

## INTEGRATION OF BEHAVIORIST THEORY IN ISLAMIC CHARACTER BUILDING STUDENTS IN MADRASAH

*Laila Wardati, Nikmatur Ridha, Misnan*

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sumatera Medan

Jl. Sambu No. 46 Medan Timur, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara

Email: [lailawardati12@gmail.com](mailto:lailawardati12@gmail.com), [ridhaks1404@gmail.com](mailto:ridhaks1404@gmail.com), [misnan83@gmail.com](mailto:misnan83@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This study was motivated by the need to strengthen Islamic character education among madrasah students, especially amid the challenges of globalization that often weaken the moral values of adolescents. The objectives of this study are (1) to analyze the principles of behaviorism in strengthening Islamic character at MTs PAB VI Helvetia; (2) to identify the forms of reinforcement used by teachers; and (3) to analyze their effectiveness. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving observation, interviews, and documentation. The results indicate that the application of behaviorism principles has proven effective in shaping students' Islamic character. Stimulus-response practices are manifested in teachers' role modeling and religious habits, reinforcement is applied in the form of praise and educational reprimands, while conditioning is evident through religious routines and Islamic social interactions. The study's conclusions emphasize the importance of consistency, teacher modeling, and family support. The implications of this research are the need for synergy between schools, families, and communities in strengthening the continuous development of noble character among students.

**Keywords:** Behaviorism Theory, Islamic Character, Islamic Education

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kebutuhan untuk memperkuat pendidikan karakter Islami pada siswa madrasah, khususnya di tengah tantangan globalisasi yang seringkali melemahkan nilai moral remaja. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah (1) menganalisis prinsip-prinsip behaviorisme pada penguatan karakter Islami di MTs PAB VI Helvetia; (2) mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk penguatan yang digunakan guru; serta (3) menganalisis efektivitasnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan prinsip behaviorisme terbukti efektif membentuk karakter Islami siswa. Praktik stimulus-respons diwujudkan dalam keteladanan guru dan pembiasaan ibadah, reinforcement diterapkan dalam bentuk pujian maupun teguran edukatif, sementara conditioning tampak melalui rutinitas religius dan interaksi sosial Islami. Simpulan penelitian menegaskan pentingnya konsistensi, keteladanan guru, serta dukungan keluarga. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah perlunya sinergi sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat dalam memperkuat pembinaan akhlak mulia peserta didik secara berkesinambungan.

**Kata Kunci:** Teori Behaviorisme, Karakter Islami, Pendidikan Islam

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic character education in madrasahs plays a strategic role in shaping a generation of national aspirations that are not only academically excellent but also have noble character. However, the development of the times—especially the flow of globalization and digitalization—has caused challenges in the internalization of Islamic values among students. This condition is also experienced at MTs PAB VI Helvetia, a madrasah located in an urban area with a heterogeneous community. Initial observations indicate that some students are beginning to experience a gap between the religious knowledge they acquire at the madrasah and their daily behavior, such as in terms of discipline, communication ethics, and social responsibility. Exposure to negative content and the uncontrolled effects of technology further exacerbate this situation, leading some students to exhibit signs of moral and spiritual decline (Ahmed & Qureshi, 2023). A similar phenomenon was also demonstrated in the research by Fatimah and Putri (2023) that children who are less exposed to Islamic character education are more susceptible to being influenced by consumerist and individualistic cultures that weaken their religious commitment. In the context of MTs PAB VI Helvetia, the optimization of strengthening Islamic character has become increasingly urgent so that students can face contemporary

moral challenges without losing their religious identity.

In the midst of this urgency, behaviorism theory developed by Watson, Thorndike, and Skinner offers an effective approach in shaping behavior through reinforcement. Behaviorism views behavioral change as the result of consistently reinforced stimulus-response (Skinner, 1953). In education, Thorndike's *Law of Effect* explains that behavior followed by pleasant consequences tends to be repeated, while behavior followed by unpleasant consequences is abandoned (Thorndike, 1932). In the context of Islamic education, this approach can be applied through the cultivation of rituals, teacher modeling, and the provision of appropriate rewards and punishments to foster noble character (Juwita, 2018).

The integration of behaviorist theory with Islamic character education is not merely a synergy between Western psychology and Islamic education, but a strategic step to strengthen good habits. Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulumuddin* emphasizes the importance of *ta'dib* or habit formation in shaping character that is ingrained in the soul (Al-Ghazali, 2005). This perspective aligns with the behaviorist view that habits are formed through repetition and reinforcement (Soebagio, 2020). Literature reviews reinforce this, for example, Winkel asserts that *conditioning* supported by positive or negative reinforcement is highly effective in modifying behavior and shaping the character of students (Winkel, 2009).

