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Teacher Professionalism as the Central Educational Figure in Shaping Students' Islamic Character at MTs Zia Salsabila

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the meaning of teacher professionalism as the central figure in shaping students' Islamic character at MTs Zia Salsabila, drawing on Imam Al-Ghazali's theoretical framework which emphasizes instruction, role modeling, and guidance as core elements of moral education. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model involving data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion verification. The findings reveal that teachers perceive professionalism as a moral trust to nurture an Islamic generation, embodied in four core competencies pedagogical, personal, social, and professional with personal competence emerging as the most influential in developing students' Islamic character, particularly through consistent role modeling, empathy, and adherence to Islamic values. The novelty of this research lies in highlighting teachers not merely as educators but as pivotal moral exemplars, while offering a unique perspective by focusing on MTs Zia Salsabila, an institution rarely examined in previous studies, thus enriching the discourse on implementing Islamic character education through teacher role modeling.

1. Introduction

Professionalism in the field of education is a form of attitude and commitment shown by individuals in carrying out their duties responsibly, in accordance with established standards and regulations. A professional teacher not only teaches as an obligation but also demonstrates personal involvement and concern in the learning process (Syakdia Apria Ningsih, 2024). A professional teacher utilizes various methods and technologies to create engaging and enjoyable learning experiences. In this context, teaching is not merely about achieving academic goals, but also about shaping character and addressing the emotional aspects of students (Kusumawati, 2022).

According to Imam Al-Ghazali in the study (Anisaturrizqi et al., 2025), The teacher is one of the most dominant factors in the educational process. In the teaching and learning process, a teacher can serve as an instructor, motivator, trainer, enabler, and more (Siti Solikah, Siti Roudhotul Jannah, 2020) Professionalism refers to the attitude of a professional who values competence in their field of work. It reflects the attitude of members of a profession toward their work, including the extent of knowledge and skills they possess to carry out their duties. Thus, professionalism illustrates a person's level of expertise and attitude in performing their job, as seen from the aspects of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for the task (Ritonga, 2025).

As a central figure, the teacher plays a key role in shaping students' personality and character. Beyond delivering subject matter, the teacher also serves as a role model through daily attitudes and behavior. In Islamic religious education, the teacher's example is more effective in instilling Islamic values than lectures alone. Therefore, the success of Islamic character formation greatly depends on the personal qualities and professionalism of the teacher as a role model (Rambe, 2023). The primary goal of character education is to shape students to be able to understand, care about, and act in accordance with ethical values. Instilling character based on Islamic teachings is essential, as it is through Islamic character that various other attitudes and behaviors can be corrected and improved (Napratilora et al., 2021). Religious values or Islamic character should be a top priority, in line with the first principle of Pancasila Belief in the One and Only God which serves as the foundation and spirit for the other four principles. Moreover, strengthening Islamic character is considered a key and highly strategic element in realizing the goals of national education (Munawir et al., 2023).

In the Qur'an, Surah Luqman verses 12–14 serve as a foundational basis for character education. Allah says:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۗ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾ وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٣﴾ وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالَهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ ۖ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٤﴾

Meaning: “(12) And We certainly gave Luqman wisdom, [saying], "Be grateful to Allah." And whoever is grateful is grateful for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever denies [His favor] then indeed, Allah is Free of need and Praiseworthy. (13) And [mention] when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with Him] is great injustice." (14) And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination ” (QS. Luqman: 12-14) (Kemenag, 2019).

According to the tafsir of Ibn Kathir, this noble verse serves as a great foundation for emulating the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in his words, actions, and behavior. For this reason, Allah commands mankind to take the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a role model especially during the Battle of Ahzab in his

steadfastness, heroism, struggle, and patience in awaiting the help of his Lord (Abu al-Fida' Isma'il ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi). The formation of Islamic character is a consciously and systematically designed effort to shape Muslim individuals to possess good morality, honesty, and obedience to the teachings of Islam (Rahman et al., 2024). This process is not limited to providing an understanding of good and bad morals to the community, but also involves training and habituation that encourage individuals to consistently apply Islamic character values in all aspects of life wherever and whenever they are. Islamic character also guides a person to firmly believe that Allah is the One and Only God, who has no children, no partners, and is in need of no assistance from anyone (Zahra & Fathoni, 2024).

