

INNOVATIVE AKIDAH AKHLAK LEARNING THROUGH THE BEHAVIORISTIC-RELIGIOUS MODEL (BRM) AT MTS MA'ARIF NU 2 CILONGOK

Evalasefa Muktiyusrina¹, Donny Khoirul Azis²

^{1,2}UIN Professor Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia

¹Corresponding E-mail: evalasefa@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the implementation of behavioristic strategies in Akidah Akhlak instruction at MTs Ma'arif NU 2 Cilongok and introduces the Behavioristic-Religious Model (BRM) as its main theoretical contribution. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings show clear improvements in students' moral behavior following consistent application of reinforcement, teacher modeling, and religious habituation. Students demonstrated greater punctuality, increased active participation in learning activities, and a noticeable reduction in discipline violations. Daily religious routines such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and structured devotional practices functioned as natural reinforcers that strengthened the internalization of moral values beyond temporary stimulus-response compliance. The novelty of Behavioristic-Religious Model (BRM) lies in its systematic integration of operant conditioning, the law of effect, social modeling, and Islamic school culture into a single framework for character formation. Practically, the model offers teachers and schools a replicable approach to designing learning environments that align pedagogical reinforcement with spiritual habituation to enhance moral behavior in Islamic education.

Keywords: Behavioristic-Religious Model; Moral Behavior; Religious Habituation

A. Introduction

Education has a major contribution to shaping students' personality and behavior in an era of rapidly changing social dynamics (Hecht et al. 2023; Jach, Bardach, and Murayama 2023). In Islamic education, the development of positive behavior is not only complementary to academic achievement, but is an essential mission of learning, especially at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level where students are at a critical phase of moral development requiring structured guidance and modeled social interaction (Saepudin and Supriyadi, 2023; Sutarja et al., 2024). However, empirical conditions in various madrasahs still show recurring behavioral challenges, including weak discipline, declining social empathy, and limited internalization of moral values. These problems are also reinforced by digital exposure and social media influence, which reshape students' patterns of thinking and behavior (Tülüba et al., 2023; Li, Chen, and Deng, 2024). These conditions demand learning approaches capable of strengthening behavior systematically and continuously within the learning process.

Behaviorism offers a relevant conceptual basis because it assumes that behavior can be shaped through stimulus, response, and reinforcement consistently delivered in learning (Daradkeh, 2022; Azis et al., 2023). However, studies from 2022–2025 show that behavioristic applications in madrasahs remain partial. Reinforcement is still frequently interpreted only as reward and punishment, resulting in short-term compliance rather than stable behavioral transformation (Hidayah et al., 2025; Hulu, 2024). At the same time, the religious ecosystem in madrasahs characterized by spiritual routines, worship practices, and strong moral culture has not been fully integrated as part of the reinforcement mechanism, even though these practices have been shown to function as natural internal reinforcers for students (Saidah & Islam, 2023; Abidin et al., 2025). Recent studies further confirm that teacher modeling often has a stronger influence than instrumental reinforcement, but the integration of Bandura's social learning principles with classical behaviorism remains underexplored in Islamic educational contexts (Sari et al., 2025; Tambak et al., 2024).

The latest madrasah education policy through the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree (KMA) No. 1150 of 2025 emphasizes the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum as a paradigm for strengthening character education that places the values of compassion, empathy, exemplary behavior, and the habit of noble character at the core of the learning process. This curriculum emphasizes that the character building of students cannot be achieved through cognitive and normative approaches alone, but must be realized through repeated, consistent learning experiences oriented towards real behavior in everyday life (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025). In the context of madrasahs, this policy provides normative legitimacy for the subject of Akidah Akhlak (Faith and Morals) as a strategic instrument for internalizing the values of love for Allah, fellow human beings, and the environment through the formation of positive attitudes and habits. Therefore, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum requires a learning model that is able to bridge affective values with measurable behavioral changes. An approach that integrates the principles of reinforcement, exemplary behavior, and religious habits is relevant because it is in line with the spirit of KMA No. 1150 of 2025, which directs madrasah education towards the systematic, contextual, and sustainable formation of character. (Nada & Listiana, 2025).

At this point, the research gap becomes clear: existing studies rarely combine operant conditioning (Skinner), the law of effect (Thorndike), teacher modeling (Bandura), and structured religious habituation into one unified framework for explaining behavioral development in madrasahs. Previous research tends to examine these approaches separately, resulting in limited theoretical and practical understanding of how the religious environment functions as reinforcement alongside classical behavioristic mechanisms. Therefore, there is still insufficient explanation of how reinforcement delivered through religious routines and spiritual experiences operates together with stimulus-response learning in forming stable moral behavior in Islamic schools.

