Teacher Guidance in Shaping Religious Character of Students: 
A Case Study at Vocational School

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of teacher guidance in shaping the religious character of students at SMK (Vocational School) Televisi Watampone, Bone Regency. Employing a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach, the subjects of this research include students, teachers, and the school principal. Data collection techniques encompass observation, interviews, and documentation, and the data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that teacher guidance significantly impacts students' character development. Initially, students exhibited poor character, but through consistent and focused guidance, their behaviors improved. The guidance emphasizes character development in relation to God, fellow human beings, and the environment. With patience and dedication, teachers at SMK Televisi Watampone have effectively nurtured their students' religious character. This study highlights the importance of aligning character development guidance with students' relationships with God, their peers, and their interaction with the environment. The significant behavioral transformation observed in students underscores the crucial role of teacher guidance in shaping religious character. Future research should explore the long-term effects of such guidance on students' overall personal and academic development and investigate the effectiveness of various approaches in fostering religious character within educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the quality of education within the school milieu. The effectiveness of the educational process hinges on educators' preparedness in facilitating students' educational journeys through various pedagogical activities (Poom-Valickis et al., 2012; Danial et al., 2019). Functioning not only as instructors but also as role models and sources of self-identification for their pupils and the wider community (Rahman & Husain, 2020), teachers shoulder a profound responsibility. This responsibility entails possessing high personal standards, encompassing attributes such as accountability, authority, self-reliance,
and discipline. Consequently, teachers assume a central position in education, with their pivotal function instrumental to the overall educational system. However, the efficacy of teachers in enhancing educational quality is intrinsically linked to their professional competence and the caliber of their work (Makovec, 2018; Salimah, 2017). Thus, a high-quality teacher is one who possesses specialized knowledge and pedagogical expertise, enabling them to fulfill their roles and responsibilities optimally (Rahman & Husain, 2020).

Changes in students’ behavior through the educational process depend significantly on the teacher's ability to serve as a commendable role model. Exemplariness here transcends mere exemplification; it extends to reinforcing the moral fabric of students' attitudes and behaviors (Prasetyo et al., 2019). Therefore, the application of role modeling in educational settings is imperative to provide students with figures worthy of emulation. A critical factor in education lies in this multifaceted role modeling, encompassing various dimensions of life (Sopian, 2016). Such role modeling includes exhibiting virtuous habits to students. The significance of a teacher's virtuous demeanor in imparting life values cannot be overstated. As posited by Barahate (2014), teachers should exhibit benevolent attitudes and espouse commendable life values. They ought to educate about positive attitudes to adopt, negative attitudes to avoid, and deliver high-quality education.

Contemporary education faces the challenge of evolving toward a more positive trajectory. National education aims to develop capabilities, shape character, and build a dignified national civilization to enlighten the nation's life (Sutisna et al., 2019). Character issues are a core concern regarding students. Although character formation primarily occurs within the family, the environment and school play pivotal roles in character development and transformation. As the driving force within schools, teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character. Nurturing character requires exemplary teachers since they consistently interact with students at school. The teacher's role in character education within the school context includes being a role model, inspirator, motivator, dynamic facilitator, and evaluator (Prasetyo et al., 2019). Character education through a teacher's exemplification is more effective because the teacher is a figure revered and emulated by students.

Character is a distinctive feature of an individual or group that encompasses values, moral capacity, and resilience in facing difficulties and challenges (Kemdiknas, 2010). Muslich (2011) states that character is an array of values that form the foundation underlying visible thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. In Islam, character education can be defined as the application of Islamic values in daily life (Umar et al., 2022). Character education should begin early, starting within the family, schools, and the community (Subiyakto et al., 2022; Romanelli et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020). The Ministry of National Education (2010) identifies five primary characters that need to be nurtured in schools: (1) religious character, encompassing thoughts, words, and actions in accordance with divine values and teachings; (2) self-character, including honesty, responsibility, a healthy lifestyle, discipline, hard work, self-confidence, entrepreneurship, logical thinking, critical and creative thinking, independence, curiosity, and a love for knowledge; (3) character values in relation to others, including consciousness, obedience, respect for others' work and achievements, politeness, and a democratic spirit; (4) character values concerning the environment, including social and environmental care; and (5)
national values, including nationalism, national spirit, and appreciation for diversity.

Religiosity, as one of the character traits, encompasses a devout attitude and behavior in adhering to religious teachings, fundamental to achieving a peaceful life (Bali & Fadilah, 2019). Therefore, religious character education or moral education must be seen as a conscious and planned effort, not one that occurs by chance. The internalization of religious character involves a deepening of religious values so that they become ingrained in every individual, giving rise to individuals with character and morality in accordance with religious teachings. Muslich (2011) articulates several reasons why an individual may fail to behave well, despite having cognitive knowledge of it (moral knowing). One reason is the lack of training to perform virtues or moral actions. Emphasizing the components of good character in character education is crucial (Bali & Fadilah, 2019) to enable students to understand, experience, and apply virtuous values simultaneously.

