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Beyond Mechanical Rituals: The Reflective Habituation Model for Student Adab Formation in Islamic Middle Schools

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ABSTRACT

Character education in Islamic schools frequently struggles with superficial ritual compliance. This qualitative case study examines how the Reflective Habituation Model fosters student adab within the morning religious program at SMPIT Al Uswah Magetan. Data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, triangulated for trustworthiness, and analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model. The findings indicate that while daily congregational Dhuha prayers, Quranic recitation, and litanies establish behavioral discipline, the integration of structured reflection and teacher modeling elevates these routines into meaningful ethical consciousness. Institutional leadership and a supportive school culture facilitate this process, despite obstacles like student fatigue and varying readiness. The study demonstrates that reflective habituation drives adab development through a gradual shift from mechanical routine to deep value internalization, providing critical insights for optimizing moral pedagogy in Islamic education.

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Introduction

In an era defined by digital disruption and accelerated information technology, the landscape of secondary education faces a critical paradigm shift. The pervasive penetration of the internet and social media has not only transformed students' communication channels and information-seeking behaviors, but has also triggered concerning ethical erosion and moral degradation (Rahman et al., 2024; Suryani & Hidayat, 2025). Phenomena such as moral decoupling, digital disinhibition, cyberbullying, declining interpersonal etiquette, and weakened self-discipline demonstrate that educational outcomes can no longer be reduced to cognitive-academic achievement alone (Fajri & Ramli, 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025). National Assessment data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology highlights this urgency by recording widespread student vulnerability to bullying (36.31%), sexual violence (34.51%), and physical punishment (26.9%). Rather than merely measuring

individual moral decline, these figures signify a persistent institutional challenge regarding mutual respect, emotional self-regulation, and the creation of a spiritually safe school ecosystem (Hasanah & Kurniawan, 2024).

In Islamic educational epistemology, the fundamental response to this ethical crisis lies in the construction of adab (ta'dib)—the manifestation of mental, spiritual, and physical discipline that enables an individual to recognize and act upon the proper place of everything in relation to God, self, society, and the environment (Al-Attas, 2018; Sahin, 2024). Character education through religious habituation (religious habituation) has historically served as the primary mechanism for Islamic schools to instill these values. Its theoretical underpinning draws from Aristotelian virtue ethics—which links virtue to repetitive practice—as well as Lickona's (2013) framework integrating moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

However, a fundamental flaw in traditional behaviorist approaches is the trap of mechanical compliance (Fauzi & Rohman, 2024). Daily religious routines repeated without structured opportunities for critical reflection tend to yield a fragile, procedural piety—where students comply primarily due to external surveillance or bureaucratic sanctions (Azizah & Mansur, 2025). Once external supervision is removed, this compliance rapidly disintegrates because the underlying ethical values were never internalized into authentic moral consciousness (internalized values) (Hakim et al., 2025).

Recent literature acknowledges the pivotal role of habituation and teacher modeling in Islamic school environments. Mahmudah et al. (2023) highlighted character internalization through religious routines reinforced by institutional supervision and positive feedback. Similarly, Hidayat et al. (2022) and Hidayah et al. (2025) emphasized that religious habituation and teacher modeling effectively cultivate a positive school culture (school culture). While existing studies confirm that daily religious practices (such as congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, and litanies) support student discipline, most literature treats religious character or formal discipline merely as an outcome, without dissecting the specific micro-pedagogical mechanisms that transform routine rituals into internalized adab (Nurhayati & Zulkifli, 2024; Pratama & Wardani, 2026). Furthermore, reflective practice (reflective practice) has largely been isolated within formal classroom instruction (KBM) rather than integrated as an organic component of daily religious routines (Syarifuddin et al., 2024).

To bridge this critical academic gap, this study conceptualizes an analytical framework termed the Reflective Habituation Model. This model offers a pedagogical reconstruction that synthesizes three primary dimensions: action routines (consistent habituation), concrete modeling (educator exemplars), and critical reflective processes (spiritual meaning-making). Within this framework, the daily morning religious program (Pagi Religi) is no longer treated as a mere formal prerequisite before academic classes begin, but as a transversive pedagogical space (transformative pedagogical space). By embedding guided self-reflection logs, dialogic spiritual exhortations (tadzkiroh), and empathetic mentoring, habituation is elevated from unexamined repetition (action-repetition) toward meaningful actualization (understanding, internalizing, and embodying adab) (Mezirow, 2000; Sahin, 2024).