Furthermore, recent empirical research provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of the behaviorist approach in Islamic character education. Research at SD Muhammadiyah Purbayan, Yogyakarta, shows that the development of character education using a neuroscience-based behaviorist approach, although qualitative in nature, found that students' religious behavior is highly dependent on teacher stimuli and supervision. Without continuous stimuli, students are unable to independently and consistently engage in religious behavior. These findings emphasize the importance of contextual and supportive stimulus design in Islamic character education (Zulfarno et al., 2019). Another relevant study was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, where the integration of Islamic values in science education significantly improved students' character, particularly in terms of gratitude, responsibility, honesty, social concern, and discipline. Quantitatively, character scores increased from an average of 45.83% before the intervention to 87.5% after the second intervention (*Cycle II*). Although not directly adopting behaviorist theory, this study demonstrates that the systematic integration of Islamic values and structured has a significant impact on the formation of real character.

Against this backdrop, this study has strategic objectives: (1) to analyze how behaviorist principles such as stimulus-response, reinforcement, and

habituation can be integrated into Islamic character-building programs—specifically at MTs PAB VI Helvetia. More specifically, this study seeks to (2) identify forms of positive and negative reinforcement, religious habituation methods, and (3) effective stimulus mechanisms for shaping the attitudes, habits, and *akhlakul karimah* behavior of students.

The distinction of this research lies in the synergistic effort between the foundations of behaviorist psychology and Islamic character education practices. Until now, many studies have examined Islamic character education predominantly from normative, cultural, or even theological perspectives, without giving sufficient space to the psychological mechanisms that can explain the effectiveness of behavioral change. This study goes further by integrating behaviorist theories—such as reinforcement, habituation, and stimulus-response—into the process of Islamic character formation in madrasahs. This approach offers a new perspective that Islamic values are not only instilled through advice or role modeling, but also through a structured pedagogical strategy called which can condition positive behavior repeatedly and consistently. Thus, this study fills the interdisciplinary gap between educational psychology and Islamic education, particularly in the context of formal institutions such as madrasahs. This synergy opens new discourse on how Islamic character can be practiced more effectively in students' lives, while also providing practical contributions for

teachers in managing classrooms and designing more systematic learning strategies oriented toward real behavioral change.

Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding academic insights into the integration of behaviorist theory with Islamic character education. This study not only reaffirms the relevance of classical learning theory in the context of Islamic education but also presents a new perspective on how the principles of stimulus, response, and reinforcement can be applied in the cultivation of Islamic moral character. Thus, this study strengthens the interdisciplinary conceptual foundation between educational psychology and Islamic education while opening space for the development of new theories that are more contextual to the needs of madrasahs in the modern era.

Practically, the contributions of this research are applicable and multidimensional. First, in the theoretical realm, the research will enrich the study of behavior and Islamic character education through a behaviorist approach based on classical and contemporary literature. Second, the practical application of this research takes the form of recommendations for learning models for madrasah teachers—such as the design of religious habit-forming activities, reward or consequence systems, and the creation of planned stimuli. Third, socially, the results of this research will support Islamic character

education efforts that are relevant to contemporary challenges, helping madrasahs to shape students who are moral, disciplined, and adaptable to modern changes without losing their spiritual values.

Thus, this research provides an important synergy between behaviorism theory and Islamic education, creating a systematic, evidence-based, and contextual approach to character education. This research is expected to serve as a foundation for the development of an effective and adaptive Islamic character-based curriculum that addresses global challenges and the digital era, enabling MTs PAB VI Helvetia to produce a generation of Muslims who are strong, integrity-driven, and of noble character.

## **METHOD**

This study uses *field research* with a qualitative case study approach. This approach was chosen because the research aims to explore in depth the reality of Islamic character education at MTs PAB VI Helvetia with an emphasis on the processes, meanings, and social interactions that occur in the context of behaviorism-based education. Case studies are considered appropriate because this research focuses on a single location with a specific phenomenon, namely the integration of behaviorist theory in strengthening the Islamic character of students at MTs PAB VI Helvetia (Creswell, 2007).

