Teacher Strategies in Greeting-Based Character Education: Fostering Students' Friendly Traits at State Islamic Elementary School 1 Merangin

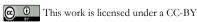**M. Zhaharil Fikri*[1],** Pristian Hadi Putra[2], Novri Pahrizal[3], Indah Herningrum[4]

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Abstract. This study explores the strategies employed by teachers at State Islamic Elementary School 1 Merangin in cultivating greeting practices as a means of fostering students' friendly character. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with the school principal, teachers, and students, as well as document analysis of instructional activities and school-based cultural programs. The findings reveal three major points. First, greeting practices are regarded as crucial in shaping students' friendly character. They contribute to the development of positive social relations, strengthen etiquette, reduce conflicts, and nurture a welcoming personality. Second, teachers adopt various strategies to instill greeting habits, including socialization and internalization of greeting culture, introducing the meaning and benefits of greetings, serving as role models, and implementing evaluation and reward systems. Third, the outcomes of these strategies are evident in the consistent practice of greetings among students, the establishment of a friendly classroom atmosphere, improved relationships between students and teachers, and a noticeable reduction of potential conflicts. This study underscores the pivotal role of teachers as agents of character education in Islamic elementary schools. It highlights how simple yet consistent practices such as greetings can effectively integrate social values, etiquette, and Islamic morality into daily school life. The findings have broader implications for Islamic education, suggesting that greeting-based character education can nurture a generation of students characterized by friendliness, respect, and strong moral integrity.

Keywords: teacher strategies, greeting practices, character education, Islamic elementary school, Islamic values.

Introduction

Education is a deliberate and structured effort to transform human beings into intelligent and virtuous individuals. It does not merely aim to transfer knowledge but also seeks to cultivate values and morality that enable individuals to interact harmoniously in society (Tilaar, 2015). In this sense, education is expected to produce not only knowledgeable individuals but also those who possess integrity, empathy, and responsibility in their social lives. This view emphasizes that the goal of education is holistic

development, integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions into the growth of students.

The Indonesian government underscores this principle through Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and process that enables students to actively develop their potential. This includes spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills necessary for themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Kemendikbud, 2003). Accordingly, education is mandated to shape learners who are spiritually strong, morally upright, intellectually competent, and socially responsible. This paradigm reflects the broad mandate of education as a driver of human civilization and social transformation.

In the current discourse, character education has become a central theme in national education. Scholars emphasize that education should not be reduced to the acquisition of academic knowledge alone but must include the cultivation of values and attitudes that reflect moral integrity (Lickona, 2013; Sakban & Sundawa, 2023). Teachers play a critical role in this process as agents of character development, guiding students not only through formal instruction but also through modelling behaviours, attitudes, and values. Thus, the strategies that teachers adopt in daily learning interactions significantly influence the success of character education in schools (Datunsolang et al., 2021).

From an Islamic perspective, the importance of character formation is reinforced by Qur'anic teachings. Surah An-Nahl (16:125) highlights that inviting others to goodness should be done with wisdom, good advice, and respectful dialogue. This principle aligns closely with the role of teachers in instilling values in students, particularly in madrasah settings where Islamic values underpin educational practices. Teachers are expected to cultivate moral behaviour through wise approaches, effective communication, and exemplary conduct. By applying such strategies, teachers become role models who inspire students to internalize ethical values and practice them in everyday interactions (Azra, 2018).

Nevertheless, empirical realities in schools often reveal challenges. Observations at State Islamic Elementary School (MIN) 1 Merangin indicated that greeting practices among students have weakened. While a number of students still greet their teachers, many rarely do so, and even fewer extend greetings to their peers. This lack of practice has contributed to weakened bonds of brotherhood, declining empathy, and, in some cases, conflicts and bullying. Official records show that during the 2022/2023 academic year, there were at least 16 incidents of student fights, most of which stemmed from teasing or neglect of respectful interaction. Such conditions suggest that the internalization of friendly character has not been optimal.

