Finding	Pattern Identified	Student Response
Warm interaction	Teachers built respectful and caring relationships with students.	Positive relationships strengthened emotional closeness.	Students felt comfortable and valued the teacher’s presence.
Active listening	Teachers listened to students’ questions, opinions, and difficulties.	Students experienced emotional safety in the classroom.	Students became more open and confident in communicating.
Empathy	Teachers paid attention to students’ emotional and learning conditions.	Empathy made teachers supportive figures for students.	Students felt accepted, appreciated, and motivated.
Respectful communication	Teachers used polite language and responded to students without humiliation.	Communication created a safe classroom climate.	Students were more willing to participate and express ideas.
Emotional support	Teachers encouraged students who faced difficulties.	Support strengthened students’ confidence and attachment to teachers.	Students showed greater trust and learning motivation.

Based on Table 3, emotional closeness between teachers and students emerged from consistent positive interactions. Teachers who demonstrated empathy, active listening, respectful communication, and emotional support created a classroom environment in which students felt safe to learn and express themselves. This finding indicates that character learning requires not only moral instruction, but also relational warmth.

The emotional closeness formed in teacher–student relationships also influenced students’ willingness to follow teacher guidance. When students felt respected and supported, they became more open to receiving advice, correction, and moral direction. In this context, teacher exemplary behavior became more effective because it was supported by emotional trust. Students did not only obey the teacher because of authority, but because they felt connected to the teacher as a caring figure.

Overall, the third finding confirms that teacher–student emotional closeness is an important foundation in character learning. Exemplary behavior becomes more meaningful when it is accompanied by empathy, respectful communication, and genuine concern for students. This finding provides the basis for the next finding, namely the formation of the longed-for teacher as a figure who is respected, remembered, and emotionally meaningful for students.

**The Formation of the Longed-for Teacher**

The final finding shows that teacher exemplary behavior contributed to the formation of a teacher figure who was not only respected but also remembered and longed for by students. In this study, the “longed-for teacher” refers to a teacher whose presence gives students a sense of comfort, emotional security, motivation, and meaningful learning experience. Students did not miss the teacher merely because of the subject matter delivered, but because of the teacher’s sincere attention, warm communication, moral consistency, and emotional support during the learning process.

The formation of the longed-for teacher was closely related to the consistency of teacher exemplary behavior. Teachers who consistently showed discipline, honesty, responsibility, politeness, empathy, and fairness created positive impressions in students' minds. These behaviors made students feel that the teacher was not only an authority figure but also a moral and emotional guide. The draft indicates that students felt comfortable and valued when teachers built warm and respectful relationships, and this emotional closeness made students appreciate the teacher's presence.

The longed-for teacher also emerged from the teacher's ability to provide emotional support. Teachers who paid attention to students' difficulties, encouraged them during learning challenges, and responded with patience were perceived as caring figures. This emotional support created a sense of attachment between teachers and students. When such teachers were absent, students felt a sense of loss because the classroom atmosphere became different without the teacher's presence. This finding shows that the longed-for teacher is formed not only through teaching competence, but also through affective presence and relational warmth.

Another factor that shaped the longed-for teacher was meaningful communication. Teachers who used polite language, listened actively, and gave constructive feedback created a classroom climate in which students felt safe to express themselves. This kind of communication made students perceive the teacher as approachable and supportive. As a result, students were more open, more motivated, and more emotionally connected to the teacher. The teacher became a figure who was remembered because of the way they made students feel valued.