The research location is MTs PAB VI Helvetia, located in an urban area with a heterogeneous community. The selection of this location is based on several reasons. First, this madrasah faces real challenges in the form of a gap between students' religious knowledge and their daily behavior, particularly regarding discipline, communication ethics, and social responsibility. Second, the complex environmental conditions with exposure to technology and globalization highlight the urgency of implementing contextual and systematic Islamic character education. Third, the school showed openness to collaborate in the research, enabling the researcher to access primary data in depth.

Primary data in this study were obtained directly from observation, interviews, and documentation in the field. Primary data include learning practices, teachers' strategies in applying rewards and punishments, students' religious habits, and patterns of interaction between teachers and students at the madrasah. Secondary data sources include literature, school archives, curriculum documents, madrasah regulations, and previous research relevant to the integration of behaviorism theory and Islamic character education.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting individuals who are considered knowledgeable and understanding of the research phenomenon. The main informants

included the madrasah principal, Islamic Education teachers, general subject teachers, and students who were the subjects of Islamic character education. In addition, parents were also involved as supporting informants to obtain perspectives on the implementation of Islamic character education at home.

Data collection techniques included three main methods. First, participant observation was used to directly observe the learning process, teacher-student interactions, and religious activities at the madrasah, such as congregational prayers, Quran recitation, and Islamic extracurricular activities. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, students, the madrasah principal, and parents to explore information regarding perceptions, experiences, and strategies in applying behaviorism theory in Islamic character education. Third, documentation was used to collect written data such as school rules and regulations, madrasah work programs, and student discipline records.

The data analysis technique in this study uses the interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña(2014) , which consists of three stages: (1) data reduction, which involves sorting, simplifying, and focusing the data according to the research focus; (2) data presentation, which involves organizing the data into narratives, matrices, or charts that facilitate understanding; (3) drawing conclusions and verification,

which involves systematically interpreting the data to answer the research questions.

To ensure data validity, this study uses triangulation techniques. First, source triangulation, which involves comparing data from various informants such as teachers, students, and parents. Second, technique triangulation, which involves combining the results of observation, interviews, and documentation. Third, time triangulation, which involves rechecking data at different times to ensure consistency of information. In addition, the researcher also conducts member checking by requesting clarification from informants regarding research findings to ensure that the data obtained is accurate and accountable.

With this research method, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of how behaviorist principles such as stimulus-response, reinforcement, and habituation are integrated into the Islamic character-building program at MTs PAB VI Helvetia can be explored, while also providing a concrete example of the Islamic character education strategies that are contextual and applicable in the modern era.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Application of Behaviorist Principles**

Field research at MTs PAB VI Helvetia shows that the application of behaviorism principles has become an integral part of daily educational practices, although teachers are not always

conceptually aware of this. The application of stimulus-response principles is evident in religious learning practices that emphasize teacher role modeling and the habit of performing religious rituals together, such as the dhuha prayer, reading the Qur'an, and praying before studying. Teachers provide stimuli in the form of guidance or instructions, while students respond by following these behaviors. The repetition of stimuli and responses is an important factor in forming religious habits that are expected to persist outside the madrasah environment. This aligns with Watson's theory of (1913), which emphasizes that human behavior can be shaped through consistent repetition of stimulus-response associations.

In addition to stimulus-response, the principle of reinforcement is also widely used at MTs PAB VI Helvetia as a strategy to shape Islamic behavior among students. Teachers consistently apply positive reinforcement in the form of praise, symbolic rewards, and special opportunities, such as becoming class leaders or leading congregational prayers. This reinforcement not only serves as a form of appreciation but also motivates other students to emulate the good behavior displayed. In the context of character education, such social rewards have proven more effective than material rewards because they foster intrinsic motivation in students (Rahman, 2021).

On the other hand, negative reinforcement is also applied with educational principles. It takes the form of

direct reprimands, additional tasks, or restrictions on certain rights, such as temporarily prohibiting students who violate disciplinary rules or do not maintain school cleanliness from participating in extracurricular activities. The purpose of this negative reinforcement is not merely to punish but to provide educational consequences so that students learn to take responsibility for their actions. This aligns with Skinner's theory (1953), which emphasizes that behavior tends to be repeated if followed by pleasant consequences, while behavior that results in unpleasant consequences is likely to be avoided.

Observations show that a combination of positive and negative reinforcement applied proportionally can improve discipline and shape students' moral character. This approach emphasizes the importance of reinforcement in Islamic education, where teachers act as facilitators who not only provide instructions but also create a learning environment that is both appreciative and educational through clear and consistent consequences.

