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Strategies for Building Students' Islamic Character Through a Habituation Program in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of habituation programs in developing students' Islamic character at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel. The study was motivated by a gap between the Islamic values taught at school and students' behavior in their daily lives, highlighting the need for a sustainable character-building strategy. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving teachers, educational staff, and students as the primary informants. The findings indicate that regularly scheduled habituation programs, such as religious activities within the Plus Program and consistent worship practices, contribute to the development of students' Islamic character. These characteristics include love for God, independence and responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, respect and courtesy, social awareness, leadership, humility, and tolerance. This study contributes to the understanding that habituation programs can effectively foster Islamic character among elementary school students. The findings further emphasize the importance of involving all members of the school community in consistently developing habituation programs grounded in Islamic values so that these values can be meaningfully reflected in students' everyday lives.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of modern life are closely intertwined with the rapid development of information technology and transportation. These innovations not only provide greater ease of access but also serve as strategic solutions to address the increasingly complex challenges of everyday life amid the ongoing process of modernization (Ridwanulloh & Wulandari, 2022). In addition, today's digital advancements have brought significant impacts across various aspects of human life, including the social, economic, and educational spheres (Ulum, 2024). In the field of education, the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) defines educational technology as a systematic process involving ideas, equipment, procedures, and people, as well as organizational activities aimed at analyzing various aspects of human learning. Learning technology is considered a component of educational technology (Hamdan Suyuti, 2021). It is undeniable that technology also facilitates various activities, particularly in accessing and disseminating information (Zuhra et al., 2025). However, despite the benefits offered by technolssogy, its rapid development has also created new challenges in everyday life. Excessive dependence on technology may reduce students' critical-thinking

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abilities, while distractions from social media and online games can interfere with the learning process. Furthermore, not all students have equal access to technology, particularly those living in remote areas, resulting in a digital divide (Sembiring et al., 2024).

Strengthening character education has become increasingly important amid technological developments that influence students' behavior and patterns of interaction. Rachmatianto and Hawadi (2022) emphasize that teachers are not only responsible for teaching students how to use technology but also for safeguarding their moral and character development so that they are not negatively influenced by social media. Similarly, Megawati Fajrin et al. (2025) demonstrate that a purely cognitive approach is insufficient to address the degradation of digital ethics, highlighting the need to integrate spiritual values and continuous worship practices. Habituation is an effective method for character development because moral values are instilled through repetition and practical application in everyday life. Research by Hirlan and Mukminah (2025) and Amaliah and Hasibuan (2023) also indicates that habituation in the affective and psychomotor domains contributes to the development of students' character and moral conduct. However, previous studies, including Ramadhan et al. (2025), have generally discussed character habituation in broad terms and have not yet examined the integrated management of such programs. This study addresses this gap by examining the Plus Program at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta, which systematically integrates spiritual habituation, manners, and discipline. This integration represents the novelty of the study in advancing Islamic-based educational management at the elementary school level.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the implementation of the Plus Program as an Islamic habituation strategy for developing students' character at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the forms, stages, and mechanisms of the habituation program, including spiritual activities, the cultivation of daily manners, and the development of student discipline. In addition, the study aims to analyze the roles of teachers and school administrators in managing, guiding, and supervising the implementation of the Plus Program to ensure that it is carried out consistently and meaningfully. The study also seeks to evaluate the program's impact on the development of students' Islamic character in terms of attitudes, behavior, morality, and discipline, while identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation. These findings are expected to serve as a foundation for developing habituation programs that are more effective, measurable, and sustainable.

SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta has implemented various structured Islamic habituation programs, including communal prayers, congregational prayer, greetings and salutations, as well as the cultivation of discipline and courtesy. Theoretically, consistent habituation is a key factor in instilling Islamic values in elementary school children. However, field observations indicate a gap between the programs that have been designed and the character traits that are actually developed. These habituation activities are still often carried out by students merely as formal routines without a deeper understanding of their meaning. As a result, Islamic behavior is not consistently reflected in students' daily lives, both inside and outside the school environment. This situation is further compounded by the absence of a systematic evaluation mechanism to assess the extent to which these programs effectively contribute to students' character development. Therefore, this study is important for examining in depth how the habituation program is implemented and how it affects the