Cultivating religious character in students is crucial to ensure that they not only comprehend general knowledge but also integrate it with religious knowledge. Various efforts can be undertaken to internalize religious character in students, such as modeling, habituation, rule enforcement, and motivation (Jumriani et al., 2022; Bali & Fadilah, 2019; Ahsanulkaq, 2019). Furthermore, Cahyono (2016) suggests that strategies for religious character education can be implemented through moral knowing, moral modeling, feeling and loving the good, moral acting, advice, punishment, and habituation. Oktari & Kosasih (2019) conclude that religious character should be instilled through daily routines, starting from waking up until bedtime. This religious character is a fundamental trait that every individual should possess (Jumriani et al., 2022) because human life cannot be separated from the religious aspect. Humans are religious beings (homo religious), meaning creatures with the capacity to understand and practice religious values.

Additionally, there is a gap in addressing measurement and evaluation methods to assess the effectiveness of religious character education programs. Moreover, there are no studies discussing inclusive approaches that accommodate diverse religious backgrounds and beliefs, nor delving into the psychological and sociological aspects of religious development in students. Addressing these gaps would provide a more comprehensive framework for fostering religious character in students, contributing to their holistic development within educational contexts.

SMK (Vocational School) Televisi Watampone, situated in a rural region within the Bone Regency, represents a distinctive case among public schools. While officially categorized as a public institution, it is noteworthy that all personnel, comprising the school principal, teaching staff, administrative personnel, and the student body, adhere to the Islamic faith. The student body exhibits substantial diversity in social background and character traits. A significant portion of the students admitted to this institution initially displayed suboptimal behavior, often engaging in various forms of misconduct, including adolescent delinquency. Remarkably, the school serves as a refuge for students who have been expelled from other educational establishments due to the severity of their transgressions. To address these challenges, SMK Televisi Watampone has undertaken a systematic approach to instill religious character in its students, seeking to enhance their conduct through an in-depth exploration of Islamic teachings and values. The results of this character development initiative, spearheaded by dedicated educators, have been noteworthy, marked
by a discernible shift towards more religiously-oriented behaviors among the student body. Consequently, this phenomenon prompts a comprehensive inquiry into the pedagogical strategies employed by educators in molding the religious character of their students.

This research presents a novel contribution to the field by offering an in-depth exploration of the pedagogical strategies employed by educators at SMK Televisi Watampone to foster religious character among students. By focusing on a specific educational institution situated in a rural region with a predominantly Islamic demographic, this study fills a crucial gap in the literature by providing insights into the intersection of religious character development, pedagogy, and contextual factors. Moreover, by highlighting the transformative impact of dedicated character education initiatives, this research underscores the importance of incorporating religious values into the educational discourse, particularly in diverse and socially complex environments.

METHOD

This study was conducted at SMK Televisi Watampone using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research was chosen for its capacity to explore and comprehend the meanings attributed by individuals or groups to social phenomena (Creswell, 2014). It can be defined as a research method where findings are not obtained through statistical procedures or numerical analysis (Shodiq & Muttaqien, 2013).

The research adopted a phenomenological approach, aiming to elucidate the significance of lived experiences related to concepts, opinions, convictions, attitudes, assessments, and the attribution of meaning to situations (Sukmadinata, 2013). The subjects in this research included the school principal and teachers responsible for character development, as well as students undergoing character formation. Data collection was accomplished through interviews, observations, and documentation.

The acquired data were subsequently analyzed following the model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction refers to the process of simplifying and condensing large amounts of data into a more manageable form without losing essential information. Data display involves presenting the reduced data in a clear and understandable manner. Conclusion drawing refers to the final step of data analysis, where the researcher interprets the findings and draws overarching insights or implications from the data. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation.

![Figure 1: Research Procedure](image-url)
RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Development of Students’ Religious Character

At SMK Televisi Watampone, educators assume a central role in character development among students, particularly in nurturing religious character. This endeavor aims to instill a sense of conscientiousness within students, preparing them to fulfill their responsibilities as Muslims before both humanity and Allah SWT. Recognizing that a robust foundation of faith and unwavering principles is imperative, as globalizing influences can exert negative pressures on students, the institution places a strong emphasis on religious character. This character is notably reflected in students' interactions with Allah SWT, their fellow human beings, and their broader environment. These three dimensions collectively comprise the focal points of the religious character development emphasized within the student body.