To address this gap, this study formulates and tests an integrated “Behavioristic-Religious Model (BRM)” that positions behavior development not merely as a mechanistic learning outcome, but as a result of the synergy between structured reinforcement, teacher modeling, and habitual religious experience embedded in madrasah culture (Sanderse, 2024; Djollong et al., 2024; Ofili & Omuku, 2024). This approach allows behavior change to be examined not only as classroom compliance, but as moral internalization reinforced cognitively, socially, and spiritually.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the implementation of behavioristic principles in Akidah Akhlak learning at MTs Ma’arif NU 2 Cilongok, identify supporting and inhibiting factors of the implementation, explain how the combination of reinforcement, modeling, and religious habituation contributes to positive and sustained behavioral transformation offer a practical behavioristic-religious learning model that is relevant to the cultural realities of the madrasah learning environment.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of behavioristic theory in Akidah Akhlak learning at MTs Ma’arif NU 2 Cilongok. Informants teachers, students, and madrasah management were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus (Riazi et al., 2023). Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation such as teacher journals and religious habituation records, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument assisted by structured guidelines.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Validation of findings was strengthened through source and technique triangulation by comparing observation, interview, and documentation results (Fikri et al., 2025). Prolonged engagement in the field and continuous verification enhanced credibility and ensured consistency between empirical observations and interpretive conclusions.

Ethical procedures were implemented by obtaining informed consent from all informants, ensuring voluntary participation, and clearly communicating the researcher’s presence to preserve the natural flow of learning activities. As a case study, the findings are context-bound and not intended for wide generalization; however, the rigorous application of triangulation and ethical principles supports the trustworthiness of the study.

C. Finding and Discussion

Finding

Application of Behavioristic Principles by Teachers

The results of triangulation of data from interviews with the teacher in question said, "In learning activities, I use verbal reinforcement such as praise, thanks, or recognition in front of the class so that students feel appreciated and get stimulus in

learning. For positive behavior of students who should show examples, I give additional points and sometimes small prizes. Usually the rewards that I often use are in the form of attitude values, compliments, gifts. As for punishment for students who have not shown positive behavior, it is usually in the form of subtle reprimands, reduction of attitude points, and additional tasks that are educational in nature. In addition, to add stimulus for students to participate and embrace learning, I provide questions, assignments, or moral instructions while observing students' responses and providing reinforcement if the response is positive. As a teacher of Akidah Akhlak, of course, I have to give a good example, maintain attitude, speech, and discipline, because I realize that students imitate what teachers do." (Interview, October 21, 2025).

The application of this behavioristic approach is reinforced by the curriculum deputy's statement regarding the learning process, "Akidah Akhlak Teachers are very consistent in using reinforcement. I see that the class is orderly and the teacher gives reinforcement in a structured manner. Madrasah supports by making class rules, attitude assessments, and religious activity programs." (Interview, October 21, 2025)

Data from observations, and documentation show that Akidah Akhlak teachers apply behavioristic principles consistently in learning activities. Teachers provide stimuli in the form of verbal rewards, additional grades, and small gifts to students who show positive behaviors such as being disciplined in attendance, actively asking questions, answering questions correctly, and showing a polite attitude during learning. Instead, teachers provide subtle reprimands, warnings, or additional assignments for students who break the rules, including the consequences of grades for certain negative behaviors. The interview findings were reinforced by classroom observations that showed the application of contextual lecture strategies, the provision of relevant examples, and the role of teachers as part of the stimulus-response process. Documentary data such as lesson plans and teacher journals show that positive reinforcement steps, habituation, and consequences have been systematically designed according to a behavioristic approach.

Changes in Student Behavior

The application of behavioristic-based learning strategies has been shown to result in significant behavioral changes in students. The interviews conducted revealed that students who were previously passive or often disruptive to learning began to show active involvement and a more responsible attitude. As the teacher of Akidah Akhlak said,

"The most visible change is that students are more polite, focused, more active, and rarely late to class. Students are very responsive. They are more enthusiastic when they know there is a reward even if it is an initial mold to encourage them to be active in learning, and punishment makes them more careful and aware. The record of class

violations has dropped quite drastically. Students become more directed." (Interview, October 21, 2025)

Observations that support these findings found that students appeared to follow learning in an orderly manner, show courtesy to teachers and friends, and participate enthusiastically in classroom activities.

