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Institutional Example as a Pillar of Character Formation of Muslim Student at Tadika Perpaduan Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The study purpose was to examine the role of institutional role modeling in shaping the character of Muslim students at Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang, Penang, Malaysia, by analyzing the relationship between institutions, institutional culture, and the school environment based on Islamic education principles.

Materials and methods. The research used a qualitative descriptive method with a field study approach. Data were collected through observations and interviews conducted by students involved in the Community Service Program (KPM) and the International Teaching Practice Program (PPL) of STIT Al Washliyah Central Aceh.

Results. The results show that institutional role modeling plays a strategic role in integrating spiritual and social values into the educational process. Strong synergy between institutional leadership, organizational structure, and school culture contributes significantly to effective character formation among Muslim students.

Conclusions. The study concludes that institutional role modeling is essential in developing the character of Muslim students from an early age. Strengthening institutional culture and exemplary leadership can enhance Islamic character education and support students in responding to technological and social challenges.

Keywords: *Role Modeling, Institutional, Character Building, Students, Malaysia*

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INTRODUCTION

The foundation of education in Islam does not only emphasize the cognitive aspect, but also touches on the affective and psychomotor dimensions, these three dimensions must be at the same level in order to develop the character of the nation's generation, strengthening institutional capacity is one of the important indicators that must continuously receive attention from school institutions in order to present and give birth to institutions whose principles grow and develop, especially in the context of globalization and modernity which are full of challenges, institutional exemplary becomes an important foundation so that Islamic education does not only convey religious knowledge, but also fosters an Islamic school culture that can be internalized in everyday life. According to Scott Institutions are social systems formed from regulatory rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive constructs *that provide meaning, stability, and legitimacy to social behavior* . Institutions are social systems formed from regulatory rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive constructs that provide meaning, stability, and legitimacy to social behavior (Scott 2021) . Meanwhile, according to Amanda, institutions in educational units are institutions or institutions that organize the educational process. Institutions can be managed by the state or community institutions. Institutions certainly have a function which is responsible for the running of the educational process (Amanda, Hazli, and Fadriati 2024) .

Educational institutions are understood as a place where the educational process takes place, while the institutional aspect refers to the system of rules, norms, and values that bind the behavior of school residents, with implementation that is continuous, responsible and disciplined, a school culture will be born that reflects the real implementation of institutions, the role of institutions in education is not only reflected in written formal rules, but also in real practices exemplified by the

principal, teachers, and all school residents, a consistent attitude in carrying out Islamic values, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social concern, will become a living role model for students, thus, institutions are not just normative concepts, but become an atmosphere that is felt by every individual in the school environment, if this runs continuously, then Islamic education is able to present a space that not only educates the mind, but also forms noble morals that are in line with character education.

The implementation of character education in educational institutions in several countries, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, is certainly caused by moral problems that are increasingly disturbing and do not show the role of humans as humans, therefore educational institutions need strategies to continue to be able to minimize the occurrence of moral decline that impacts the young generation's indifference to human identity itself, although in the concept and application of character education between Indonesia and Malaysia there are differences, but in essence both countries continue to strive to continue to instill character values in their students, in line with the opinion of (Kurniawan and Dompak 2024) Indonesia and Malaysia have different education systems, Education plays an important role in determining whether a nation develops or not. Through education, the quality of life can be improved in terms of spiritual, intellectual, and skills. Good quality education is the main key to the progress of a nation and contributes significantly to the quality of life of its people.

In the context of Malaysian education, the Malaysian education system has undergone various reforms to adapt to the times and the demands of globalization. However, on the other hand, the challenges of globalization have also given rise to various moral problems for the younger generation, such as a weakening of social awareness and a tendency towards individualistic behavior (Pratama, Mislaini, and Rahman 2025) . This requires Islamic educational institutions to function not only as a place for the transfer of knowledge, but also as a center for the internalization of noble values and morals. Institutional role models are an important instrument in presenting a school culture based on Islamic values, both through regulations, norms, and the daily practices of school residents. Thus, Islamic educational institutions in Malaysia do not only produce students with academic achievements, but also develop a complete Muslim personality. One concrete example of institutional implementation in education at Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang in the northeastern region of Penang Island, Malaysia. This early childhood education institution not only emphasizes cognitive aspects, but also integrates children's social, emotional, language, and motor development with integrated institutional management and teachers' high awareness of the importance of instilling character values from an early age to prepare the future generation of Malaysia.