This research investigates SMPIT Al Uswah Magetan, an Integrated Islamic Middle School that systematically incorporates structured reflection protocols into its morning religious program (encompassing Dhuha prayers, Quranic tilawah/tahfidz, Al-Ma'tsurat litanies, student-led short sermons, and relational ethics training). The novelty of this study lies not in claiming that religious habituation itself is a novel practice, but in elucidating the precise micro-pedagogical mechanism that converts repetitive ritual performance into consciously internalized, authentic adab.

Grounded in this academic rationale, this study aims to analyze:

1) The structural implementation of the Reflective Habituation Model within the Pagi Religi program at SMPIT Al Uswah Magetan;
2) The primary supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its execution; and

3) Its conceptual and practical implications for student adab formation.

The central argument of this paper is that while habituation provides behavioral regularity and teacher modeling offers concrete ethical exemplars, structured reflection supplies spiritual meaning-making; the integration of all three elements successfully transitions students from superficial procedural compliance toward conscious, authentic adab.

Method

This qualitative study, employing a single-case study design, aims to analyze in depth the processes, experiences, meanings, and practices of student adab (ethical character) formation through the implementation of a reflective habituation model. The research site was selected purposively at SMPIT Al Uswah Magetan due to its structured daily Pagi Religi (Morning Religious) program conducted prior to regular classes, which encompasses Dhuha prayer, collective supplication and dhikr, Quranic recitation/memorization (tilawah/tahfidz), and student-led short sermons (kultum). The school's vision "Forming a Generation with Adab, Academic Achievement, and Environmental Care" along with its emphasis on autonomous religious awareness, provides substantive alignment with the core focus of this study. This research focuses on four primary dimensions: implementation mechanics (planning, organizing, executing, and monitoring), adab formation (through habituation, exemplary modeling, meaning-making, and reflection), supporting and inhibiting factors, and its overall impact on student discipline, responsibility, politeness, respect, and positive interactions.

To gather rich and multi-perspective data, sixteen participants were purposively selected, consisting of one school principal, three teachers, and twelve students. The principal represents policy-making and overall program oversight; the teachers serve as implementers, mentors, supervisors, and evaluators; while students from grades 7, 8, and 9 provide direct lived experiences and personal meaning-making processes. Data were collected through a combination of passive participant observation over twelve weeks, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and secondary document analysis. Observations focused on ritual dynamics, participation levels, teacher modeling (uswah), and routine student behaviors, while interviews explored perceptions, behavioral transformations, and implementation challenges. Supplementary documentation including school profiles, program guidelines, reflection/daily worship logs (mutaba'ah), and evaluation archives was utilized to corroborate and validate field findings.

The researcher acted as the primary human instrument, supported by observation checklists, interview guides, documentation matrices, audio recording tools, and field notes. Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, operating cyclically through data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview transcripts and field notes were systematically coded and grouped into primary thematic categories, such as religious habituation, educator modeling, spiritual reflection mechanisms, adab formation, and supporting/inhibiting factors. The condensed data were subsequently presented through descriptive narratives and cross-variable relational matrices to uncover primary underlying patterns.

The trustworthiness and credibility of the data were ensured by applying Lincoln and Guba's qualitative quality criteria. Credibility was established through source triangulation (comparing accounts across the principal, teachers, and students) and technical triangulation (cross-referencing interview transcripts, observation logs, and documentary artifacts). Additionally, persistent field observation, prolonged engagement, member checking, and referential adequacy guaranteed analytical precision. Transferability was ensured via thick descriptions of the research context, whereas dependability and confirmability were maintained through a rigorous audit trail and reflexive field documentation to minimize subjective researcher bias.

Hasil dan Pembahasan

The research findings indicate that Pagi Religi (Religious Morning Routine) functions not merely as a routine worship program, but as a structured habituation practice encompassing teacher role modeling, character strengthening, and reflection (Hidayat et al., 2023). Three main findings emerged from this study. First, the program implementation is organized systematically through four stages: planning, organizing, executing, and monitoring (Setiawan et al., 2024). Second, this process is supported by institutional commitment, exemplary teacher behavior, program consistency, and a religious school culture, while simultaneously addressing challenges related to student readiness, focus, discipline, and staff engagement (Nurbaiti et al., 2024). Third, the combination of repetitive practice and reflection correlates with improvements in student discipline, politeness, respect toward teachers, responsibility, serenity during worship, and sustained religious habits (Hidayah et al., 2023).