This phenomenon highlights the urgency of developing effective teacher strategies in strengthening greeting practices as part of character education. Greetings, though simple, serve as a foundation for respect, empathy, and friendliness in school culture. Teachers, through consistent strategies such as modelling, habituation, and evaluation, can nurture these values in students. This study, therefore, seeks to examine teacher strategies in habituating greetings to foster students' friendly character at MIN 1 Merangin, Bangko

District, Merangin Regency. The objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze the urgency of greeting habituation in shaping students' friendly character at MIN 1 Merangin, (2) to identify the strategies employed by teachers in implementing greeting habituation, and (3) to describe the results of these strategies in fostering students' friendly character. The results are expected to provide both theoretical insights into character education and practical implications for improving school culture in Islamic elementary education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to provide an in-depth exploration of teacher strategies in cultivating greeting practices for fostering students' friendly character at State Islamic Elementary School (MIN) 1 Merangin. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to describe social phenomena holistically in their natural setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Leavy, 2017). Descriptive qualitative research focuses on portraying existing realities without manipulating variables, thus allowing the researcher to capture authentic educational processes (Kim et al., 2016). Furthermore, this study is categorized as field research, as the data were collected directly at the research site, namely MIN 1 Merangin, which provided a contextual understanding of the school's environment and culture.

Participants in this study were selected to represent key stakeholders involved in the educational process at MIN 1 Merangin. They included the school principal, teachers, administrative staff, and students, as well as other relevant stakeholders within the school community. These participants were considered as information-rich cases, providing valuable insights into both the strategies implemented by teachers and the responses of students toward greeting practices. In qualitative research, the inclusion of multiple participant categories strengthens the triangulation of perspectives and enhances the credibility of findings (Patton, 2014).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which informants are chosen deliberately based on specific considerations (Moleong, 2018). This method is appropriate when the researcher aims to gain deep insights from individuals who are directly involved in or knowledgeable about the studied phenomenon (Burhan, 2012). The primary consideration in participant recruitment was their role and experience in relation to greeting practices at MIN 1 Merangin. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, meaning no current information or variation emerged from subsequent participants (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

The main instrument in this research was the researcher as the key instrument, supported by additional tools such as observation checklists, interview guides, and documentation sheets (Miles et al., 2014). Observation was conducted in a participant observation mode, allowing the researcher to directly witness and record students' and teachers' behaviors related to greeting practices. Interviews were semi- structured, guided by an interview protocol to ensure focus while allowing flexibility for probing questions. Documentation included analysis of school policies, activity records, and cultural programs related to character education. These instruments collectively enhanced the depth and validity of the collected data.

Data analysis was conducted following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014), which involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction entailed summarizing and focusing on relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents. Data display was conducted by organizing the reduced data into structured narratives and matrices to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn inductively, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations, while continuously verifying findings against the data (Creamer, 2024). To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (Golafshani, 2003), including the use of triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking.

Results

The urgency of greeting habituation in shaping students' friendly character at MIN 1 Merangin

The findings of this study indicate that the practice of greeting (salam) at MIN 1 Merangin holds a high level of urgency in shaping students' friendly character. Although seemingly simple, greetings have a significant impact on fostering harmonious social relationships between students and teachers as well as among peers. Both teachers and students agree that greetings help create a positive impression, build closeness, and cultivate mutual respect.

Furthermore, the habituation of greetings has proven to serve as a means of ethical education within the madrasa environment. Through greetings, students learn to respect the dignity of others, appreciate diversity, and maintain inclusive communication. This is reinforced by observational findings showing that students who consistently practice greetings are able to sustain healthy relationships characterized by respect and contribute to creating peace in the learning environment. Another important finding reveals that the practice of greetings also contributes to reducing conflicts among students. By becoming accustomed to exchanging greetings, students demonstrate mutual respect, thereby minimizing the potential for conflict. Teachers and the head of the madrasa emphasized that greetings can even act as a bridge to ease tensions, establish a peaceful atmosphere, and enhance comfort within the learning process.

Finally, the habituation of greetings is considered effective in shaping students' friendly and empathetic personalities. Students who regularly greet others not only demonstrate respect but also show care for others. This fosters a warm, pleasant learning atmosphere and strengthens bonds of friendship among members of the madrasa community. Thus, greetings emerge as an essential component of character education at MIN 1 Merangin.

The strategies employed by teachers in implementing greeting habituation

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation data, the strategies employed by teachers in habituating the greeting practice at MIN 1 Merangin are carried out through

several complementary stages. First, teachers socialize and cultivate the habit of greeting by issuing school-level agreements, displaying posters about the greeting culture, and designating "greeting zones" at the school entrance and exit. These efforts aim to raise students' awareness that greetings are not merely formalities but an integral part of school culture and a means of strengthening social bonds. Second, teachers introduce the meaning and benefits of greetings by explaining the literal wording, the associated religious values and rewards, as well as the ethical principles embodied in the practice. This way, students are not only mechanically repeating the greeting but also internalizing its religious and social significance.