Islamic values encompass attitudes and behaviors that reflect obedience in practicing one's religious beliefs, respect for the worship practices of other religions, and living harmoniously with followers of different faiths (Ritonga et al., 2020). As taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), we are encouraged to love our fellow brothers as we love ourselves, as stated in a hadith narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim:

لا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يُحِبَّ لِأَخِيهِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ

Meaning: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." (HR: Bukhari dan Muslim).

The hadith above emphasizes the importance of love and solidarity among fellow Muslims. It affirms that one's faith is not complete unless he loves his brother (fellow Muslim) as he loves himself. Issues related to teacher professionalism can be seen in data from the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI), which shows that approximately 60.8% of madrasah teachers have not yet obtained teaching certification. The majority of them are non-civil servant or honorary teachers. The absence of certification means they have not completed the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program, which is essential for improving competence and understanding their rights and responsibilities as professional educators. This lack of training has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and the development of students' character (Savira, 2024).

This study presents a novelty in both context and approach. Unlike previous research that focused more on general theories or practices in public schools, this study specifically examines the case of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zia Salsabila—an Islamic-based educational institution with strong religious characteristics. By focusing on teachers as central figures in shaping students' Islamic character through specific teaching strategies and real-life practices, the study offers a more practical and contextual perspective. Moreover, the approach used in this research does not merely evaluate the general level of professionalism, but also explores in depth the relationship between teacher competencies and the actual practice of Islamic character formation, both inside and outside the classroom.

There are several research gaps that have not been adequately addressed in previous studies. First, research by (Risdiyani & Herlambang, 2021) which discusses the role

of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' religious character, focuses solely on the cognitive aspect, without exploring how teachers implement character-building strategies based on role modeling and emotional closeness. Second, a study by (Musfirah et al., 2024) examined teachers' pedagogical competence in Islamic Education (PAI) teaching at public schools, but did not highlight how such competence directly relates to the formation of students' Islamic character in madrasahs. Third, a study by (Iskandar & Apipudin, 2023) A study on the effectiveness of religious habituation programs in Islamic schools remains largely institutional and programmatic, without exploring the personal and professional roles of teachers as key figures behind the success of such programs. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by focusing on teacher professionalism at MTs Zia Salsabila and the concrete strategies implemented to personally and deeply shape students' Islamic character. In this context, teacher professionalism at Madrasah Tsanawiyah becomes a crucial aspect in the formation of students' Islamic character. However, to what extent teachers at MTs Zia Salsabila are able to carry out this role optimally remains a question that needs to be answered through research. The issues to be examined include how teachers serve as central figures in shaping Islamic character, and what strategies they employ in fulfilling this responsibility.

This study aims to examine and interpret the meaning of teacher professionalism as the central role in shaping students' Islamic character at MTs Zia Salsabila, using Imam Al-Ghazali's theoretical framework to understand how professional competencies particularly pedagogical, personal, social, and professional are applied in the context of Islamic education. It seeks to identify which competency most significantly influences the development of students' Islamic character, explore the ways teachers internalize and embody Islamic values through instruction, guidance, and role modeling, and provide fresh insights into character education practices by focusing on a rarely studied institution, thereby contributing to the enrichment of Islamic educational theory and practice.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. According to Sugiyono, as cited in Fattah's book, qualitative research is conducted in natural settings where the researcher serves as the key instrument, directly interacting with the research subjects. The phenomenological approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of teachers and students in the process of forming Islamic character within the madrasah environment. According to (Sugiyono, 2021), Phenomenology aims to uncover the meaning of individuals' lived experiences toward a particular phenomenon in this case, the meaning of teacher professionalism from the perspective of Islamic education.

This research was conducted at MTs Zia Salsabila, located in Pasar VII, Jl. Pendidikan Gg. Sayang, Bandar Setia Village, Percut Sei Tuan Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. Data were collected through in-depth interviews

with several informants, including subject teachers of Aqidah Akhlaq, Fiqh, and Qur'an-Hadith, as well as several eighth-grade students selected purposively. In addition, classroom observations were conducted to examine how teachers deliver instruction and instill Islamic character through role modeling, interaction, and personal approaches. Documentation in the form of photographs and field notes was also used to support the data and record key findings throughout the research process.