According to (Kurniawan and Dompak 2024) The education system in Malaysia refers to structures and policies designed to cover basic to higher education, with a focus on the formation of people with character, skills, and knowledge to support national development, Malaysia tends to have a more uniform system and is oriented towards consistent quality improvement. In general, the Malaysian education system shows a comprehensive educational structure, not only supported by policy determination at the administrative level, but also followed by consistent achievements at the implementation level, this reflects the integration between formal regulations and educational practices in the field. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of institutional role models is an important instrument in building the character of students that is comprehensive, consistent and relevant to the progress and development of the times.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of in-depth description of institutional exemplary practices as a pillar of character formation for Muslim students in Malaysia. The research location is centered on Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, which was chosen because it represents an early childhood Islamic educational institution with an integration of institutional management and character building. And accompanied by the involvement of STIT Al Washliyah Aceh Tengah students in the Community Service Lecture (KPM) and International Field Experience (PPL) programs. The subjects in the study included the principal, teachers, students and all stakeholders of the Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang educational

institution, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. The data collection technique was carried out using direct interviews, interviews were conducted to explore the perspectives of the principal and teachers in making the institution a role model that must be implemented by all stakeholders of Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Exemplary behavior in Islamic education

Exemplary behavior is one of the fundamental principles in Islamic education. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of good example through the figure of the Prophet Muhammad as stated in the Qur'an, Surah al-Ahzab, verse 21 " *Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow (that is) for anyone who hopes for (the mercy of) Allah and (the coming of) the Last Day and remembers Allah much."* Prophet Muhammad is the main example in all aspects of life. According to Jamal Abdurrahman in Ritonga , providing an example is the duty of an educator or teacher. An educator must apply his knowledge and not let his words belie his actions. Abdurrahman An Nahlawi put forward the idea that anyone who is considered a role model must maintain his behavior, with the awareness that he is responsible to Allah for what others do, especially those who admire him, this concept emphasizes that education does not only take place through the delivery of material, but is stronger through real examples that can be imitated by students (Ritonga, Andriyani, and Nurmalia 2024) . Thus, the process of character formation cannot be separated from the exemplary behavior of educators as the main role models.

From a tarbiyah perspective, role models include spiritual, moral and social dimensions. A teacher, for example, is not only tasked with transferring religious knowledge, but also practicing Islamic values in daily behavior, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social concern. As Nurhabibi explains, there is no stronger character education than through role models. In Islam, the concept of good conduct is a crucial foundation for education. Therefore, teachers and educators in Islamic institutions must be able to project figures who reflect good character. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's view, which emphasizes that students' morals are more easily formed through direct experience than through mere verbal advice (Nurhabibi et al. 2025) .

Islamic education plays a role in strengthening religious identity through lessons and discussions about Islamic history, aqidah, and Islamic law, students can better understand and internalize their identity as Muslims. Its relevance to the management of Islamic educational institutions is seen in how role models are used as strategic instruments to build an Islamic school culture and every stakeholder including the principal as an institutional leader plays a role in directing the vision and mission of education while teachers become exemplary agents in the implementation of learning, while the community acts as observers of the educational process (Johansyah, Mahmmud, and Rahman 2025) , while school policies and regulations become a systematic forum for internalizing values with consistent management, so that role models are not just individual practices, but are integrated into the overall management of educational institutions.

Institutional in education

Institutions in the context of education can be understood as a set of rules, norms , and values structured within an educational institution that can guide the behavior and interactions of all school members. Institutions are social systems formed from regulatory rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive constructs that provide meaning, stability, and legitimacy to social behavior (Scott 2021) . Thus, institutions are not simply written rules but also encompass social practices that shape a shared culture within educational institutions. The understanding of "institutions" in the educational context relates to how educational institutions formally or informally establish goals and strategies to produce graduates with specific competencies, which are then analyzed and articulated in educational journals (Rustandi and Abdurrahmansyah 2022) .

In Islamic education, institutions serve as a framework that regulates the teaching and learning process so that it aligns with the Islamic vision. For example, school regulations that require students to perform congregational prayer, an introduction to the basics of the Quran, Islamic history , stories of Islamic fighters, and the behavioral patterns of believers, these conceptual

frameworks are not merely administrative in nature but also reflect spiritual values institutionalized in the institution's policies. In other words , formal school rules and policies serve as a means of transforming Islamic values into the daily lives of students.