Furthermore, teachers act as role models in practicing greetings consistently in daily interactions. They greet students upon entering the classroom, when meeting them in the schoolyard, and even outside the school environment. Such consistency provides a tangible example that encourages students to imitate and gradually make it a personal habit. Beyond uttering the words, teachers also guide students in observing the etiquette of greeting, including proper intonation, facial expression, politeness, and the act of shaking hands. Thus, greetings are practiced as a symbol of respect and friendliness rather than a perfunctory routine. The next stage involves evaluation and reinforcement. Teachers assess the consistency of students in giving greetings through daily reports and direct observation. Students who regularly greet others are rewarded with praise, positive feedback, or small gifts, while those who neglect the practice receive corrective sanctions designed to educate rather than punish. This evaluative process fosters discipline and strengthens students' intrinsic motivation to sustain the culture of greetings.

Through these strategies, the habituation of greetings at MIN 1 Merangin has developed beyond a mere formality and has become an integral component of character education. Greetings serve as a medium for instilling ethics, respect, and sociability, ultimately shaping students into individuals who are friendly, polite, religiously mindful, and socially caring.

The Results of Teachers' Strategies in Habituating the Greeting Practice to Foster Students' Friendly Character at MIN 1 Merangin

The habituation of greeting practices at the madrasah has proven effective in guiding students to behave according to ethical values. This practice positively influences their mindset, encouraging them to adopt positive thinking. As a result, students begin to acknowledge their own mistakes, willingly forgive others, and reduce negative assumptions toward their peers.

They also demonstrate inclusivity and openness toward everyone, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or race. They are willing to cooperate with others, creating a harmonious atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect. For students, ethical speech and conduct are expressed through courteous language and polite gestures. For instance, they consistently greet teachers, classmates, and guests, express sincere gratitude when receiving something, and apologize honestly when making mistakes. These behaviors are rooted in honesty and integrity, fostering an environment where moral values are firmly upheld. Such habituation becomes the foundation of their strong character development.

According to the head of the madrasah, simple habits such as greeting others—when instilled from an early age—can shape positive attitudes, including politeness, friendliness, and respect for others. Over time, these practices become embedded in students' daily lives, influencing their speech, thoughts, and actions to align with religious, moral, and ethical norms. When such practices are applied consistently across all madrasahs, they can nurture a generation of morally upright, respectful, and ethical youth.

From interviews, observations, and documentation, the researcher identified several outcomes of teachers' strategies in habituating greetings to foster students' friendly character at MIN 1 Merangin, namely: *Students consistently greet teachers when they meet*. Initially, some students were reluctant to greet teachers. However, after repeated guidance, many have gradually developed the habit of giving greetings, both inside and outside the madrasah. Students reported that they now spontaneously greet their teachers, shake hands, and even show respect through warm gestures. This illustrates how greetings serve as an entry point to building students' moral conduct. *The formation of a positive and friendly classroom culture*. Greeting practices have helped students understand the importance of polite communication and respect for others. This habit creates an inclusive classroom environment where students feel acknowledged and valued. It also strengthens cooperation and fosters a sense of belonging among peers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the learning process. *Improved relationships between students and teachers*. Warm greetings serve as emotional bridges, strengthening the bonds between students and teachers. When students respectfully greet their teachers, it generates mutual appreciation and trust. This supportive atmosphere encourages students to engage actively, share ideas confidently, and view teachers as partners in learning rather than mere authority figures. *Reduction of potential conflicts and disputes*. Greeting practices have also been instrumental in reducing conflicts among students. By promoting respect and recognition of everyone's dignity, greetings create a positive interactional foundation that minimizes tension. Documentation from the student affairs coordinator indicated that cases of student conflict significantly decreased over the observation period.

In summary, the simple act of greeting, when practiced consistently, nurtures respect, inclusivity, and harmony in the madrasah environment. It not only strengthens students' friendly character but also supports the development of a conducive and meaningful learning atmosphere.

Discussion

The Urgency of Greeting Habituation in Shaping Students' Friendly Character at MIN 1 Merangin

The findings reveal that greeting habituation plays a crucial role in building students' friendly character, as it fosters mutual respect, empathy, and inclusivity within the school environment. This simple practice contributes to creating a positive atmosphere where students develop social awareness and harmonious interactions with teachers and peers. Research has increasingly pointed to the significance of habituation in character education. Fadilah et al. note that greeting habituation must be reinforced regularly by educators and parents to ensure its persistence in students' daily lives (Fadilah et al., 2023). This assertion

is echoed by Idawati et al., who emphasize that systematic habituation, like greetings, can effectively shape students' characters and contribute to the formation of desirable traits such as politeness and empathy (Idawati et al., 2023). Additionally, Ningsih et al. articulate that schools serve as pivotal platforms for character development where practices such as greeting can significantly influence students' personalities by enhancing their socialization skills (Ningsih et al., 2021). The importance of such practices is further corroborated by Aufa et al., who delineate that the role of educators extends beyond knowledge transmission to include character-building practices through consistent greetings and positive interactions (Aufa et al., 2023).