Religious Habits and School Culture

The results of the study also show that religious habituation carried out collectively in madrassas plays a major role in strengthening students' positive behavior. Observations recorded religious routines such as reciting Asmaul Husna, tadarus Juz 'Amma, daily prayers, nadhoman sa'altuka robbi, dhuha prayers, tahlil together, and pilgrimage to the grave every Friday which were consistently carried out. This habituation practice is in line with several madrasah missions that develop religious, polite, creative, innovative and capable individuals, as well as integrate Science and Technology and Imtak so that knowledgeable and moral human beings are formed, which in a behavioristic perspective functions as a collective reinforcement that stabilizes students' positive behavior.

Discussion

Emperical Evidence

The empirical findings show that student behavior at MTs Ma'arif NU 2 Cilongok is shaped through the combined use of reinforcement, teacher modeling, and religious routines. Classroom observations, interviews, and documentation demonstrate that teachers implement verbal praise, attitude points, small rewards, and subtle corrective actions as structured reinforcement. These practices are consistently associated with increased student engagement, discipline, and reduced classroom violations. Students who were initially passive or disruptive began to participate more actively, showed politeness, and adhered to class rules. In addition, daily religious routines – including Asmaul Husna, tadarus Juz 'Amma, duha prayer, tahlil, and Friday pilgrimages – were found to function as collective habits that reinforce students' moral behavior through repetition. Empirically, these routines create predictable behavioral cues that support positive conduct in the madrasah environment.

Theoretical Interpretation

The empirical patterns align with key behavioristic principles. Skinner's concept of operant conditioning clarifies how verbal praise, attitude scores, and rewards function as reinforcement that strengthens desirable behavior, while Thorndike's law of effect explains the consolidation of habits through pleasurable consequences (Daradkeh, 2022; Azis et al., 2023; Ofili & Omuku, 2024) Bandura's social learning theory is reflected in how students imitate teachers' attitudes, discipline, and mannerisms, which reinforces the importance of modeling in moral development (Sanderse, 2024; Tambak et al., 2024). The findings also support research on religious habituation in Islamic education, showing that repeated

spiritual practices function as natural reinforcement (Saidah & Islam, 2023; Abidin et al., 2025). These practices strengthen students' emotional and spiritual engagement, enabling internalization rather than mere behavioral compliance. Thus, the data extend traditional behaviorism by showing that reinforcement in a religious school context is not limited to external reward but includes spiritually meaningful experiences.

Integrated Interpretation: The Behavioristic-Religious Model (BRM)

Synthesizing the empirical data and theoretical foundations, the Behavioristic-Religious Model (BRM) explains behavior formation through three interconnected mechanisms: (1) environmental inputs in the form of learning stimuli and religious routines; (2) internal processes involving student responses shaped by reinforcement and modeling; and (3) stable behavioral outcomes produced through repetition and internalization. In BRM, Skinner's reinforcement accelerates behavioral repetition, Thorndike's law of effect strengthens pleasurable habits, and Bandura's modeling provides a social pathway for value internalization. Religious habituation complements these components by serving as repetitive natural reinforcement with emotional and spiritual significance, enabling behavior to move from obedience to deeper moral commitment (Arif, 2022; Mangestuti & Aziz, 2023; Naldi et al., 2024; Wardati et al., 2025). This integrated perspective aligns with recent research advocating the adaptation of behavioristic theory to the cultural-religious environment of madrasahs. It also confirms that the combination of reinforcement, teacher modeling, and structured religious routines produces more sustainable positive behavior among students.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that the formation of positive behavior of students in learning Akidah Akhlak at MTs Ma'arif NU 2 Cilongok takes place through the synergy between strengthening, teacher example, and religious habituation that is applied consistently in madrasah culture. The integration of these three aspects results in stable behavioral changes, where reinforcement functions to direct student responses, teachers' examples become imitated behavior models, and religious habits act as natural reinforcement that strengthens moral internalization. Through the analysis of the findings, this study formulated the Behavioristic-Religious Model (BRM) as a conceptual framework that explains the cause-and-effect mechanism of behavior formation in the context of madrasah. This model can be used as a basis for teachers and institutions to design learning strategies, classroom management, and behavior evaluations that not only assess compliance, but also the sustainability of students' good habits. Further studies are needed to test the effectiveness of BRM in a broader context and measure the contribution of each component to the formation of morals in the long term.

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