In the context of Islamic education, the relationship between institutions, institutions, and school culture forms a complementary whole. Institutions refer to educational institutions as formal forums that organize the learning process, such as schools, madrasas, or Islamic boarding schools, and within them there is an organizational structure, vision, mission, and goals that become the direction of the development of Islamic education. However , the existence of institutions will be meaningless without institutional support, namely a set of rules, norms, values, and regulatory mechanisms that bind all school members. Institutions serve as a foundation that regulates patterns of interaction, discipline, and order, so that educational institutions run in accordance with sharia principles and the goals of Islamic education. In line with Amanda's opinion, institutions in educational units are institutions or institutions that organize the educational process. Institutions can be managed by the state or community institutions (Amanda et al. 2024) . Institutions certainly have functions that are responsible for the course of the educational process. Scott also explains that institutions are a framework that has a stabilizing nature and creates meaning, because basically institutional nature is driven by three elements including school rules (*Regulative*), social values (*Normative*) and cognitive culture (*Cultural-Cognitive*). These three elements are important to be implemented in educational institutions in order to weave character-based educational achievements (Scott 2021) .

Scott's theory, if implemented within an educational framework, then the regulative element refers to school rules including discipline, mandatory supervision at certain times, the use of school uniforms, mandatory congregational prayer, and rules that can be internalized. Then there is normative which refers to Islamic values , the culture of queuing, mutual respect for differences, love of the homeland. Then there is Cultural-Cognitive which refers to the collective beliefs of students such as for the Islamic generation , of course, must have noble morals, human nature is good, so that students behave well is considered normal.

Islamic School Culture

Islamic school culture is born through the internalization of institutional values derived from Islamic rules, norms , and principles that are consistently applied in the school environment. When regulative values (written rules), normative (ethics, manners, and etiquette), and cultural-cognitive (Islamic ways of thinking) are implemented by all school members, including the principal, teachers, students, and parents as the primary residents in the educational process, an atmosphere is formed that reflects Islamic identity. This process is not only formal through school policies, but also manifested in the exemplary behavior of the principal, teachers, and educational staff who display Islamic behavior in the school environment. One example of the main values that are the core of Islamic school culture includes:

a. Discipline: implemented through punctuality, adherence to school rules, and dedication to both learning and teaching. This process can be seen from the perspective of the five daily prayers, where Islam consistently enforces prayer at set times.

b. Responsibility: instilled in academic and non-academic tasks, including maintaining school facilities and carrying out mandates well and instilling in students the courage to take responsibility for what they do.

c. Social concern: manifested in the attitude of helping each other between students, respecting differences and creating charity or social service programs, as well as empathy towards others.

d. Ukhuwah: developed through harmonious interactions, polite speech, courage to guard one's tongue from unscrupulous words, mutual respect, and building brotherhood based on faith and country.

School culture is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of institutionalized rules and values. School culture is evident in religious practices such as congregational prayer, greetings and smiling, reciting prayers before class, and mutual respect between teachers and students. This culture does not emerge spontaneously, but rather from institutions that internalize Islamic values through a consistent institutional system. Thus, the relationship between the three is integrative: institutions provide a platform, institutions guide behavior, and school culture reflects the results of an Islamic-based educational process. This collaboration is a crucial pillar in shaping the character of Muslim students who are faithful, have noble character, and are competitive in the modern era.

Character education will be successful if accompanied by good examples from teachers, educational staff, the community, and the students' parents (Ridho, Kosim, and Abidin 2024) . If a school has a good culture, students will also have a good culture (character); conversely, if a school has a bad culture, students will also have a bad culture (character). Therefore, the existence of Islamic educational institutions can minimize the development of poor student character.

Islamic Education Management in Malaysia

Management-based Islamic education studies have been systematically described in Education in Malaysia is not only seen as an instrument for advancing the country, but also as a tool for forming an educated and competitive society on the global stage (Pratama et al. 2025) . Education in Malaysia consists of various levels including preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education. The Malaysian government, through the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), is responsible for the management and development of the education system, including policies, curriculum, and the implementation of various education programs aimed at improving the quality of education throughout the country.

One of the most important aspects implemented in Malaysian education is Islamic education which is managed in a structured manner by the Malaysian Ministry of Education through the Department of Islamic and Moral Education (JAPIM), Islamic education is not only seen and placed as a compulsory subject in elementary and secondary schools, but Islamic values have been instilled since the students were at the pre-school level, and Islamic education is also positioned as a pillar of moral formation and Muslim identity in a multicultural society.

Malaysia has successfully implemented results-based education management and increased community involvement in education, thus achieving better results in a shorter time. Research shows that community involvement in Malaysia plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education through more collaborative and responsive school management (Hidayah et al. 2025) . The study shows that educational management is not merely a direction for institutional management but rather how the indicators within that management can facilitate the process of effective implementation and foster the knowledge of school residents. Institutionally, Islamic education management in Malaysia is regulated based on the National Education Philosophy which emphasizes a balance between physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development, then strengthened through a curriculum policy that requires Islamic education for Muslim students, while non-Muslim students receive moral education. Thus, Islamic education does not stand alone, but is integrated into the national education system that emphasizes social harmony.