During the planning phase, Pagi Religi is embedded as a core component of the school culture because school leaders recognize that character and adab (moral etiquette) formation require structured daily practice beyond classroom instruction (Mahmudah et al., 2023). Targeted values include faith, harmony, discipline, responsibility, honesty, respect for teachers, empathy, and self-improvement (Hidayat et al., 2023). The organizational structure engages school principals, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, student affairs coordinators, the student council (OSIS), and students (Setiawan et al., 2024). Program documentation includes daily schedules, speaker/imam assignments, participant codes of conduct, and evaluation mechanisms, elevating adab cultivation to an institutional practice rather than the isolated responsibility of individual Islamic Education teachers (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

Observational data reveal that daily activities run from approximately 07:00 to 07:45 AM, consisting of congregational Dhuha prayers, dhikr, collective prayers, Qur'anic recitation and memorization (tilawah and tahfidz), and student-led short Islamic lectures (kultum) (Nurbaiti et al., 2024). Eighth-grade male students are given leadership opportunities to serve as imams and speakers on a rotating basis (Setiawan et al., 2024). Prior to the main event, students adhere to pre-routine habits: arriving before 07:00 AM, greeting teachers at the gate, checking uniform compliance, turning in mobile phones, and assembling orderly at the venue (Hidayah et al., 2023). Most students demonstrate a clear understanding of the event sequence, actively participating as imams, prayer leaders, reciters, or speakers—roles that expand the program's scope into an arena for practicing responsibility, self-confidence, discipline, and mutual respect (Mahmudah et al., 2023).

A key differentiating element of the program is teacher role modeling coupled with oral reflection (Hidayat et al., 2023). Teachers do not act merely as supervisors; they participate alongside students, offer timely reminders, and employ gentle, direct corrections (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023). Upon completion of the routine, students engage in brief reflective discussions regarding their experiences, personal benefits, and areas needing improvement (Dewey, 1933; Mezirow, 2000). Student accounts connect these activities to internal peace, enhanced quality of worship, discipline, proper etiquette, and habits that carry over into the home environment (Nurbaiti et0al., 2024). The observed process can be synthesized into a pedagogical continuum where repetitive behavior leads to direct experience, which, through teacher modeling and reinforcement, facilitates reflection and meaning-making, ultimately leading to the reinforcement of adab. (Hidayat et al., 2023).

The connection between habituation and adab operates through distinct behavioral mechanisms: punctuality, congregational worship, Qur'an reading, dhikr, and attentive listening incrementally foster behavioral regularity (Hidayah et al., 2023). Over time, students navigate the sequence with a diminishing need for constant supervision (Setiawan et al., 2024). Teacher modeling provides a real-world social context where expected behaviors are visibly demonstrated rather than abstractly commanded (Hidayat et al., 2023). Subsequent reflection enables students to construct meaning around these experiences through concepts of peace,

faith, discipline, and respect (Mahmudah et al., 2023). The intensity of this transformation depends not solely on frequency, but on the quality of interactions surrounding the daily routine (Nurbaiti et al., 2024).

The most visible impacts manifest across four dimensions: etiquette toward God (Allah), etiquette toward teachers and peers, etiquette toward self, and personal accountability (Hidayat et al., 2023). Students report heightened self-awareness regarding Dhuha prayers, daily Qur'anic reading, and independent home worship (Nurbaiti et al., 2024). In social relationships, data indicate increased respect toward teachers, greetings upon meeting, attentive listening, and positive peer dynamics (Hidayah et al., 2023). Regarding self-directed ethics, students display improved punctuality, orderliness, and personal accountability through leadership roles (Setiawan et al., 2024). Although several students report transferring these habits home, data suggest that individual transformation varies across the student body (Mahmudah et al., 2023). Program implementation is supported by leadership commitment, teacher involvement, structured scheduling, a religious school culture, active student involvement, and clear documentation (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