development of students' Islamic character at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta. The findings are expected to provide the school with data-driven evaluation and recommendations for optimizing Islamic character development so that it goes beyond mere formality and becomes a meaningful part of students' everyday lives.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to provide an in-depth understanding of students' Islamic character and the implementation of the Habituation Program (Plus Program) at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta (Septiani et al., 2025). Unlike quantitative research, this approach focuses on understanding phenomena within their specific contexts rather than achieving statistical generalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Five informants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement and understanding of the program, consisting of the program coordinator (Ms. Ifa), one teacher, and three actively involved students. The study focused on the types and implementation of habituation programs and their impact on students' Islamic character. Data were collected over approximately 1.5 months, from November 25 to January 7, through semi structured interviews and direct observations, using interview guides and observation sheets as research instruments (Refan, 2025). Interviews were conducted according to an agreed schedule and recorded carefully to ensure accuracy, while observations were carried out during habituation activities to obtain a realistic understanding of their implementation. The data were analyzed using narrative and thematic analysis to identify participants' experiences, key themes related to program implementation, and its contribution to the development of Islamic character (Pujiati, 2024). To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, methodological and source triangulation were applied by combining interviews and observations from multiple informants (Rakhmatullah, 2025). Overall, this study is based on the assumption that students' Islamic character can be effectively developed through the habituation programs implemented at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation studies at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta, it was found that the school implements a habituation program as the main strategy for developing students' Islamic character. This habituation program is designed in a planned, systematic, and continuous manner. Most of these habituation programs are integrated under the umbrella of a school policy known as the "Plus Program."

Habituation Program (Plus Program) at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel

The Plus Program was initiated by the Muhammadiyah Branch Leadership (PCM) as a means of strengthening and enriching the Al Islam and Muhammadiyah curriculum. The program consists of six main pillars that are integrated into the school's daily schedule:

Table 1.
Structure of the Plus Program Components at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel

Program Component	Implementation & Habituation Method	Targeted Character Values
Tahfidzul Qur'an	Every morning after the congregational Dhuha prayer in a classical setting. Students who are fluent recite the verses, while the other students listen and follow through repetition.	Religiosity, attentiveness, memory, and togetherness.
Qika (Qiraah & Kitabah)	Gradual BTAQ learning from Iqro to the Qur'an, along with instruction in writing Hijaiyah letters.	Qur'anic literacy, discipline, and neatness.
AY (Adabul Yaumiyah)	Daily practice of ethics, including greetings, polite and respectful behavior, and appropriate interaction within the school environment.	Courtesy, social role modeling, and respect.
TIK (Information Technology)	Introduction to computers, basic computer operation, and the appropriate use of learning applications.	Digital literacy, responsibility, and orderliness.
Tapak Suci & HW	Compulsory martial arts and scouting extracurricular activities with intensive talent development supported by specialized coaches.	Independence, courage, leadership, and patriotism.
Talent and Interest Development	Inclusive guidance for all students, both those who are already talented and those who show potential, without forcing participation.	Self-confidence, self-appreciation, and perseverance.

The seriousness of the management of the Plus Program, particularly in the Tapak Suci (TS) and Hizbul Wathon (HW) components, is one of the main strengths of SD Muhammadiyah Pakel compared with similar elementary schools. This was emphasized by Ms. Ifa, the Main Coordinator of the Habituation Program:

> *"We include the TS and HW programs in the Plus Program because the children will truly receive proper guidance. Although these activities are compulsory for all students, when a child has greater potential, we bring in a specialized coach so that their talent can be properly developed and nurtured."* Interview January 7, 2026.

In addition, an inclusive approach to developing students' talents and interests is also implemented in a humane manner without putting pressure on students, as further explained by the Habituation Program Coordinator:

> *"All of the children receive guidance, whether they are talented or not. If there is a child who is talented in singing but does not participate in the music extracurricular activity, for example, if we see that the child has potential, we will still pay attention to and support that potential without forcing them."* Interview, January 7, 2026.

The school's commitment to developing students' character and potential is reflected in its culture of courtesy and their religious achievements. Based on field observations, students consistently responded to greetings from visitors or researchers in a polite and friendly manner. In addition, informal interviews with several students regarding their Qur'an

memorization achievements revealed that most of them had reached the memorization target up to Surah Al-Lail.