Character Development of Students in Human Relationship with God

Religious values, as one of the character values developed at SMK Televisi Watampone, represent the efforts made by teachers to enhance the students' faith in Allah SWT. The students are trained to perform the religious practices taught in Islam, such as daily Duha prayers, congregational Dhuhr prayers, Quran recitation, and supplications before engaging in school activities. These practices instill in the students a habit of recognizing the importance of performing various religious rituals as guidance in their worldly lives and as preparation for the hereafter. The guidance provided aims to foster a deep understanding of religious values, particularly faith in Allah SWT, among the students as a foundation for their religious beliefs.

For the teachers at SMK Televisi Watampone, there is no notion of being too late to instill religious practices in students. Even though many students have weak religious foundations, teachers are deeply committed to providing them with religious guidance and understanding. Some students may not even know how to properly perform prayers or recite the Quran. However, no student is left without support in learning to pray and read the Quran. Teachers conduct daily congregational prayers at school and gradually evaluate the students' prayer recitations. Based on these evaluations, students are grouped, making it easier to provide tailored guidance. Those who struggle with prayer recitation and Quranic reading receive gradual coaching through habituation. This method gradually raises awareness among students about the significance of fulfilling their religious obligations.

Consequently, the religious environment cultivated at SMK Televisi Watampone enables students to become accustomed to performing various religious practices, thus fostering a religious atmosphere within the school. This atmosphere is further reinforced by the active involvement of teachers and other school personnel, who set a positive example for the students.

The results of this study indicate that the character development of students in their relationship with God at SMK Televisi Watampone is cultivated gradually. The religious environment created nurtures habits in students to perform worship to Allah SWT. Schools play a pivotal role in shaping students' personalities and moral behaviors by instilling religious values, thereby creating individuals who are devout (Ahsanulkhaq, 2019). Efforts to enhance students' religiosity should be viewed as a necessity, not merely driven by fear of God (Munirah & Ladiku, 2019). Religious character, as described by Gunawan (2014), encompasses an individual's thoughts, words, and actions,
which are continually guided by divine values or the teachings of their religion. Mutmainah (2018) describes that spiritual enhancement can be achieved through the practice, understanding, and internalization of religious values, and the application of these values in both individual and collective societal life. Religious character is of paramount importance for students in facing the challenges of changing times and moral degradation. In this regard, students are expected to possess and act upon standards of good and evil based on religious decrees and principles.

Character Development Among Students in Human Relationship with Others

Teachers play a vital role in schools, often serving as surrogate parents and role models for both students and the broader community. Their responsibility extends to nurturing students’ character, a task of considerable significance. The cultivation of students’ character concerning their interactions with peers and others should ideally commence with exemplary conduct modeled by teachers. This is reflected in the way students conduct themselves socially and present themselves, encompassing elements of decorum and propriety. Research conducted at SMK Televisi Watampone reveals that students have comprehended the principles of decorum in both their behavior and attire. Moreover, they have gained a clear understanding of boundaries when interacting with individuals of the opposite sex, marking a discernible transformation attributed to the guidance provided by the teachers.

Character development at SMK Televisi Watampone begins with instilling ethical values within students, promoting self-respect, reverence for parents and teachers, and respect for elders, peers, and others. This instructional approach mirrors a familial setting, employing gentle language and practical examples that students can emulate. Teachers focus on imparting values like courtesy, humility, respecting elders, and displaying affection for younger peers. Furthermore, students are encouraged to exhibit care towards others, engage in acts of kindness, show empathy, and steer clear of detrimental social influences. Consequently, students at SMK Televisi Watampone exhibit compassionate character traits, especially in their respect towards parents and teachers, as well as their considerate and amicable conduct towards others.

The observed behavioral transformation among students at SMK Televisi Watampone serves as an indicator of the teachers’ success in character development. The empathy instilled in students fosters positive relationships with fellow human beings, aligning with Shale’s findings (2012). Character education, as a concept deeply ingrained in individuals, molds their personalities, making them more polite, cultured, physically and spiritually healthy, ultimately leading to improved behavior in their lives, as emphasized by Nurgiansah (2022). The teachers’ role transcends merely transmitting knowledge about moral principles and behavioral norms; it extends to ensuring that these moral guidelines are genuinely embodied in students’ daily conduct, echo by Choli’s insights (2019). Furthermore, Suyanta (2013) outlines that character education progresses through three stages: socialization and introduction, internalization, and application in real-life situations. The cultivation of strong character concerning interactions with fellow human beings becomes pivotal in fostering students' empathy towards others, reinforcing Choli's perspective (2019) that poor moral character towards others invariably reflects one's moral character towards God, underscoring the importance of nurturing robust character in students' interactions with others.
intricately linked with their moral conduct towards God.