The formation of the longed-for teacher can be summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. The Formation of the Longed-for Teacher

Dimension	Field Finding	Pattern Identified	Student Response
Moral consistency	Teachers showed consistency between words and actions.	Consistency strengthened students' trust in the teacher.	Students respected and imitated the teacher's behavior.
Emotional support	Teachers encouraged students and paid attention to their difficulties.	Teachers became supportive figures in students' emotional development.	Students felt accepted, motivated, and emotionally attached.
Warm communication	Teachers used polite language, listened actively, and responded respectfully.	Communication created a safe and meaningful learning atmosphere.	Students became more open and comfortable in class.
Inspirational presence	Teachers showed discipline, responsibility, empathy, and fairness.	Exemplary behavior created a lasting impression.	Students remembered the teacher as a meaningful figure.
Sense of longing	Students felt the teacher's absence when the teacher was not present.	Emotional closeness transformed respect into longing.	Students missed the teacher's presence and support.

Based on Table 4, the longed-for teacher was formed through the interaction of moral, emotional, and pedagogical dimensions. Moral consistency built students' trust. Emotional support created attachment. Warm communication strengthened comfort and openness. Inspirational presence gave students a lasting impression. These dimensions show that students' longing for a teacher is not accidental, but emerges from repeated positive experiences in learning.

This finding also indicates that the concept of the longed-for teacher is closely connected to character learning. Teachers who model good character and build emotional closeness become more effective in guiding students' moral development. Students are more likely to accept advice, follow rules, and internalize values when they feel connected to the teacher. Thus, teacher exemplary

behavior becomes meaningful not only because it teaches character, but because it creates a relationship that makes character learning emotionally powerful.

Overall, the final finding confirms that the formation of the longed-for teacher is the result of consistent exemplary behavior, emotional support, respectful communication, and meaningful teacher–student relationships. A teacher becomes longed for when students experience the teacher’s presence as a source of guidance, comfort, motivation, and moral inspiration. This finding strengthens the argument that character education must be built not only through curriculum content, but also through the quality of teacher presence and relational warmth in daily learning.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that teacher exemplary behavior plays a central role in character learning and in the formation of a teacher figure who is longed for by students. The forms of exemplary behavior found in this study include discipline, honesty, responsibility, polite communication, empathy, fairness, emotional control, and consistency between words and actions. These forms of behavior are not merely personal qualities of teachers, but function as concrete moral models that students observe and imitate in daily school life. This finding supports the idea that character education is more effective when moral values are not only taught verbally but also demonstrated consistently through teacher behavior (Humairah et al., 2025; Qushwa et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this finding is closely related to Bandura’s social learning theory, which explains that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. In the classroom context, students observe how teachers speak, manage emotions, treat others, enforce rules, and respond to problems. When teachers consistently show discipline, fairness, and empathy, students receive concrete examples of how moral values should be practised. Thus, teacher exemplary behavior becomes a “living curriculum” in character education. This is also consistent with the draft finding that students responded positively to teacher discipline, polite communication, emotional support, and moral consistency in classroom interaction (Hidayat, 2025; Tohet & Nuraini, 2026).

The findings also show that teacher exemplary behavior influences students’ motivation and character development. Students became more punctual, confident, respectful, and willing to participate in classroom activities when teachers demonstrated positive behavior. This means that teacher exemplary behavior affects not only students’ moral understanding but also their learning motivation and emotional engagement. Teachers who show enthusiasm, care, and responsibility create a learning atmosphere that encourages students to be more active and disciplined. This finding is in line with Astuti et al. (2023), who found that positive teacher-student relationships can increase students’ motivation, discipline, and enthusiasm for learning. Similarly, Deni et al. (2022) emphasized that positive habituation consistently practised by teachers can gradually strengthen students’ character (Malau et al., 2025).

Another important finding is that emotional closeness between teachers and students strengthens the effectiveness of character learning. Teachers who communicate warmly, listen actively, and provide emotional support create a sense of safety and acceptance for students. This emotional bond makes students more open to receiving advice, correction, and moral guidance. In this context, character learning does not occur only through instruction, but through relational experience. Students are more likely to internalize values when they trust and feel emotionally connected to the teacher who teaches those values. This finding supports Noddings’ view that caring relationships are fundamental in moral education because students learn values through experiences of being cared for, respected, and understood.