Implementation of the Habituation Program at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta

The implementation of the full-day school system requires students to remain at school until the afternoon. Therefore, the school schedules Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers in congregation as mandatory daily activities. The implementation of worship habituation is supported by a unique operational spatial design. The school does not provide a dedicated teachers' room; instead, teachers' desks and presence are positioned directly in front of or within the classroom area. As stated by a classroom teacher:

> *"Since there is no dedicated teachers' room, we, as teachers, can directly monitor the students' discipline and behavior, from the time they arrive until they leave school."* Interview, January 9, 2026.

The supervision system is further strengthened by teachers' duty schedules at the school gate, mosque, and classroom corridors. In the implementation of Adabul Yaumiyah (AY), the school applies two approaches: (1) AY Materi, which is integrated into face-to-face lesson hours, and (2) AY Pembiasaan, which is implemented through daily practices. Evaluation and character development are conducted regularly after congregational prayers through sympathetic reprimands, reinforcement of values, and educational assignments based on the principles of appropriate reward and punishment.

The Impact of Habituation on the Development of Students' Islamic Character

The observation results indicate significant development in several aspects of students' character, including: (a) independence in organizing learning materials and carrying out classroom duties; (b) punctuality in performing worship and maintaining order in the mosque; (c) honesty and appropriate speech etiquette, including greetings and courteous behavior; and (d) adherence to daily worship practices. Nevertheless, the field findings also indicate challenges in maintaining consistent manners and worship practices when students are outside the school environment, which are strongly influenced by differences in parenting styles and the level of support provided by their families.

The successful internalization of these character values is also reflected in the students' culture of courtesy and religious achievements within the school environment. Based on direct field observations, students spontaneously and politely responded to and greeted every guest and researcher with smiles and warm greetings. In addition, through informal interactions with several students regarding their progress in the *Tahfidzul* Qur'an program, it was found that most of them had demonstrated memorization achievements that exceeded the basic targets for their grade level, with some having completed memorization up to Surah Al-Lail. These findings confirm that the consistent habituation practices implemented at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel are able to foster students' intrapersonal awareness, both in developing proper manners in social interactions and in improving their Qur'anic literacy.

Discussion

The habituation program at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel represents a structured and systematic approach to character education based on habituation. The findings of this study confirm Lickona's theory (1992), which states that effective character education must go

beyond moral knowledge (*moral knowing*) to encompass moral feelings (*moral feeling*) and moral actions (*moral action*), which are realized through concrete habituation in everyday life (Mulyasa, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2024; Carr, 2024). From the philosophical perspective of Aristotle (Aristotle, 2009; Symons & VanderWeele, 2024), moral virtue is not formed spontaneously but develops through the continuous repetition of good actions until they become an inherent and lasting character (*habitus*). The conceptual framework for the internalization of Islamic character in this school operates through four interconnected and continuous stages (Mu'alimin et al., 2026; Noe et al., 2026; Parhan et al., 2024).

The process begins with policy input in the form of strengthening the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) curriculum and the "Plus Program" policy framework established by the Muhammadiyah Branch Leadership (PCM). These policies are then translated into implementation strategies that focus on spatial innovation, namely positioning teachers' desks directly within the classroom environment without a separate teachers' room, combined with educators' exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) and the application of educational *targhib* and *tarhib*. Subsequently, these strategies are implemented through daily habituation activities, including *Tahfidzul Qur'an*, *Qika*, *Adabul Yaumiyah* (AY), Tapak Suci, Hizbul Wathon, and congregational prayers. This series of processes ultimately produces character outcomes reflected in students' independence, discipline in worship, courteous speech, and the sustainable development of Islamic character (Supriyandi et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2024).

Based on an in-depth analysis, the successful internalization of Islamic values at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel is supported by three main pillars:

Educators' Exemplary Behavior (*Uswah Hasanah*) and Spatial Innovation

The policy of eliminating a dedicated teachers' room and positioning educators directly within the classroom environment creates a high level of interaction between teachers and students (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021; Brady & Wilson, 2021; Khaleel et al., 2021). In the context of Islamic education, this strengthens the role of educators as *uswah hasanah* (exemplary role models) in a direct and continuous manner (Hidayat et al., 2018). Exemplary behavior is one of the most effective means of character habituation because it not only provides concrete examples but also serves as a source of social legitimacy for the values being taught (Rohman & Muzaini, 2023). Continuous close supervision creates a supportive moral climate that encourages the development of positive character among students (Marzuki, 2022).