**Forms of Character Development in Human Relationship with Environment**

The environment encompasses the surroundings that individuals can perceive and experience. At SMK Televisi Watampone, character development in relation to the environment is actively promoted by teachers who instill the belief that "cleanliness is an integral part of faith." This school also integrates lessons that emphasize the importance of environmental stewardship, encouraging tree planting, responsible waste disposal, drainage system maintenance, and more. These initiatives are governed by rules set by teachers, such as pre-class requirements like cleaning the school environment, toilets, ablution areas, and teachers' quarters.

Cleanliness serves as a key element supporting the cultivation of religious character among students. Character development extends beyond religious rituals to underscore the importance of environmental preservation through a clean and conscientious lifestyle. This approach fosters a sense of moral and social responsibility among students, prompting active participation in maintaining a clean environment. Both teachers and students readily engage in activities such as cleaning the schoolyard, tending to the mosque's surroundings, and enhancing the overall environment. This commitment reflects a strong sense of social responsibility, underpinned by effective collaboration in maintaining cleanliness.

An environmentally conscious character signifies an individual's attitude toward the environment, manifested through daily actions aimed at preventing environmental degradation and rectifying existing harm to nature. Notably, insufficient awareness of proper waste disposal and inadequate waste management knowledge contribute to environmental degradation (Siskayanti & Chastanti, 2022). Cultivating an environmentally conscious character is crucial, particularly in instilling habits like responsible waste disposal among future generations. This form of character education can be seamlessly integrated into the school curriculum and personal development programs (Purwanti, 2017). Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping environmentally conscious students, reducing environmental risks (Simbolon, 2010). Furthermore, a conducive school environment, characterized by green and aesthetically pleasing surroundings, enhances the learning atmosphere (Sabardila et al., 2020). Therefore, the guidance provided by teachers at SMK Televisi Watampone represents a concerted effort to instill environmental awareness in their students.

The significance of religious character development within a school context demands attention from educational institutions. It ensures that students adopt and practice virtuous character traits in line with the values they are taught. Consequently, character education must be systematically and cohesively designed and implemented to help students internalize moral values related to self, others, the environment, and the divine (Saleh, 2012; Suyanta, 2013; Widiatma, 2016; Choli, 2019; Nurgiansah, 2022). The guidance provided by teachers in shaping student character should align with their relationships with both God and fellow humans, as well as their interaction with the surrounding environment. To illustrate the findings from the discussion on the development of students' religious character, here is a discussion diagram illustrating the findings of the research on the development of students' religious character at SMk Televisi Watampone.
Three main branches represent the dimensions of religious character development: relationship with God, relationship with others, and relationship with the environment. Each branch further elaborates on specific aspects of character development within those relationships, including faith, rituals, empathy, compassion, cleanliness, and environmental awareness. Arrows indicate the flow of influence and interaction between different aspects of character development within each dimension. Bullets under each aspect provide specific examples and strategies employed by educators at the school to foster religious character development. This discussion diagram visually summarizes the multifaceted approach to character development at SMK Televisi Watampone, highlighting the interconnectedness of faith, behavior, and environmental stewardship in shaping students' religious character.

This study makes a unique contribution to the field by thoroughly examining the pedagogical methods utilized by educators at SMK Televisi Watampone to nurture religious character in students. By concentrating on a particular educational institution located in a rural area with a predominantly Islamic population, this research addresses a significant void in the literature by offering insights into the convergence of religious character cultivation, teaching approaches, and contextual influences. Additionally, by emphasizing the profound effect of purposeful character education programs, this study highlights the necessity of integrating religious principles into educational discussions, especially in diverse and socially intricate settings.

CONCLUSION
Religious character formation among students at SMK Televisi Watampone is a responsibility shouldered by teachers and encompasses their relationship with God, fellow human beings, and the environment. Teachers have made significant efforts in character development, leading to observable changes in students' behavior. Initially, some students exhibited poor character traits, but
through the guidance of teachers, they have gradually improved. In their relationship with God, students demonstrate religiosity through activities like congregational prayers, Quran reading, Duha prayers, and other religious practices. Regarding their interactions with fellow human beings, students exhibit traits such as politeness, mutual respect, empathy, cooperation, and a commitment to avoiding unhealthy social behaviors. Furthermore, in their relationship with the environment, students contribute to the cleanliness of the school surroundings and the orderly arrangement of facilities and vehicles, thereby enhancing the overall comfort and aesthetics of the school environment. Consequently, character education for students, emphasizing not only cognitive development but also religious character, stands as a crucial concern for teachers.

REFERENCES


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