The implementation of structured greeting habits can significantly bolster students' emotional connections and social skills. Astuti et al. encapsulates this notion, highlighting how engaging in friendly greetings and similar practices can reinforce commendable character traits within school life (Astuti et al., 2021). This is critical in crafting an environment free from hostility, thereby nurturing a caring and supportive atmosphere, which is essential for effective learning and development (Nadlifah et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the role of the school community, including teachers, staff, and parents is essential in cultivating these practices. For instance, Syadzili et al. discuss how leaders within educational institutions can foster a culture of friendliness through behavioral habituation characterized by greetings and courteous interactions (Syadzili et al., 2022). This collaborative approach helps create a strong support system that amplifies the impact of greeting habituation on students' character formation.

In summary, greeting habituation is instrumental in molding friendly characters among students at MIN 1 Merangin. By fostering a culture rooted in respect and empathy through consistent practice, and with the active involvement of educators and the broader school community, schools can cultivate an environment where positive social interactions thrive. This holistic approach to education not only enhances interpersonal relationships but also contributes significantly to the overall character development of students.

The Strategies Employed by Teachers in Implementing Greeting Habituation

Teachers employ integrated strategies, including socialization, introducing the meaning of greetings, role modeling, and evaluation with reinforcement, to ensure the effectiveness of greeting habituation. These approaches move the practice beyond routine formality and transform it into a meaningful component of character education. The effective habituation of greetings among students requires the integration of various teaching strategies, including socialization, role modeling, and evaluations with reinforcement. Research indicates that the application of these strategies transforms the practice of greeting from mere routine to a meaningful part of character education. By creating an environment where greetings are valued, educators can instill essential social skills corresponding to educational goals.

In line with focusing on systematic methods, studies have shown that behavioral skills training (BST) combined with verbal prompts can lead to the successful acquisition and maintenance of greeting skills in students, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder

(ASD) (Hood et al., 2017). Furthermore, teaching methods that utilize point-of-view video modeling have proven effective, providing a visual context that helps children understand the nuances of social interactions like greetings (Kouo, 2018). This approach allows students to observe and imitate greetings in a socially contextualized manner, enhancing their learning through direct observation and practice.

Moreover, the influence of the social environment on greeting behaviors is significant. Evidence suggests that childcare settings that encourage staff-child and peer interactions, including simple greetings, foster healthier emotional and social development (Saunders et al., 2019). These interactions go beyond teaching formality; they actively engage students in a process of learning and practicing social norms and etiquette that are crucial for their personal growth (Abdullaeva, 2020). Such social skills are not merely academic; they play a vital role in shaping the character of students and preparing them for collaborative learning environments.

To further enhance the meaning of greetings within character education, integration with local cultural practices also contributes positively to this process. Implementing multicultural perspectives in education, such as understanding diverse greeting traditions, can enrich students' experiences and foster respect for different cultures, thereby enhancing social cohesion and mutual respect within the learning environment (Haq et al., 2023). In essence, this multifaceted approach ensures that greetings are not only taught as a formality but are embedded as a significant part of character and social education.

The cohesiveness of greeting strategies implemented by teachers, including socialization and reinforcement through role modeling, highlights the necessity of combining educational and cultural insights. This integration provides a comprehensive framework for educators to cultivate robust social skills in their students, preparing them for collaborative interactions in a diverse world.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the practice of greetings at MIN 1 Merangin serves as a vital instrument in fostering students' friendly character within the framework of Islamic education. Greeting practices were found to function not only as polite expressions but also as ethical and spiritual acts that strengthen social bonds, reduce conflicts, and nurture empathy among students. Teacher strategies—including socialization, introducing meanings, serving as role models, evaluation, and reinforcement—proved to be effective in embedding greetings as a daily habit. The outcomes observed, such as students' consistent greetings, the development of a positive classroom culture, and improved teacher–student relationships, affirm the transformative impact of greetings on students' moral and social development.

The findings highlight the importance of integrating simple yet meaningful practices into character education. In the context of Islamic schooling, greetings encapsulate values of respect, humility, and care that contribute to building a harmonious and inclusive educational environment. These results provide practical implications for educators, suggesting that embedding religious and cultural values into daily routines can significantly

enhance the effectiveness of character education. Future research is recommended to expand this investigation across multiple Islamic schools to further validate and enrich the findings.

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