The data analysis technique in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction is used to sort and select relevant information, data display is organized systematically to allow meaningful interpretation, and conclusions are drawn through repeated verification to ensure data accuracy. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher employed triangulation techniques, including source, method, and time triangulation. Observations were conducted more than three times to ensure the consistency of the information obtained, making the findings of this study scientifically credible and in-depth (Rukminingsih, 2020).

3. Results and Discussion

Teacher Professionalism in Shaping Students' Islamic Character

Based on the interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, in carrying out their professional duties, teachers are required to possess comprehensive educational competencies that serve as the foundation for their effectiveness in guiding and nurturing students. These competencies covering pedagogical, personal, social, and professional dimensions are not only technical skills but also encompass moral integrity, emotional intelligence, and spiritual commitment. Pedagogical competence enables teachers to design and deliver lessons that integrate academic knowledge with Islamic values, while personal competence reflects the teacher's integrity, discipline, and role as a moral exemplar in daily interactions. Social competence ensures the ability to build harmonious relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and the community, fostering an environment conducive to moral growth (Hamidah & Hasanah, 2024):

A. The Role of Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in the Formation of Students' Islamic Character

1. Understanding student characteristics based on the principles of Islamic cognitive development

Based on interview results, the Aqidah Akhlaq teacher stated that the initial approach to students should be adjusted according to their age and level of cognitive absorption. The teacher uses practical methods, believing that moral education should take precedence over the teaching of fiqh. Similar views were expressed by the Fiqh and Qur'an-Hadith teachers, who emphasized the importance of a personal approach and understanding students' psychological conditions before teaching Islamic values.

According to Bastian & Reswita (2022), approaching students involves a series of patterns or steps (actions) arranged according to specific principles philosophical, psychological, educational, and ecological which are systematically directed toward desired learning outcomes. This highlights that teachers perceive the process of understanding their students not merely as a duty, but as a moral and spiritual responsibility. Teachers must also continuously observe and adapt the way they teach Islamic values so that the message reaches the hearts of students in accordance with their developmental stage.

2. Conducting a conducive and Islamic learning process.

Several teachers create a conducive classroom atmosphere by building personal connections with their students and ensuring their comfort during the learning process. A conducive environment can be seen as an expression of the teacher's emotional response to students' situations in the classroom, as well as a form of moral responsibility in delivering Islamic values in an engaging and enjoyable manner, as stated by Buya Muhammad Raihan, an Aqidah Akhlaq teacher:

"It depends on us. When it comes to creating a conducive classroom atmosphere, we need to consider the situation. For example, if we enter during the first lesson, in shaa Allah the class is already conducive why? Because the students are still fresh. But it's different if we come in during the last lesson; at that time, they're already sleepy, hungry, and their mood has changed. So, the way we create a conducive environment must also be different. For instance, using humor can help lighten the atmosphere. Different times require different approaches."

The way teachers teach students in the classroom and develop their learning experiences is one of the efforts to condition the teaching process to be more systematic and meaningful through the use of specific methods or techniques (Jarkasih et al., 2024). During the learning process, teachers need to create a supportive classroom atmosphere by understanding students' emotional states. In line with the above statement, religious and moral education teachers adjust their teaching methods differentiating between the first lesson, when students are still enthusiastic, and the last lesson, when students begin to appear tired.

3. Designing and implementing the evaluation of the process and outcomes of learning Islamic values

Based on the results of observations and interviews with several teachers, it was found that teachers carry out continuous evaluations starting from observing students' behavior, their tasks, and the Islamic values they apply. The evaluation of students' Islamic character development is not limited to the cognitive aspect but also includes affective and psychomotor aspects.

The Aqidah Akhlaq teacher stated that he observes students' behavior, teaches them to greet with *salaam*, and notices changes not only in cognitive aspects but also in affective and psychomotor domains. The teacher mentioned that this helps students become accustomed to such practices.

“By repeating the process, when we repeat it, we begin by greeting with "salam", we apply it through giving "salam", we explain the virtues of giving "salam", and then we have the students practice it. We are the ones who greet the students first. Through this consistent practice, they will gradually get used to it.”

According to Kifer in the book (Ariani et al., 2022), evaluation is defined as an investigation to determine the value or usefulness (worth) of a program, product, procedure, or project. Teachers interpret evaluation not only as an assessment of learning outcomes, but also as an effort to build Islamic character in students so that they can practice Islamic values in their daily lives. The discussion above explains that teachers perceive classroom behavior as a moral responsibility influenced by students' psychological conditions. This indicates that the implementation of pedagogical competence at MTs Zia Salsabila takes into account the principles of child development and Islamic values within its context.