The study also confirms that the concept of the “longed-for teacher” emerges from the combination of moral consistency, emotional support, respectful communication, and meaningful teacher-student relationships. A teacher becomes longed for not simply because of teaching

competence, but because students experience the teacher's presence as comforting, motivating, and morally inspiring. When students feel that a teacher appreciates them, listens to them, and supports their development, the teacher becomes a figure who is remembered and missed. This finding strengthens the psychopedagogical view that the emotional presence of teachers is an important factor in meaningful learning.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on teacher exemplary behavior and character education. Assyifa et al. (2023) emphasized that exemplary behavior in moral and faith-based learning serves as a foundation for character formation. Sugianto (2024) also showed that polite and empathetic teacher communication contributes to a positive classroom climate. Meanwhile, Wibowo and Ok (2023) found that teacher exemplary behavior in moral education influences students' character formation. The present study extends these previous findings by showing that teacher exemplary behavior does not only shape character, but also builds emotional attachment that contributes to the formation of a teacher who is respected, remembered, and longed for by students.

The implication of this study is that character education should not be limited to curriculum content or moral instruction. Schools and madrasahs need to strengthen teacher exemplary behavior as a core component of character education. Teacher professional development should include not only pedagogical competence but also interpersonal competence, emotional regulation, empathetic communication, and reflective moral practice. Teachers need to be supported to become consistent role models in daily interactions, because students learn character most powerfully from what teachers repeatedly demonstrate.

In addition, madrasahs need to create a school culture that supports exemplary behavior. Character education will be more effective when teacher behavior, school rules, classroom culture, and student interactions are aligned. Programs such as mentoring, reflective teacher forums, character habituation activities, and emotional communication training can help strengthen teacher-student relationships. In this way, character education can become more humanistic, relational, and meaningful.

Overall, the discussion shows that teacher exemplary behavior is a fundamental foundation of character learning. Through discipline, honesty, empathy, polite communication, fairness, and emotional support, teachers become moral models who influence students' motivation, behavior, and emotional development. More importantly, consistent exemplary behavior and warm relationships enable teachers to become figures who are not only respected but also longed for by students. Thus, the formation of the longed-for teacher is not accidental; it is the result of sustained moral practice, relational warmth, and meaningful educational presence.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher exemplary behavior is a central foundation in character learning and plays an important role in shaping teachers who are longed for by students. The findings show that exemplary behavior is reflected in concrete daily practices, such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, polite communication, empathy, fairness, emotional control, and consistency between words and actions. These behaviors function as moral models that students can observe, imitate, and internalize in their daily school life. Therefore, character education becomes more effective when teachers do not only explain moral values, but also demonstrate them consistently through classroom interaction and school routines.

Teacher exemplary behavior also contributes to students' motivation, character development, and emotional closeness. Students become more disciplined, confident, respectful, and motivated when teachers show care, fairness, and emotional support. Warm communication, active listening, and sincere attention create a safe learning environment in which students feel valued and accepted.

This emotional closeness strengthens students' willingness to follow teacher guidance and internalize character values more meaningfully.