These findings demonstrate that the physical and social positioning of educators within the classroom plays an important role in strengthening their function as *uswah hasanah*. Rather than being limited to verbal instruction, educators' continuous presence enables students to observe and internalize positive behaviors through daily interaction. The following figure illustrates how classroom integration, direct interaction, and exemplary behavior contribute to the creation of a supportive moral climate and the development of students' character.

The Educational Application of *Targhib* and *Tarhib*

The use of an educational reward-and-punishment system after congregational prayers is consistent with the principles of *targhib* (motivation/appreciation) and *tarhib* (educational warning) in Islamic education (Sulaiman, 2024). This approach has been shown to foster discipline without generating fear or relying on harsh treatment. Instead, it encourages students' intrapersonal awareness of Islamic rules and manners (Bosmans et al., 2022; Gomez et al., 2021; Gregory et al., 2021). Consistent positive reinforcement through appreciation can strengthen students' internal motivation to repeat good behaviors, while guidance-oriented reprimands provide students with opportunities for self-reflection and correction without making them feel intimidated (Chen, 2026; Chen et al., 2026; Shorb, 2024).

In addition to educators serving as role models, character formation is reinforced through consistent approaches to guiding, monitoring, and responding to students' behavior. At SD Muhammadiyah Pakel Yogyakarta, the implementation of targhib and *tarhib* represents a balanced educational mechanism for strengthening Islamic character through positive reinforcement and constructive guidance. *Targhib* is implemented by providing appreciation, encouragement, recognition, and positive feedback when students demonstrate desirable behaviors, such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, politeness, and obedience in worship. Such appreciation helps students recognize that positive actions are valued and encourages them to repeat these behaviors voluntarily. Meanwhile, *tarhib* is applied not as a form of punishment or intimidation, but as a constructive warning intended to help students understand the consequences of inappropriate behavior and reflect on their actions. Teachers provide guidance through dialogue, reminders, and corrective instructions while maintaining students' dignity. The combination of these approaches allows teachers to establish clear behavioral expectations while simultaneously developing students' internal awareness of Islamic values. Rather than depending on fear or external control, the process gradually encourages students to develop discipline, self-control, responsibility, and intrinsic motivation. The following figure illustrates the complementary relationship between *targhib* and *tarhib* in supporting students' character development through consistent, balanced, and educationally meaningful guidance.

Figure 2:

The Educational Application of Targhib and Tarhib



Synergy Between the Three Centers of Education (School and Family)

The field findings indicating discontinuity in students' character when they are at home highlight the importance of consistency across environments. As explained by Febriyanti and Supriyadi (2023) and Safitri et al. (2023), religious habituation at school can achieve optimal and lasting effects when it is reinforced within the family environment. The development of individuals who possess faith and noble character requires a holistic balance among the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions, supported harmoniously by schools and parents (Damsir & Yasir, 2020). Therefore, aligning norms and maintaining intensive communication between the school and parents are crucial to preventing compromises in religious values when students are outside the school's supervision (Gede Agung et al., 2024; Hasan, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025).

However, the effectiveness of these educational practices depends not only on what takes place within the school environment but also on the continuity of values beyond school supervision. The findings indicate that cooperation between educators and parents is essential to ensure that religious habits and character values developed at school are consistently reinforced at home. The following figure presents the interconnected roles of school, family, and collaborative communication in creating a consistent environment for the sustainable development of students' faith and noble character.

CONCLUSIONS

The habituation program at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel has proven effective as a planned, consistent, and inclusive strategy for Islamic character education, involving all members of the school community through daily worship routines, teachers' exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), the cultivation of proper manners (*Adabul Yaumiyah*), intensive supervision, and evaluations based on *targhib* and *tarhib*. These practices have had a significant impact on improving students' discipline in worship, independence, courteous communication, and achievement in *Tahfidzul Qur'an*. The main contribution of this study lies in identifying a continuous supervision model through the effectiveness of spatial arrangement, particularly the placement of teachers' desks within the classroom environment. This finding demonstrates that teachers' direct physical presence in students' learning areas can minimize opportunities for indiscipline while maximizing the effectiveness of naturally internalizing religious values. Nevertheless, the field findings indicate challenges in maintaining consistent manners and worship practices when students are outside the school environment due to differences in parenting styles at home. Therefore, the sustainability of students' Islamic character still requires strong support and harmonious collaboration from the family environment. Future research is recommended to examine more deeply the models of collaboration and interactive communication between schools and parents, while also employing mixed methods or longitudinal approaches to measure the persistence of students' Islamic character as they transition to higher levels of education.

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