B. Teachers' Personal Competence as Islamic Role Models

1. Respecting students regardless of their background.

Teachers at MTs Zia Salsabila acknowledge that proportional justice will be applied according to the conditions and needs of the students, and that all students will be treated fairly regardless of their backgrounds, as stated by Umi Nana, a Fiqh teacher:

“Of course we must be fair. If a teacher can't be fair, then maybe they shouldn't be a teacher. Especially being fair to ourselves. If at some point we're not fair, we should be honest with the students—say, 'I'm sorry, Umi was late.' It's about treating each student according to their needs. If a child has difficulty hearing, we ask them to sit at the front. If their vision isn't good, we guide them to sit at the front too. But if a child is big in size and tends to misbehave, it wouldn't be right to just put them in the front because of that—that's not fair. It depends on the situation and how we create a conducive environment. Teachers must be able to create a supportive and fair atmosphere for their students.”

A similar statement was also made by the Qur'an and Hadith teacher:

“Usually, Buya always reminds himself that every child in the classroom has the right to be guided, no matter their background. So Buya gives them all the same opportunity to ask questions or express their opinions. If there are differences in character, Buya

turns that into a lesson too so they can understand one another and not make fun of each other."

Teachers must demonstrate justice and compassion in dealing with students. They should pay attention to time and provide feedback to each student. Showing empathy, care, and concern for students' needs is essential. By doing so, teachers can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Aviatin, 2023). Thus, teacher professionalism in shaping Islamic character is reflected in their just and compassionate attitude not merely fulfilling teaching duties, but also upholding the values of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood).

2. Demonstrating exemplary Islamic behavior.

Based on the interview results, the teacher is regarded as the central figure. As emphasized by an Islamic creed and character (Aqidah Akhlak) teacher, a teacher must consistently observe their prayers, manners during meals, and the way they speak in front of students. The students also acknowledged this, stating that their teachers are good role models not only in terms of worship, but also in patience and compassion.

"Yes, we also try to practice what the Prophet taught, like performing prayers. We shouldn't neglect our prayers while the students are watching. The way we eat, the way we speak—everything we do should follow the example of the Prophet. We must strive to emulate him in all aspects"

As explained in Surah Al-Ahزاب, verse 21.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾

Meaning : " Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah often." (QS. Al Ahزاب : 21) (Kemenag, 2019).

According to the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir, this noble verse serves as a strong foundation for emulating the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) in his words, actions, and behavior. Therefore, mankind is commanded to follow the example of the Prophet ﷺ during the day of the confederates' defeat with his patience, perseverance, determination, struggle, and his unwavering hope in the help of his Lord, the Most Glorious and the Most High. May peace and blessings always be upon him until the Day of Judgment.

2. Presenting oneself as a stable, mature, and dignified individual.

Teachers must face various challenges at school, ranging from student behavior to interactions with parents. The Islamic creed (Aqidah Akhlak) and jurisprudence (Fiqh) teachers at MTs Zia Salsabila emphasize the

importance of emotional self-control, engaging in remembrance (dhikr), and making supplications (du'a) before starting their teaching duties. These attitudes and behaviors help cultivate students' respect and earn their trust. This aligns with the view of Aviatin et al. (2023), who state that a teacher's authority can be built through professional competence, effective communication, professional appearance, and a sense of justice. This indicates that teachers are aware of the importance of maintaining mental stability in order to be respected and esteemed individuals. A teacher must establish and maintain authority in the classroom.

3. Demonstrating a strong work ethic, trustworthiness, and a sense of responsibility.

Based on interviews with the Aqidah Akhlak and Fiqh teachers, they interpret professionalism as a form of worship, not merely a job. This includes arriving on time, preparing lesson materials, and completing tasks with full responsibility. The students of MTs Zia Salsabila also acknowledged that their teachers are disciplined and enthusiastic. This statement was affirmed by Buya Muhammad Raihan, the Aqidah Akhlak teacher:

“As a teacher, Buya always strives to arrive at school on time and enter the classroom according to the schedule. He carefully prepares his teaching materials in advance so that what he delivers can be understood and beneficial to the students. In addition, he completes all school-related tasks with a strong sense of responsibility, because for him, it is not merely an obligation, but a trust (amanah) that must be carried out sincerely. Buya aims to set an example for his students that work is not only about earning a living, but also a form of worship that should be done with sincere intention and enthusiasm.”