The formation of the longed-for teacher emerges from the combination of moral consistency, relational warmth, and meaningful educational presence. Teachers become figures who are respected, remembered, and missed when their presence provides comfort, guidance, motivation, and moral inspiration for students. This study implies that schools and madrasahs need to strengthen teacher exemplary behavior as a core component of character education through professional development, reflective teaching practices, empathetic communication training, and school cultures that support consistent moral modeling. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term influence of teacher exemplary behavior on students' character development across different educational settings.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adrias, & Ruswandi, A. (2025). *Desain Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan Mix Method*. Rajawali Pers.
- Alexander, A. P. (2019). Lincoln and Guba's quality criteria for trustworthiness. *IDC International Journal*, 6(4), 1–6.
- Aziz, A., & Hasanah, U. (2022). PENGUATAN PROFIL PELAJAR PANCASILA MELALUI PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER BERBASIS NILAI-NILAI ISLAM DI MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH. *Journal of Education and Learning Sciences*, 2(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.56404/jels.v2i2.19>
- BABATUNDE, T. B., AKINLADE, B. K., & AJAYI, M. D. (2025). Teachers as Moral Exemplars: Analyzing the Role of Educators in Shaping Ethical Behavior Among Students. *INTL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, MANAGEMENT SCIENCES AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES*, 1(2), 368–384.
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1). Prentice-hall Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Fifth Edit). SAGE Publications Inc.
- Febriyanti, A., & Andriyani, S. (2023). PAI TEACHER'S ACTION TO MINIMIZE RACIST BEHAVIOR AT ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOL IN JEPARA. *Kartini: Journal of Gender and Social Inclusion Studies*, 1(2).
- Firdaus, M. A. (2020). Pendidikan Akhlak Pendidikan Akhlak Karimah Berbasis Kultur Pesantren. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11(2), 136–151.
- Fox, B., Bearman, M., Bellingham, R., North-Samardzic, A., Scarparo, S., Taylor, D., Thomas, M. K. E., & Volkov, M. (2021). Longing for connection: University educators creating meaning through sharing experiences of teaching online. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(5), 2077–2092.
- Hidayat, A. W. (2025). Moral Learning Based on Teacher Exemplars as a Strategy for Strengthening Islamic Character Education. *JISEI: Journal of Islamic Studies and Educational Innovation*, 1(4), 467–479.
- Humairah, D. A., Ulfah, U., Hariana, K., Lagandesa, Y. R., & Fasli, M. (2025). Teacher

- strategies in cultivating character education: A study of religious, honest, and disciplined values in elementary school. *Journal of Innovation and Research in Primary Education*, 4(4), 3388–3400.
- Irawati, D., Iqbal, A. M., Hasanah, A., & Arifin, B. S. (2022). Profil pelajar Pancasila sebagai upaya mewujudkan karakter bangsa. *Edumaspol: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 6(1), 1224–1238.
- Kainde, S. J. R., & Mandagi, D. (2023). A Systematic Review of Servant Leadership Outcomes in Education Context. *EDUKASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 4(2), 2563–2574. <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v4i2.627>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, B. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. Inc.
- Malau, J., Purba, M. Y., Manurung, R., Purba, M. N., & Ambarita, M. E. B. (2025). The Influence of Early Childhood Teachers' Exemplary Behavior on Students' Learning Motivation at PAUD Haleluya Pematang Siantar. *Global Perspectives on Christian Education and Theology*, 1(1), 60–68.
- Mendes-Flohr, P. (2026). 5 The Father I Longed For. In *Love Is Strong as Death* (pp. 77–87). University of Chicago Press.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Third edit). SAGE Publications Inc.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1609406917733847.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.
- Qushwa, F. G., Putri, D. F., & Jali, H. (2025). Integration of Teacher Exemplary Behavior in Character Education to Build A Globally Perspective Madrasah Generation. *EDUCARE: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(1), 1–13.
- Ruswandi, A., Firdaus, M. A., & Ruswandi, R. (2023). Readiness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers for Digital Learning Post Pandemic Covid 19. *International Journal of Ethno-Sciences and Education Research*, 3(3), 77–84.
- Ruswandi, A., Firdaus, M. A., Ruswandi, R., & Mahyani, A. (2024). Readiness of Digital Learning Documents on Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Madrasah. *7th International Conference on Learning Innovation and Quality Education (ICLIQE 2023)*, 906–918.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75.
- Sugiyono. (2023). *Metode penelitian pendidikan*. Penerbit Alfabeta.
- Tisdell, E. J., Merriam, S. B., & Stuckey-Peyrot, H. L. (2025). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Tohet, M., & Nuraini, F. (2026). More Than Teaching Values: Teacher Exemplarity and Moral Formation through the Figurative Learning Model. *Indonesian Journal of Education*

*and Social Studies*, 5(1), 40–55.

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications*. SAGE Publications US.