In practice, Islamic education management in Malaysia includes several important aspects: first, curriculum planning that is in line with the Qur'an and Sunnah and the needs of the modern era; second, the management of teachers who are professionally prepared through teacher training institutions and Islamic universities; third, the development of special programs such as j-QAF (Jawi, Qur'an, Arabic, Fardhu Ain) which is a national strategy to strengthen basic religious mastery from an early age (Suhid, Noh, and Mutalib 2014) . The Malaysian education system, there is a special subject known as Islamic Education or Moral Education for non-Muslims with the aim of developing student character in which values such as politeness, harmony, and cultural diversity are often emphasized, from the perspective of character education implemented by Malaysia makes teachers one of the important instruments that must be considered (Irnissa, Rahmawati, and Muhtarom 2023) . In line with Rahman's opinion that Revitalizing the role of teachers is important

to answer these challenges. Often times revitalization is only directed at the formation of a system, but basically the revitalization needed by a teacher is a change in mindset where the moral calling of a teacher must be re-cultivated, meaning that when the education program only focuses on administrative forms, the implementation of character education is only limited to writing containing ideas and concepts, but when teachers become the main program, character education will be easy to implement (Rahman 2025) .

Furthermore, Islamic education management in Malaysia also emphasizes the integration of Islamic values into school culture, such as discipline, responsibility, brotherhood, and social concern. These values are not only taught cognitively, but also instilled through teacher role models, extracurricular activities, institutional structures, and community and parental involvement. With systematic management, Islamic education in Malaysia contributes significantly to the character development of a young generation that is religious, virtuous, and ready to face global challenges without losing its Muslim identity.

Institutional Exemplary Behavior at Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang

Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang is a preschool institution under the Department of State Unity and National Integration (JPNIN), which was founded with the main aim of fostering racial unity from an early age . Tadika Perpaduan is inclusive and open to children from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. The presence of this educational institution combines Batu Lancang as a preschool institution in a multicultural environment and instills the values of tolerance and kindness among students. The curriculum applied refers to the Malaysian National Preschool Curriculum to provide balanced education between cognitive, affective and social aspects.

Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang education also applies Islamic -based learning for Muslim students, the foundation of learning is based on the Koran and the hadith of the Prophet. Islamic education is studied by Muslim students, while Moral Education is studied by other students. Islamic education provides basic knowledge and skills regarding the Pillars of Faith, Pillars of Islam, Sirah Rasulullah and Kalimah Shahadah. Preschool students learn to purify themselves, perform ablutions, perform prayer movements, imitate several of the Prophet's morals and carry out daily practices according to adab (Isa et al. 2017) . At the same time , this student also gets to know the basics of the language of the Koran, Hijjaiyah and Jawi letters and memorizes several short surahs and selected prayers. Teaching and learning of Islamic education is carried out through activities such as storytelling, simulations, singing, praying, hands-on activities, exploring and playing. After taking part in activities that emphasize spiritual support, attitudes and values, especially the components of Islamic education, students can learn the principles of the Pillars of Faith, the Pillars of Islam, the Prophet's Order and recite the Two Kalimah Shahadah. At the same time , students can purify themselves, perform ablution and perform prayer movements, imitate some of the morals of the Prophet and carry out daily practices according to adab.

The institutional exemplary behavior at Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang is reflected in the institution's consistency in establishing Islamic rules, norms , and values, which are comprehensively implemented by teachers, staff, and students. As a preschool institution focused on character building, Tadika Perpaduan prioritizes role models as a key strategy in shaping an Islamic school culture. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as moral role models through discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. These values are then internalized in daily activities, both in the classroom and in students' social interactions. The implementation of this institutional model makes the school a vibrant learning space, where rules are not merely formal but present in concrete practices experienced by the children. Thus, Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang is able to provide Islamic education that fosters noble morals and fosters Muslim identity from an early age .

Student involvement in the community service program (PKM) of the Al Washliyah Aceh Tengah Tarbiyah College at the Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang educational institution, Pinang Island, Malaysia, participates in strengthening Islamic education for Muslim students and broadens students' insights in organizing and managing Islamic education in the school environment, in addition, students also directly see how institutional roles can be role models for students so that they can become a school culture that guides students to learn more fun and innovatively.