Research conducted by Ifnaldi (2021) explains that every professional teacher must meet the requirements of being a responsible figure in the field of education while also carrying out various educational tasks. The presence of the teacher in the learning process, as a medium for conveying values and norms, continues to play a vital role. The achievements of modern technology, such as computers and other tools, cannot replace the role of teachers in education. This highlights that the Islamic work ethic is a form of devotion to Allah, the school, and the students. Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that teachers at MTs Zia Salsabila cultivate emotional connection through exemplary acts of worship and daily ethical conduct. This is evident in the teachers' sense of responsibility and their personal character.

C. Teachers' Social Competence in Establishing Islamic Communication

1. Communicating Effectively, Empathetically, and in Accordance with Islamic Etiquette

Teachers build respectful, open, and compassionate relationships with students, fellow teachers, and parents. Teachers of Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, and Qur'an-Hadith emphasize the importance of offering correction in a kind manner—privately and without judgment. According to Lafendry (in Panjaitan et al., 2024), teachers must understand the underlying causes of student behavior before giving warnings and should not react with anger. Students who show a lack of discipline are given extra attention so that they feel valued, accepted, and motivated to change.

2. Adapting to the School Environment and Local Community

In the context of teacher professionalism as central figures in education at MTs Zia Salsabila, the ability to adapt to the school environment and surrounding community is key to successfully shaping students' Islamic character. Teachers do not only play a role in the classroom but are also actively involved in religious and social activities around the school. Buya Raihan, Umi Nana Mahrani, and Buya Syuhada emphasized the importance of teachers' involvement in community life, such as attending funerals (*takziah*) and participating in other social activities, as a form of role modeling and an effort to build emotional closeness with students and the community.

This aligns with Nalapraya's (2023) view that teachers must understand the community's condition in order to design relevant learning. Teachers are also encouraged to take note of social issues and discuss them with students as part of character education. Based on observations and interviews, it was found that teachers use polite and wise language in their interactions, thereby maintaining authority and preventing violations of Islamic values within the school environment.

D. Teachers' Professional Competence in Instilling Islamic Values

1. Mastery of Learning Content Relevant to Islamic Teachings

Teachers ensure that the teaching materials are integrated with real and contextual Islamic values, for example, by connecting lessons to students' social realities and contemporary issues. Teachers act as planners and curriculum developers, creating relevant and engaging content for students. They play a vital role in optimizing students' learning potential. Therefore, teachers must possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform this role effectively and optimally (Sulistiani & Nugraheni, 2023). This statement shows that deep mastery of Islamic content is essential for teachers to convey Islamic values contextually and effectively to students.

2. Providing Advice to Students

Teachers at the madrasah, including those teaching Aqidah Akhlak and Fiqh, actively provide advice during lessons, breaks, and religious activities. This advice is often accompanied by inspirational stories, making it easier for students to understand and internalize. Students also feel that such advice leaves a lasting impression and positively influences their behavior. To motivate students, teachers consistently offer reminders and encouragement, emphasizing the importance of hard work and discipline in all aspects of life. This aligns with Faroh & Abduh (2022), who argue that advice, when supported by exemplary behavior and effective communication with parents, is a powerful strategy for strengthening students' Islamic character.

3. Preventing Students from Engaging in Behavior Contrary to Islamic Teachings

Teachers employ a persuasive and exemplary approach. As explained by Buya Muhammad Raihan, he shared a case involving a student who used harsh language and described how he handled the situation by first identifying the root cause rather than reacting with anger. A competent teacher is expected to guide students and minimize misconduct. Teaching is not limited to academic instruction. This view is supported by Rudini et al. (2022), who state that teachers are key figures in education and therefore must embody strong moral values. Moreover, teachers bear a religious responsibility to educate students to become morally upright individuals. Educators must assist students in discovering their potential, solving their problems, and guiding them to become consistent (*istiqamah*) Muslims in every aspect of their lives based on Islamic values. Thus, a competent teacher must be a morally upright individual and an effective mentor—one who can steer students away from deviant behavior and foster an Islamic personality.