The principle of conditioning is clearly evident in the daily program at the madrasah. Students are accustomed to reciting prayers, shalawat, and dzikir routinely before and after learning activities. According to Thorndike's (Thorndike, 1932) with the Law of Effect, behavior that produces positive results will be reinforced, while behavior that does not produce pleasant results will weaken (2005). In this context, religious habits are

not merely seen as routines but as a means of internalizing Islamic values through repeated spiritual experiences. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's view in *Ihya Ulumuddin* that noble character is formed through the process of ta'dib, which is education based on habit formation.

Recent research by Fatimah and Putri (2023) supports this finding, where they found that children who are consistently accustomed to religious activities are better able to internalize Islamic values and are more resistant to the negative influences of consumerism and individualism. At MTs PAB VI Helvetia, this is evident among students who actively participate in collective worship activities, who demonstrate greater discipline and respectful attitudes compared to those who rarely participate in such activities. Thus, the application of behaviorist principles in this madrasah has proven relevant and effective in supporting the strengthening of Islamic character among students.

### **The forms of reinforcement and religious habit-forming methods used in shaping Islamic behavior and habits among students**

Research findings indicate that at MTs PAB VI Helvetia, there are variations in the forms of positive and negative reinforcement applied by teachers in order to shape Islamic behavior among students. Positive reinforcement includes praise such as *MasyaAllah* or *Very good* when students are able to recite prayers well, additional points in the attitude aspect, and special

opportunities such as becoming the prayer leader or ceremony officer. According to research by Rahman (2021), positive reinforcement that is symbolic or social in nature is more effective in shaping students' character than material rewards, as it emphasizes the intrinsic value of good behavior.

Meanwhile, negative reinforcement is used to prevent students from repeating behavior that does not align with Islamic norms. Its forms include direct reprimands, assigning additional tasks such as writing verses or hadiths, and restricting certain rights such as temporarily prohibiting participation in extracurricular activities. This aligns with the opinion of Slavin (2020), who emphasizes that negative reinforcement can be effective if applied consistently and while adhering to educational principles, rather than merely serving as punishment.

In terms of religious habits, MTs PAB VI Helvetia implements a number of methods that are integrated into daily and weekly activities. Students are accustomed to reciting prayers together every morning, performing the *dhuha* prayer in congregation, and reciting the Quran regularly before classes begin. These methods strengthen the internalization of Islamic values through the process of habituation. According to Bandura (1977), consistent habit formation, combined with the role of teachers as models or role models, strengthens the social learning process, making it easier for good behavior to be imitated and maintained.

Research findings also indicate that habit formation is not only applied in the realm of religious rituals but also encompasses social aspects inherent in the daily lives of students at the madrasah. These habits include greeting one another when meeting, maintaining the cleanliness of the madrasah environment, and fostering respect for teachers and peers. These simple practices essentially form a way of life with Islamic nuances, because the values that are taught come from religious teachings. With thus, habituation becomes an effective instrument in the internalization of values, not just a mechanical routine, but a continuous process of instilling attitudes and character.

Hidayat's (2022) research supports this finding by showing that social-religious habits such as greeting, smiling, and saying hello have been proven to foster a sense of togetherness, strengthen social bonds, and reinforce solidarity among students. The social interactions built through these habits make the madrasah atmosphere more harmonious, conducive, and warm. A sense of belonging to the school environment also increases because students are accustomed to maintaining cleanliness and upholding values of discipline together. Ultimately, these social-religious habits encourage the formation of Islamic character that is not only evident in ritual behavior but also in civilized social relationships, full of respect, and upholding brotherhood.

In other words, social-religious habits can be seen as a character education

strategy that emphasizes consistency, exemplary behavior, and repetition. This strategy is not merely a formal routine but an internalization process of values that is repeated until they become deeply ingrained habits in the students. When students are accustomed to engaging in social-religious activities, such as praying before studying, shaking hands, speaking politely, and helping others, these actions gradually cease to be seen as imposed obligations but rather as needs arising from self-awareness (Sahab et al., 2023).

Consistent habit formation trains students to develop positive behavior patterns that ultimately shape religious and social character rooted in their personality. Noble moral values are not instant results but the fruit of an educational process that emphasizes repetition and the example set by teachers and the environment. Through example, students have real models to follow, while repetition strengthens good behavior in memory and action.

In line with this, recent research in character education also emphasizes the importance of habit formation as a main pillar of moral development, as values instilled through daily habits tend to be more enduring than mere theoretical knowledge. Thus, social-religious habit formation is an effective strategy in building a strong, holistic, and sustainable foundation for students' character.