Implications for the Formation of Muslim Students' Character

Institutional role models that are consistently applied in educational institutions, especially in Tadika Perpaduan and Islamic schools in Malaysia, have important implications for the character formation of Muslim students. The values that are successfully formed are not only individual, but also collective. First, from a moral perspective, students are accustomed to honesty, discipline, and responsibility through daily practices at school. Second, social concern arises through communal activities, such as sharing programs, caring for friends, and involvement in community activities. Third, the formation of a sense of shared identity (ukhuwah) serves as important social capital that strengthens a sense of brotherhood among students. This sense of ukhuwah encompasses a sense of friendship, caring, support, and cooperation among fellow Muslims, both in good times and in difficult times (Radiviansyah, Sa'dullah, and Dina 2024) .

Regarding character education implemented in Malaysia, it has a management structure that leads to the formation of Islamic-based characters for Muslim students and moral education for non-Muslim students, in addition, character education cannot be separated from collaboration between institutional policies, school residents and the community, according to Abd Rahman The formation of children's character cannot be separated from the role and function of the social environment, especially the family environment and the school environment, both environments should receive special attention from both the school and parents, the implementation of character education is increasingly important and urgent, various habits of today's young generation no longer rely on Islamic values and are also inseparable from aspects, honesty, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, respect, and empathy, these values are very important to form individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong morals and ethics (Rahman, Hasnawati, and Sari 2024) .

One of the leading policies that demonstrates institutional exemplary behavior is the j-QAF (Jawi, al-Qur'an, Arabic, Fardu Ain) program which has been implemented in national schools since 2005. This program not only provides academic reinforcement but also shapes the religious ethos of Muslim students through a comprehensive mastery of religious fundamentals. Furthermore, Islamic school culture in Malaysia is practiced through structured institutional routines, such as congregational prayer, recitation of prayers , disciplined Islamic dress, and the habituation of additional religious activities. This demonstrates that character formation in Malaysia does not depend solely on teacher initiative but is built collectively by the institution.

Another noteworthy advantage is the existence of the Islamic Education Division (BPI) under the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) which specifically manages Islamic education, including state religious schools, thus there is bureaucratic integration that ensures curriculum standards, monitoring, and evaluation run consistently across the region, on the other hand state religious schools have strong legitimacy as an official educational pathway that is parallel to national schools, so that Islamic education is not positioned as an alternative, but an integral part of the national system, likewise Islamic education in Indonesia has strong legitimacy as an official educational pathway and the Character Education Strengthening Program (PPK) and the Independent Curriculum do emphasize the values of Pancasila and religiosity, but their implementation often depends on the capacity of each school and teacher, while on the other hand teacher development programs have not been in line with the development of the system that continues to receive attention.

The gap in educational quality and outcomes has prompted researchers to compare Indonesian and Malaysian education, despite the fact that each country has different educational targets. The comparison is not intended to marginalize either country but rather to provide ideas that can improve the Indonesian education system, placing character education integrated into the school system, while in Malaysia it is positioned as a program or field of study (Sultoni 2016) . Character education methods in Indonesia are more systematic, complex, and varied, while the methods used in Malaysia are the opposite, relatively simple and not varied, such as direct learning and memorization. Sultoni's statement contrasts with Dian's statement, which states that the Indonesian education system prioritizes students' cognitive wealth, such as academic grades, exam scores, and other daily test scores. The Indonesian education system does not prioritize affective

and cognitive aspects, even though this cognitive wealth is only administrative (Montanesa, Firman, and Ahmad 2021) . This means that the character education system implemented in Indonesia still has administrative standards, where all achievements are seen from how regularly the administrative data is documented by the educational institution, while the character education program applied by Malaysia prioritizes the application process so that what is strengthened by Malaysian education is the institution and its institutions so that the educational institution has a school culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of a study of educational practices at Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, encouraging its school community to be institutionalized as a rule that must be carried out with a sense of responsibility and making it a pillar of character formation for Muslim students, the exemplary behavior shown is not only present in the figure of teachers or school administrators personally, but also integrated into the institutional system of the institution through rules, regulations, and school culture that consistently instill Islamic values, a strong institutional presence creates a conducive educational environment, every student activity in the school environment has a solid guide that will reflect on the lives of students outside the school environment and in the midst of society .

Therefore, character formation cannot be separated from the integration between institutions, institutions, and school culture. Institutions act as formal and informal forums that provide space for development and education, while institutions refer to the system of rules, norms, and values that bind the behavior of school members, while school culture reflects real practices that instill character values that refer to noble morals. Tadika Perpaduan Batu Lancang is one educational institution that demonstrates how the institutional model of exemplary behavior can shape students who are faithful, disciplined, and have social awareness. Thus, this concept can serve as a strategic reference for other Islamic educational institutions in strengthening their role as agents of character formation for a superior and integrated Muslim generation.

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