4. Mastery of Educational, Instructional, and Islamic Learning Processes

Teachers design learning activities that integrate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor components of Islamic education—from routine worship to hands-on practice and attitude assessments. Students perceive the learning process as engaging and enjoyable. Educators are expected to present lessons in a joyful and motivating manner. According to Aris (2022), giving motivation to students is a “delightful act” that significantly contributes to their development. Mastering integrated and enjoyable Islamic educational processes is the key to successfully shaping students' Islamic character holistically.

Findings from interviews and observations reveal that the teacher's personal example—such as honesty, discipline, politeness, authority, empathy, and compassion—is the most memorable and influential factor for students. Students are better able to grasp and reflect on Islamic values when they see

them modeled directly by their teachers. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers' personal competence is the most prominent and strategic factor in shaping students' Islamic character at MTs Zia Salsabila. These findings affirm that professionalism in Islamic education is not solely measured by mastery of subject matter, teaching methods, or administrative tasks, but more deeply by the teacher's personal character, which serves as a living example for students.

E. Teachers' Strategies in Shaping Students' Islamic Character

1. Religious Habituation Strategy

Teachers consistently implement religious routines such as duha prayer, group Qur'an recitation, and prayers before and after lessons as an integral part of the school's daily activities. These practices are not merely ceremonial, but are designed to cultivate students' awareness and commitment to Islamic values through consistent repetition and reinforcement in a structured environment. By engaging in these routines collectively, students develop a sense of spiritual discipline, mutual encouragement, and shared responsibility in upholding religious obligations. According to Syaroh & Mizani (2020), habituation is a key method in Islamic education that helps students internalize and practice religious teachings with *istiqamah* (consistency), enabling these values to become ingrained in their character and daily lives.

2. Interactive Lectures and Moral Storytelling

Teachers use interactive lectures and inspiring stories about the Prophet, his companions, and contemporary Muslim figures to introduce and reinforce Islamic morals in a way that captures students' attention and fosters emotional engagement. This method goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, as it allows students to connect abstract moral concepts with concrete examples and real-life situations, making the lessons more meaningful and memorable. By relating values to students' daily experiences, teachers help bridge the gap between theory and practice, encouraging students to embody the virtues they learn. As noted by Hidayat (2022), this approach is effective because it is simple, relatable, and embeds moral lessons within familiar contexts, enabling students to internalize the teachings naturally.

3. Islamic Praise and Reprimand Strategy

Teachers give positive reinforcement such as verbal praise, encouraging words, or warm gestures like a smile or nod to acknowledge and encourage good behavior, while also providing wise, empathetic reprimands when students exhibit misconduct. This balanced approach ensures that discipline is not punitive but constructive, focusing on guiding students toward self-awareness and moral responsibility. The Aqidah Akhlak teacher, in particular, places strong emphasis on understanding students' personal and

family backgrounds before offering advice or correction, recognizing that each student's behavior is influenced by unique circumstances. By taking the time to listen and empathize, the teacher is able to provide guidance that is both relevant and compassionate, which strengthens the teacher-student relationship. In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Fahri et al., 2024), appreciation and recognition play a crucial role in fulfilling students' psychological needs for belonging and esteem, which in turn fosters intrinsic motivation to maintain positive behavior.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that teacher professionalism at MTs Zia Salsabila plays a vital role as the driving force in shaping students' Islamic character. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as role models, motivators, and moral guides who consistently perform their duties in harmony with Islamic values. The holistic implementation of the four core competencies pedagogical, personal, social, and professional shows that personal competence is the most dominant factor influencing character formation. Teachers view their responsibilities as both a sacred trust and a form of worship, which shapes their approach in building close relationships with students, applying engaging teaching methods, and demonstrating exemplary behavior in daily interactions. These efforts are supported by strategies such as structured religious habituation, moral storytelling, positive reinforcement, and corrective guidance delivered with empathy.

The success of Islamic character development in the madrasah is closely linked to the dedication and integrity of its teachers. Beyond academic expertise, their role requires empathy, adaptability, and active engagement with students, parents, and the broader community to ensure consistent value transmission. The study indicates that when teachers embody these qualities, they can effectively nurture both the intellectual and moral dimensions of students. This research successfully answers the core question regarding the centrality of teacher professionalism in fostering Islamic character, showing that sustainable success in this area depends on the presence of committed educators who are consistent role models in knowledge, behavior, and faith.

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