Challenges encountered include tardiness, drowsiness, limited attention spans, side conversations during lectures, uneven dhikr participation, diverse family backgrounds, and the perception among some non-religious subject teachers that Pagi Religi belongs solely to religious instruction staff (Nurbaiti et al., 2024; Syaroh & Mizani, 2023). The school addresses these obstacles through mentoring, homeroom communication, motivational encouragement, individual counseling, targeted discipline management, and periodic evaluations (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Program monitoring relies on daily observations, homeroom reports, discipline logs, general program reviews, and worship tracking instruments (mutaba'ah) (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023). The overall pattern indicates that habituation does not occur automatically; structural framework provides repeated opportunities for practice, but sustainable adab demands teacher modeling, mentorship, reflection, and an encouraging institutional climate (Hidayat et al., 2023; Mahmudah et al., 2023). Conversely, reflection alone is insufficient without consistent practice (Dewey, 1933). This process is gradual and contextual: routines become pedagogically meaningful when students directly experience them, witness exemplary behaviors, discuss their significance, and receive constructive reinforcement (Hidayah et al., 2023).

Table 1. The title must be placed above the table.

Aspect	***Key Finding***
Implementation	*Pagi Religi* is structured via planning, organizing, executing, and monitoring (Setiawan et al., 2024).
Habituation	Activity repetition establishes behavioral regularity and order (Hidayah et al., 2023).
Role Modeling	Teachers serve as behavioral models, mentors, and positive reinforcers (Hidayat et al., 2023).
Reflection	Post-activity dialogue bridges direct experience with moral meaning (*adab*) (Mahmudah et al., 2023).
Adab Formation	Evident in discipline, politeness, respect, responsibility, and worship regularity (Nurbaiti et al., 2024).
Supporting Factors	Institutional commitment, staff involvement, religious culture, scheduling, and facilities (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

Inhibiting Factors	Student readiness, fatigue, focus limitations, home variance, and uneven staff engagement (Nurbaiti et al., 2024).
Implications	Routines transition into moral awareness when structural, relational, and reflective elements integrate (Hidayat et al., 2023).

The core findings demonstrate that adab formation through Pagi Religi occurs through an integrated blend of habituation, role modeling, direct experience, and reflection (Hidayat et al., 2023). This supports the proposition that religious routines carry significantly higher educational value when they extend beyond mechanical repetition (Mahmudah et al., 2023). Habituation provides repeated opportunities to practice, modeling offers tangible examples, and reflection helps students comprehend the underlying purpose and moral value of their actions (Dewey, 1933; Hidayat et al., 2023). Thus, the scholarly contribution of this study goes beyond proving that religious activities yield positive behavior; it elucidates the pedagogical mechanisms connecting routine practice with deep moral comprehension (adab) (Hidayah et al., 2023).

Findings regarding behavioral regularity align with prior literature on religious habituation showing that routines reinforce positive and religious conduct (Nurbaiti et al., 2024). However, this study expands the scope from the mere presence of a routine to the dual function of habituation: first, establishing behavioral order; second, providing an experiential platform for conscious meaning-making (Mahmudah et al., 2023). This distinction is critical because behavior driven solely by rigid scheduling or fear of supervision does not inherently signify the internalization of values (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

Reflection acts as the core mechanism bridging physical experience and spiritual values. From an experiential learning perspective (Dewey, 1933; Mezirow, 2000), educational experiences become meaningful and transformative when processed reflectively rather than accepted passively. Within Pagi Religi, reflection need not take the form of lengthy academic writing; brief dialogues concerning feelings, perceived benefits, and areas for personal growth provide a reflective space where students connect actions to daily life (Mahmudah et al., 2023). Student responses attributing feelings of inner peace, discipline, adab awareness, and consistent worship to the program highlight reflection's capacity to connect physical routines with core values (Nurbaiti et al., 2024).