Thus, it can be concluded that a balanced combination of positive and negative reinforcement, accompanied by consistent religious habit formation

methods, can shape students' Islamic behavior more effectively. This approach is not only consistent with behaviorist theory but also aligns with Islamic educational principles that emphasize the habit formation of righteous deeds and the role of teachers as primary agents of character education.

### **The effectiveness of stimulus mechanisms in shaping attitudes, habits, and akhlakul karimah behavior in students**

An evaluation of the stimulus mechanisms applied at MTs PAB VI Helvetia shows that stimuli play an important role in shaping students' Islamic attitudes and behavior. The stimuli provided by teachers, whether in the form of instructions, role modeling, or school rules, have proven effective in fostering students' awareness to behave in accordance with Islamic values. For example, stimuli in the form of routine instructions to recite prayers and dzikir together at the beginning of activities make students accustomed to starting activities by remembering Allah. This is consistent with Pavlov's theory of *classical conditioning* (1927), where repeated stimuli can elicit automatic responses that eventually become habits.

Research findings indicate that the most effective stimuli are those that are contextual and repetitive. For example, students who receive gentle reminders when they forget to perform the Dhuha prayer are more motivated to improve their behavior compared to those who are only

given formal punishments. This supports the findings of Sari and Yusuf's research (2020), which states that stimuli based on a personal approach are more effective in shaping students' religious attitudes than rigid and uniform stimuli.

Additionally, non-verbal stimuli such as teachers' exemplary behavior in maintaining discipline and moral conduct have also proven effective. Students tend to imitate their teachers' behavior, as explained in Bandura's *observational learning* theory (1977), which states that individuals learn through observation of significant models. Thus, stimuli manifested in the form of teachers' exemplary behavior become a key factor in the development of students' moral character.

However, this study also found that the effectiveness of stimuli greatly depends on consistency in implementation and environmental support. Students who receive positive stimuli at madrasah but lack support at home tend to have difficulty maintaining their good behavior. This indicates that the formation of Islamic character cannot rely solely on formal educational interventions but requires synergy between schools, families, and the community (Auliya et al., 2025; Sinaga & Lubis, 2025). These findings are in line with the research by Ahmed and Qureshi (2023), which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between schools and families in maintaining the sustainability of Islamic character education. They assert that the role of parents is crucial in reinforcing the

values instilled in schools so that they can be deeply internalized by students.

Furthermore, recent research by Rahman et al. (2022) also shows that children who receive consistent support from their parents in the form of role models, motivation, and supervision tend to be more stable in developing religious behavior compared to those who only receive stimuli from teachers. Thus, the success of Islamic character education must be seen as a continuous process involving various parties, not just the responsibility of teachers in the classroom.

Family involvement in education also serves as a reinforcing factor for the moral values taught. If children see consistency between what they learn at madrasah and daily practices at home, the internalization of Islamic character will be more effective and long-lasting. Therefore, successful character education strategies require intensive communication and active collaboration between educators and parents to create a consistent, harmonious, and supportive learning environment for the development of noble character in students (Lestari et al., 2025; Siddik et al., 2025).

Thus, it can be concluded that the stimulus mechanism is effective in shaping students' attitudes, habits, and moral behavior, especially when the stimulus is provided consistently, contextually, and supported by teachers' exemplary behavior and family involvement. The implementation of a well-planned stimulus

will produce disciplined, integrity-driven, and strongly Islamic-charactered students.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that the application of behaviorist principles at MTs PAB VI Helvetia has been proven to significantly contribute to shaping the Islamic character of students. Through the application of stimulus-response, students are trained to develop religious habits through repeated practices, such as praying together, performing the dhuha prayer, reading the Qur'an, and greeting others. Teachers' exemplary behavior and consistent instructions serve as the main stimuli that encourage positive responses from students. The principle of reinforcement also plays an important role. Positive reinforcement in the form of praise, symbolic rewards, and opportunities to become class leaders has been proven to motivate students to repeat good behavior. Meanwhile, negative reinforcement in the form of reprimands or educational consequences can prevent the repetition of inappropriate behavior. A balanced combination of both creates a disciplined environment that supports the development of *akhlakul karimah*. Additionally, the principle of conditioning through daily religious activities and social interactions (such as greeting others, maintaining cleanliness, and showing respect) reinforces that Islamic character education is more effective

when implemented consistently and supported by teacher role modeling.

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