Teacher role modeling (uswah) reinforces this connection. Teachers do not merely supervise; they actively participate, mentor, remind, and visibly demonstrate expected behaviors (Hidayat et al., 2023). This aligns with established models of habituation, integration, and imitation in character education (Hidayat et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2024). In the context of practical and relational ethics (adab), behaviors such as showing respect to speakers, maintaining order, engaging reverently in prayer, and practicing punctuality are more readily adopted when visually modeled by educators (Hidayat et al., 2023). Furthermore, teacher modeling reinforces that adab is a shared community value rather than an isolated rule for students (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

Findings on enabling and disabling factors illustrate that habituation occurs within a broader school ecosystem (Hidayah et al., 2023). Consistent scheduling, administrative leadership, teacher involvement, a religious culture, and proper facilities establish the framework required for behavioral repetition (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023). Conversely, diverse student backgrounds, fatigue, attention deficits, and varying degrees of teacher support reveal that student populations are non-homogeneous, necessitating flexible, dialogic guidance (Nurbaiti et al., 2024). When addressing behavioral infractions, the school favors mentorship and dialogue over punitive enforcement, converting behavioral lapses into educational

opportunities for reflection and growth (Setiawan et al., 2024; Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

This study's position relative to prior research can be delineated into three key distinctions. While Nurbaiti et al. (2024) demonstrated that religious activity habituation supports positive behavior, this study shifts focus toward the underlying mechanisms of adab formation through reflected habituation. While Hidayat et al. (2023) emphasized habituation, integration, and imitation, this study incorporates reflection as the vital link between direct experience and moral interpretation. While Hidayah et al. (2023) established the relationship between religious habituation and school culture, this study deepens this understanding within Islamic schooling contexts by examining the specific pedagogical dynamics of morning routines.

The Reflective Habituation Model developed here serves as a conceptual framework rather than a finished, universal model. The conceptual relationship can be summarized as a sequential process where habituation leads to direct experience, which, when coupled with modeling and reinforcement, enables reflection and meaning-making, ultimately resulting in the reinforcement of adab (Hidayat et al., 2023; Mahmudah et al., 2023). Conceptually, it demonstrates that behavioral repetition requires value alignment through modeling and reflection. Empirically, it proves that pre-class religious routines serve as effective pedagogical spaces for moral development when structured, student-led, and reflectively guided (Setiawan et al., 2024). Practically, it underscores that process quality is far more crucial than mere program compliance (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).

Practical implications suggest five key actions for educational practitioners:

1) Guided Daily Reflection: Structure reflection around accessible questions regarding moral lessons learned, real-world application with teachers and peers, and personal behavioral goals (Dewey, 1933; Mahmudah et al., 2023).
2) Kultum Mentorship: Enhance student lecture quality through content coaching and public speaking training to maintain peer engagement (Setiawan et al., 2024).
3) Whole-Staff Engagement: Involve teachers across all academic disciplines to prevent the misconception that religious culture is solely the domain of Islamic studies educators (Syaroh & Mizani, 2023).
4) Observable Adab Indicators: Incorporate observable indicators into monitoring tools, including politeness, respect, responsibility, and empathy (Hidayat et al., 2023).
5) School-Home Synergy: Strengthen parent-school communication channels to ensure religious and moral habits established at school find reinforcement in the home environment (Hidayah et al., 2023; Nurbaiti et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that student adab (moral etiquette) formation through Pagi Religi (Religious Morning Routine) cannot be sufficiently understood as merely the result of repeating religious activities. Habituation becomes more meaningful when accompanied by teacher role modeling, direct experience, reinforcement, and reflection that helps students comprehend the underlying meaning of their behavior. The primary takeaway of this study is that adab is cultivated incrementally: students act, repeat, experience, construct meaning, and subsequently reinforce these behaviors in their daily lives. Consequently, Pagi Religi functions as a pedagogical space rather than a mere worship program.

The study constructs the Reflective Habituation Model as a conceptual synthesis combining habituation, role modeling, direct experience, meaning-making, and reflection. Its key scholarly contribution lies in explaining the pedagogical mechanisms that enable habituation to transition from a rigid routine toward conscious adab awareness. From a practical standpoint, schools must design activities grounded in explicit adab goals, position teachers as active role models, provide structured opportunities for reflection, monitor daily behavior, and ensure consistency across the entire school community.

The strength of this research lies in its deep qualitative case study design, the triangulation of observational, interview, and documentary data, and its dedicated focus on adab. However, its limitations include the single-school context, an emphasis predominantly on the school environment, and the absence of longitudinal quantitative measurements. Future research should therefore test this model across multiple institutional contexts, employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and develop more systematic adab evaluation instruments. Ultimately, the Reflective Habituation Model should be understood as a conceptual framework born from the context of SMPIT Al Uswah Magetan—one that remains open to empirical testing, further development, and replication.

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